

Cooking myths and legends debunked

Written by Terry Mathews
Thursday, 02 April 2009 11:32

A few weeks ago our pastor at First Baptist, Bill Anderson, told a story that reminded me of the fact that even in the food world you can find stories, myths, old wives tales and urban legends. His anecdote was one form of an old joke that has many versions.

A man was watching his wife as she prepared the ham for Sunday dinner. She carefully cut away the extra length of hamhock, set it aside, trimmed the opposite end of the ham and placed the ham in the roasting pan.

The curious husband asked his wife why she didn't include the hamhock in the roasting process.

She replied that she was following her mother's instructions. That was how they had always prepared ham.

When they questioned her mother, they discovered that she was roasting the ham the way she had been taught by her mother.

Next they questioned the grandmother. Her answer – the ham was always too large to fit in my roasting pan if I left the hamhock on, so I cut it off.

You may have a specific way you cook your favorite pies, cookies and holiday foods because that is how your family has always done it.

Sometimes these traditions make for great, unique recipes and other times they can easily be changed for the better.

A friend of mine could never get her sugar cookies to taste the way her mother-in-law's tasted. Her husband insisted that the special cookie cutter his mom used made all of the difference.

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When Ashley asked her mother-in-law about the cutter she learned that it was just the lid off of an old tin baking powder container.

Sometimes these family traditions can lead to misconceptions about food and its preparation.

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Common Food Myths

It is not safe to refreeze meat after it has been thawed.

It is safe to refreeze meat if it was thawed properly in the refrigerator at a proper temperature. The quality can be affected however.

Adding salt to water makes it boil faster.

Salt actually raises water's boiling point, thus taking it slightly longer to boil.

Boiling leaches away all nutrients from vegetables.

Some vitamins are water soluble and may diminish, but most minerals and fiber remain.

Searing meat seals in all of the juices.

Searing steaks doesn't "seal" in juices. It locks in great flavor by caramelizing the crust.

Salads and sandwiches containing mayonnaise aren't safe for picnics.

Commercial mayo contains an acid level that actually allows it to act as a preservative for other ingredients in a salad. All foods containing proteins should be packed carefully at the proper temperature to avoid food contamination.

All alcohol burns off during cooking.

If you heat an alcohol based concoction for a long period the level may lessen, but a quick flambé, simmer or bake on knocks the potency back by 50 percent or less.

Processed foods have a lot less nutrients.

Many processed foods are just as nutritious or in some cases even more nutritious than fresh foods because of additives. It depends on how they are processed and how you prepare the fresh version at home.

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Don't be afraid to research new cooking techniques and updated ideas.

Don't be afraid to experiment. Sometimes a simple change can make a good recipe into a great recipe.

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For the past 20 years, Cindy Welch has been involved with all aspects of cooking, including formal culinary training, experience as food service director for First Baptist Church of Euless, a personal chef and owner of Cindy's Casa Cuisine. Cindy's favorite hobby is "providing delicious food for the people of Sulphur Springs."

Her columns cover all aspects of the cooking experience.