

NEWS ARTICLE

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A SHARP KNIFE IS A MUST FOR HOLIDAY COOKING

According to most media outlets, the largest cooking holiday happened this past weekend, Thanksgiving. How did your knives perform? Did you find yourself thinking, this sure is a dull knife, or I need to invest in a good knife? You may have been helping a relative or friend prepare foods and thought, they sure could use a new knife. If so, now may be the time to purchase one before you start preparing for Christmas parties and dinner. And a great knife makes a great present!

Good knives make cooking easier and most importantly, a sharp knife is safer than a dull one. A sharp knife will do what you expect it to do. It will cut through foods easily and not slip or get caught as you are chopping. When a knife slips or is dull, that's when cuts and accidents happen.

A great knife does not need to be expensive. Good knives can be purchased at discount stores for just a few dollars. These knives will typically stay sharp for six months to a year. At this price, you would likely replace the knife when it gets dull.

You may be fortunate enough to have someone in your home who can sharpen knives using a whetstone. Knives that can be sharpened have a heavier blade and will last longer. If you don't have someone who can sharpen knives the old-fashioned way, you can buy a knife sharpener. Most are reasonably priced.

Some knife sets come with a honing stone, a long rod with a handle on it. These stones are used to put a finish edge on a knife and really do not do much towards sharpening. They do

make you look good, and many chefs use them for effect. To really make a knife sharp, you need to have them professionally sharpened using a whetstone and oil or a commercial sharpener.

Check with the hunters in your family. Chances are they know how to sharpen knives correctly.

Sharpness isn't the only concern when dealing with knives. There are other safety rules to follow that every cook should know when using a sharp knife. Good knife skills are an advantage in the kitchen.

S – Securely hold your knife. Grip the top of the blade firmly between your thumb and forefinger. Cut foods on a flat surface. Use a cutting board! Do not cut foods while holding them in your hand.

A – Anchor all cutting boards to ensure they do not slip. If your cutting board slides around on the counter, put a damp kitchen towel underneath it. This will help keep it from sliding around. There are also cutting boards available that have grippers on the bottom to prevent sliding.

F – Fingertips should be curled back and under when cutting foods. I like to tell 4-H members to make “growly” fingers when learning to cut. Use the tips of your fingers to hold the food in place and keep them tucked under away from the knife when cutting.

E - Eyes on the knife! It is imperative that you pay attention to what you are doing when cutting. Avoid distractions that can take your eyes off the task. Remember to keep knives visible. Put them on the counter next to the sink. Do not put them in a sink full of dirty dishes. Also, avoid putting them in a drawer that has other kitchen tools in it. A knife block is a great place to store knives.

T – Take your time. Don't be in a hurry. Accidents happen when you are rushed.

Y – Yield to falling knives. If a knife slips out of your hand or falls from the counter, let it drop. Resist the urge to reach out and catch it. This is also a reason to wear close toed shoes when prepping food.

As you begin making and purchasing gifts on your list, think about giving a set of new knives to be used in the kitchen. They are a useful gift for anyone who cooks!

For a list of basic kitchen equipment or if you are interested in learning how to cook, contact the Howard County Extension Office at 870-845-7517 or visit our office located on the second floor of the courthouse. You may also email me, jince@uada.edu, and I will be glad to put you on my mailing list to let you know of scheduled programs.

Recipe of the Week

If you are looking for a new recipe for a holiday cookie bar, try this one. Judy Hockaday made these recently and the recipe is being shared across Howard County. They are delicious and perfect for parties.

Frosty Fingers

1 large box graham crackers

1 stick margarine

1 cup brown sugar

1 cup crushed graham crackers.

1 cup coconut

1 teaspoon vanilla

Dash of salt

1/3 cup milk

Glaze:

1 ½ cups powdered sugar

3 Tablespoons water

Place 12 whole graham crackers to cover the bottom of a cookie sheet. Set aside.

Place margarine, brown sugar, crushed graham crackers, coconut, vanilla, salt, and milk together in a saucepan. Heat over low heat until butter is melted, and mixture is blended. Spread over graham cracker squares. Top with 12 more graham crackers.

To make glaze: Mix powdered sugar and water. Spread lightly on top of graham crackers. Refrigerate until set. Cut into long strips, 1 x 2-inch. Serve. Hint: Use graham cracker perforations to cut out cookie bars.