

# The Balancing Act

Winter/Spring 2011



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## Slow Cookers & Food Safety

*By: Wayne Coachman, Early County*

Opening the front door on a cold winter evening and being greeted by the inviting smells of beef stew or chicken noodle soup coming from a slow cooker can be a diner's dream come true. But winter is not the only time a slow cooker is useful. In the summer, using this small electrical appliance can avoid introducing heat from a hot stove. At any time of year, a slow cooker can make life convenient by planning ahead, saving time and using less electricity.

### Is A Slow Cooker Safe?

Yes, the slow cooker, a counter-top electrical appliance, cooks foods slowly at a low temperature—generally between 170° and 280° F. The low heat helps less expensive, leaner cuts of meat become tender and shrinks less. The direct heat from the pot, lengthy cooking and steam created within the tightly-covered container combine to destroy bacteria and make the slow cooker a safe process for cooking foods.

### Safe Beginnings

Begin with a clean cooker, clean utensils and a clean work area. Wash hands before and during food preparation. Keep perishable foods refrigerated until preparation time. If you cut up meat and vegetables in advance, store them separately in the refrigerator. The slow cooker may take several hours to reach a safe, bacteria-killing temperature. Constant refrigeration assures that bacteria, which

multiply rapidly at room temperature, won't get a "head start" during the first few hours of cooking.

### Thaw Ingredients

Always thaw meat or poultry before putting it into a slow cooker. Choose to make foods with high moisture content such as chili, soup, stew or spaghetti sauce. If using a commercially frozen slow cooker meal, prepare according to manufacturer's instructions.

### Use the Right Amount of Food

Fill cooker no less than half full and no more than two-thirds full. Vegetables cook slower than meat and poultry in a slow cooker so if using them, put the vegetables in first. Then add the meat and desired amount of liquid such as broth, water or barbecue sauce. Keep the lid in place, removing only to stir the food or check for doneness.

### Settings

Most cookers have two or more settings. Foods take different times to cook depending upon the setting used. Certainly, foods will cook faster on high than on low. However, for all-day cooking or for less-tender cuts, you may want to use the low setting. If possible, turn the cooker on the highest setting for the first hour of cooking time and then to low or the setting called for in your recipe. However, it's safe to cook foods on low the entire time - if you're leaving for work, for example, and preparation time is limited.

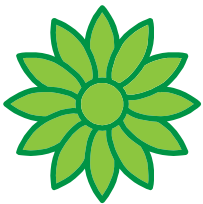
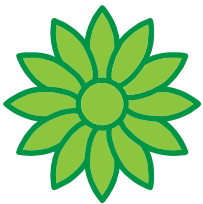
While food is cooking and once it's done, food will stay safe as long as the cooker is operating.

### Power Outage

If you are not at home during the entire slow-cooking process and the power goes out throw away the food even if it looks done. If you are at home, finish cooking the ingredients immediately by some other means: on a gas stove, on the outdoor grill or at a house where the power is on. When you are at home, and if the food was completely cooked before the power went out, the food should remain safe up to two hours in the cooker with the power off.

### Handling Leftovers

Store leftovers in shallow covered containers and refrigerate within two hours after cooking is finished. Reheating leftovers in a slow cooker is not recommended. Cooked food should be reheated on the stove, in a microwave, or in a conventional oven until it reaches 165 °F. Then the hot food can be placed in a pre-heated slow cooker to keep it hot for serving—at least 140 °F as measured with a food thermometer.





## Treat Gift Cards like Cash

By: Peggy Bledsoe, Houston County



Gift cards are the perfect gift for some people. They make shopping simpler and gift cards allow friends and family members to purchase just what they want. You may have received a gift card for Christmas or you may have given several gift cards.

Since some new rules about gift cards went into effect August of 2010, I want to share them with you. Money on a gift card cannot expire for at least five years from the date the card was purchased or from the last date any additional money was loaded onto the card. If the expiration date listed on the card is earlier than these dates, the money can be transferred to a replacement card at no cost. Inactivity fees can be charged only after a card hasn't been used for at least one year and you can be charged only once per month. But you may be charged a fee to buy the card or to replace a lost or stolen card. Also, the

expiration date of the card must be clearly disclosed on the card and fees must be clearly printed on the card or its packaging.

When you shop for gift cards, it is wise to buy from sources you know and trust. Avoid buying gift cards from online auction sites, because the cards may be counterfeit or may have been obtained fraudulently. Always read the small print before you buy. If you are not pleased with the terms, buy elsewhere. Inspect the card before purchasing. Verify that none of the protective stickers have been removed and that the codes on the back of the card haven't been scratched off to reveal a PIN number. Always give the recipient the original receipt so they can verify the card's purchase in case it is lost or stolen.

When you receive a gift card, read the card concerning terms and conditions and use it as soon as possible. It is not unusual to misplace gift cards or forget you have them. Using them early will help you get the full value.

Check for an expiration date or fees.

If it appears that the value of your card has expired, or that fees have been deducted, contact the company that issued the card. They may honor the card or reverse the fees.

