Where food safety is concerned, a food thermometer is kind of like the swiss army knife. It’s a must-have, multi-use tool in the kitchen.

It is one of the most important tools consumers can use to know when food is cooked properly for safe consumption. “It’s useful for meat items, casseroles and even baked goods. Using a subjective method – such as ground meat color – can be misleading and lead to foodborne illness.

Also, it can help (assuring) the quality of a food item and reduce over-cooking.

For consumers who need to buy a food thermometer, the digital type is recommended.

Digital food thermometers read the temperature at the tip of the temperature probe. They also read temperature quickly, and come in a simple handheld design or with other features, such as the ability to insert the probe into the food and leave it in during cooking. You can set the thermometer to indicate when the final temperature has been reached.”

Some digital thermometers can even connect to a mobile device. More information for the types of food thermometers available is available online from the U.S. Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Consumers who already own a food thermometer can calibrate them routinely to make sure they are still giving accurate readings.

The best method is to calibrate your thermometer using ice water and boiling water to check cold and hot readings. Dial faced thermometers can be adjusted if needed. Digital thermometers should be replaced unless it came with instructions on how to adjust.

When it comes to food safety, the No. 1 thing to start with in any kind of cooking situation is washing your hands. It’s the first line of defense against foodborne bacteria.

Handwashing is as simple as wetting the hands, rubbing them together with soap for 20 seconds and rinsing them thoroughly.

Other steps to promote food safety include:

Clean counters and other prep areas as you go. Clean up drips, especially from raw meat. Rinse the outside of fresh fruits and vegetables with clean, running water, rubbing the food gently with your hands. As one example, a watermelon may have dirt on the outside that could be transferred by a knife to the flesh when cutting it open. Bacteria washes, produce washes and bleach are not recommended for rinsing fruit and vegetables. Meat should not be rinsed before cooking. Rinsing can lead to splattering water with meat juice to your ready-to-eat food counters and cabinets. Also wash hands anytime you are moving from one food to another, which helps avoid cross-contamination.

Separate. Keep raw meat on one plate, and cooked meat on a separate plate. Also keep raw meat away from ready-to-eat foods, such as salad and fruit.

Cook. Use your thermometer. Steaks, roasts, chops and fish should be cooked to an internal temperature of 145 degrees F; ground meats (including beef, pork and lamb) should be cooked at 160° F; and all poultry products should be cooked at 165° F.

Chill. As outdoor temperatures get warmer, it becomes even more important to keep food chilled. A good rule of thumb is to get food back in the refrigerator or ice chest within two hours or less.

Grill. Give the grill a good cleaning before the first cookout of the season. Scrape the grate with a stiff brush, or using approved cleaners.