



COLORADO  
FARM TO TABLE  
FOOD SAFETY

# How to Pack a Cooler

*Safely enjoy nutritious foods on your next trip by following these tips for packing a cooler.*

## Plan Ahead

- Always clean the cooler well and dry before using. Clean both the inside and outside with a solution of mild soap and warm water. If the cooler has a drain, be sure to clean it with hot soapy water and drain completely.
- If the cooler has been stored in a hot garage or shed, bring inside the day before using to cool down prior to packing.
- Blocks of ice work better than cubes or ice packs to keep foods cold. Make your own by freezing water bottles or milk cartons.
- Store food in watertight containers or plastic bags to keep out melting ice. Divide large portions into smaller bags or containers to help them chill faster and make serving easier.
- Package raw meat in its own container to avoid cross-contamination of other foods; meat in the original packaging can be placed in a zip-type plastic bag or sealable container.
- Freezing meats, prepared vegetables, breads, or beverages ahead of time will help keep temperatures in the cooler cold longer. Partially freezing milk, juice and other beverages can help keep the cooler frosty – but set a timer to avoid leaving beverages in the freezer too long!



## Arrange and Pack Strategically

- Load the food straight from the fridge into the cooler before leaving--don't pack it in advance.
- Pack items in the reverse order from when you will use or serve them, except for raw meat, which should be placed in the bottom of the cooler to protect other foods from leaking juices.
- Consider having a separate beverage cooler to avoid opening and closing your food cooler too often. Wipe the tops of beverage containers before opening.

## Keep Foods Cold

- Keep a thermometer inside the cooler to ensure that the contents stay below 40 degrees F. The thermometer may need to be inside a plastic bag to prevent water damage.
- If possible, transport the cooler in the passenger area of the car, rather than the hot trunk. At your destination, keep the cooler in the shade. Covering it with a blanket or tarp can protect it from hot temperatures but if leaving the camping area, keep the cooler inaccessible to wildlife. At the beach, bury the bottom of the cooler in the sand and use an umbrella for shade.
- Avoid opening the lid too often. When perishable food items are removed from the cooler, avoid foodborne illness by consuming them within two hours (or within one hour when temperatures are above 90 degrees F.) Discard any uneaten foods that have been out of refrigeration too long.

Read more cooler information: <http://www.eatright.org/resource/homefoodsafety/four-steps/refrigerate/packing-the-perfect-cooler>

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