Home cooks often hail Memorial Day as the beginning of grilling season. But it can be at anytime anymore. I know we grill throughout the whole year.

A food thermometer should be your best friend when grilling outdoors. You should never determine meat doneness based on color. Use a food thermometer and make sure meat is cooked to the recommended minimum internal temperature.

For the three most common types of grilled meats, those recommendations include:

Steaks, chops and roasts—145 degrees Fahrenheit.
Ground meat — 160 F.
All poultry — 165 F.

A food thermometer should be inserted into the center of the thickest part of the meat, away from bone, fat and gristle. For ground meat—such as hamburger patties—insert into the side so that the thermometer is positioned through the center of the food.

There are many types of thermometers to choose from when cooking. For checking food temperature, a digital or dial food thermometer is best. Digital temperatures can sense temperature at the tip of the probe and give a quick temperature response. Do not leave the digital thermometer in the food during cooking.

Other food thermometers have a temperature probe connected to a separate digital display. If grilling, use one designated for the high heat of grilling. For large cuts of meat—such as roasts—a meat thermometer can be inserted into the roast and left in during cooking.

Other Safety Tips for Outdoor Grilling

Use separate plates and utensils for raw meats and cooked meats.

Wash your hands frequently, especially after handling raw foods, before and during meal preparation, and before eating.

Prepare several ice chests to keep food cold and to separate items. Keep beverages in one chest, ready-to-eat foods in another, and raw meats in a third.

Do not wash meat or poultry before cooking. This increases the chance for cross-contamination and is not necessary. Cooking meat to the proper internal temperature is your best defense.

When it comes to safe food handling and preparation in your home, you’re in control. Your home is the final stop in the farm-to-table continuum, and safely handling food is your best protection against foodborne illnesses.

Quick Tip. Keep hot foods hot (above 140°F) and cold foods cold (below 40°F). The “Danger Zone” where bacteria grow rapidly is between this temperature range. Never let perishable food sit out for more than two hours, even if you intend to eat it later.

Some non-food safety tips include positioning the grill away from flammable areas, checking the charcoal or gas supply so you don’t run out while preparing meals, and keeping children and pets away from the hot grill.

Plan ahead to keep the party simple. If you are having guests over, ask them to bring other menu items or supplies such as utensils, plates and beverages. The main goal is to have fun!!!