

## Essential Gift Ideas

The gift giving season reminds us of our desire to share quality rather than quantity. If you have a few more gifts to purchase, consider these kitchen essentials that make great gifts AND help keep food and folks safe.

**Food thermometer** - A food thermometer is an essential for every kitchen. Cooking food to proper temperatures will insure quality and safety. Not sure on proper temperatures - look for magnets or framed art that creatively display safe food temperatures.

**Fridge/Freezer thermometer** - Most refrigerator and freezer have controls labeled “cold to coldest.” A small thermometer can be placed inside your unit to provide you with a number. Different parts of your refrigerator will keep food colder - learn how your fridge works by recording temperatures from various sections. Refrigerators should be set to 40 °F or below to keep food safe.

**Cutting boards** - All plastic and wooden cutting boards wear out over time. Once cutting boards become excessively worn or develop hard-to-clean grooves, they should be discarded. Bamboo cutting boards are less porous than hardwoods, absorb very little moisture and resist scarring from knives. There are also cutting mats that can make food prep easier.

**Sponges or kitchen brushes** - Sponges are a versatile tool but can be a breeding ground for bacteria. To inactivate bacteria, heat a sponge in a microwave for one minute or place it in a dishwasher operating with a drying cycle. Many kitchen brushes can be dishwasher safe. I keep my kitchen brush on the top shelf of my dishwasher so it is frequently cleaned and in a consistent location.

**Kitchen cloths and towels** - Kitchen towels can be a source of bacteria that can cross-contaminate otherwise clean dishes, hands, and surfaces. Frequent cleaning is a must. Consider buying color-coded towels for that hard-to-buy for person. For instance, one color could be used for hands and another color for kitchen surfaces to help prevent cross contamination.

Some sources recommend laundering towels after each meal. If you can't do laundry right away, remove the towel from the kitchen to a rack for drying, and then launder once you have enough for a load. Use hot-water machine washing followed by machine drying to help reduce the number of bacteria harboring in your towel.

The gift of food safety and good health is always a good idea. Have a happy and safe holiday season!

*Source: University of Wisconsin-Extension - Safe & Healthy: Wash those kitchen towels by Barb Ingham; USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service website*

**K-State Research and Extension**

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- 30 -

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