Treat your card like cash. If your card is lost or stolen, report it to the issuer immediately. If you have a problem with a gift card, contact the company that issued the card. If you can't resolve the problem at that level, you may want to file a complaint with the appropriate authorities:

*For cards issued by retailers, contact the Federal Trade Commission at [ftc.gov](http://ftc.gov) or call toll-free: 1-877-FTC-HELP. Or you may file a complaint with the state Attorney General. For cards issued by national banks, contact the Comptroller of the Currency's (OCC) Customer Assistance Group by calling 800-613-6743 or sending an e-mail to [customer.assistance@occ.treas.gov](mailto:customer.assistance@occ.treas.gov) The OCC charters, regulates and supervises national banks.*

## Reap the Rewards of Gardening with Children

By: Roxie Booker, Dougherty County



By planting and tending a garden, children learn how to appreciate the natural world around them. From the first stages of research and seed selection, through planting, watering, weeding, and harvesting, children develop a sense of pride and responsibility. Gardening is also a fun opportunity to help children practice math

and science skills.

Plan before you start planting. Find out what to plant and how to take care of it. Take children to libraries and local greenhouses, or search online for gardening ideas. Decide whether you want to plant a raised garden, a conventional garden with rows, or a container garden.

Think about the climate and growing season before planting. Shovels and hoes with short handles are easier for children to use than full-size tools. Be sure to give children real tools that are appropriate for their size. Use gardening as a learning experience. Here are some ways to help children learn more from their gardens:

Learning about Science and Nature

- Talk with children about the patterns and cycles they observe. What happens to plants when the weather gets hotter? How do the plants change when it rains?

- Learn the names of insects that appear in your garden. Which ones are beneficial, and what do they do? Which ones are harmful to your plants?

Math

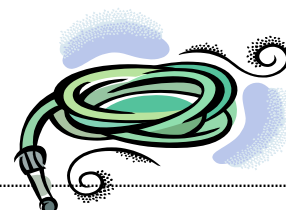
- Count seeds with children. Have them estimate how many seeds or plants are needed to fill a specific area and then count as you plant.

- Measure the correct distance between plants before planting them.

- Mark the calendar for the date you expect seedlings to appear. Go back and compare the actual date of sprouting with the predicted one.

- Keep track of the height of your plants as they grow.

Gardening is a great way for children to learn through meaningful activities. The lessons children learn through gardening will build strong family connections, and will help them learn important skills in a fun way. You'll be amazed to watch your child's sense of accomplishment grow!





## Getting Rid of Allergens With a Little Spring Cleaning

By: Sylvia Davis, Baker/Mitchell Counties



For many, spring time means cleaning the home thoroughly. Cleaning on a regular basis in a thorough manner may reduce the numbers of allergens in the home. The following are just some of the ways to reduce allergens while spring-cleaning your home.

**To remove accumulated dust and dust mites:** Remove clutter from the home.

Clean all fan blades and light fixtures.. Vacuum or dust all ceilings, walls and furniture. Clean vents and vacuum all upholstery and carpeting. Also, clean window treatments, dust blinds, and remove and wash curtains, if possible. If you have carpet, consider replacing it with wood, vinyl or linoleum flooring.

**To remove mold:**

It is extremely difficult to remove all molds from an indoor environment. Instead, control moisture to aid in the elimination of mold growth. Eliminate moisture sources, such as dripping faucets, puddles of water and wet bathmats. Make sure that there is adequate ventilation while cooking and bathing to reduce moisture build-up.

Remove mold and mildew from surfaces using cleaners designed for the job. Read and follow all product directions. Once surfaces covered with mold and mildew have been cleaned, continue to clean once or twice per week to maintain cleanliness.

**To eliminate unwanted pests:**

Remove clutter from the home. Unwanted pests may take up residence in stacks of old papers and objects.

Keep your kitchen clean at all times to discourage the presence of unwanted pests, such as cockroaches.

Cockroaches are not only attracted to foodstuffs such as crumbs and grease, but they are also attracted to water.

**Keep the number of allergens in the home to a minimum by maintaining cleanliness.**

Create a cleaning plan and stick to it. For example, on Mondays, you may wish to clean the bedroom thoroughly, including washing all bedding, cleaning windows and sills, dusting furniture, vacuuming and or wet mopping the floor. Take time everyday to maintain a clean home, even if it is just for five minutes.

Source:

The Soap and Detergent Association. Clean and Healthy: Cleaning to Control Asthma and Allergies. <http://www.cleaning101.com/health/NewAllergies/page14.html>



## Clip and Save



### Fresh Fruit Dip

**8-ounce carton plain yogurt**

**¼ cup unsweetened applesauce**

**1 tablespoon powdered sugar**

**½ teaspoon vanilla**

**1/8 -teaspoon ground cinnamon**

**Cups assorted fresh fruit (pineapple chunks, apples, peaches, and strawberries)**

**In a small bowl stir together all ingredients. To serve, spear fruit with toothpicks, and then dip into yogurt mixture.**

**Yeild: 6 servings**

LEARNING FOR A LIFETIME

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*The Balancing Act: Your Current Issue Enclosed*

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*Dear Friends,*

*The Balancing Act is a quarterly publication sent to you by Family and Consumer Sciences Agents serving all South-west Georgia. All information in this newsletter is written by Specialists at the University of Georgia and FACS agents, and is backed by research from the University of Georgia and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.*

*This newsletter brings you the latest information, please contact the agent in your county.*

*Thank you,*

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