Prairie Fare

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NDSU | EXTENSION

Try these tips to spring-clean your kitchen

We tend to hang onto things in our family -- all of us, except, perhaps, our son. If I give him things, I'll later find out he sold the items.

I recently offered him a chair -- one we bought him when he was in college -- from our basement.

"If you bring me that chair, I will sell it," he said matter-of-factly.

I kept the chair. Guess who is probably getting nothing for his next birthday.

I'm trying to reduce clutter. I even have several magazines and books that provide decluttering information. Unfortunately, they are adding to the problem.

Do you have any extra stuff? Most of us do. About 10% of people rent storage space at $90 or more per month, according to the Self Storage Association. If you do, add up the worth of the items in storage versus the storage cost.

Spring is a good time to assess the items in our home, including ones in our kitchen.

Let's start with kitchen spring cleaning. You will feel a sense of accomplishment if you shed some extra bowls, pans and utensils from your cupboards, counters and drawers. Selling at garage sales, sharing with young adults or donating to thrift stores are all good options to reduce clutter.

Spring cleaning of kitchens can potentially reduce the number of germs that promote foodborne illness. Cleaning and sanitizing are two separate steps: cleaning removes visible contaminants, such as spills, while sanitizing takes cleaning to the next level. The invisible contaminants, including many types of bacteria associated with food, are more hazardous than the visible ones.

Spring is a good time to assess and clean the items in our kitchen. (Pixabay photo)

Wash counters and other kitchen surfaces, including refrigerator shelves and drawers, with hot soapy water, then sanitize with a very dilute bleach solution and allow to air-dry.

A solution of one tablespoon of unscented bleach per gallon of water is typical for cleaning, or you can use another sanitizing agent prepared according to the directions. Be sure to clean your microwave oven. Place a microwave-safe bowl filled with water, and microwave on high for four minutes. Don't overfill the bowl. Simply use hot, soapy water to wipe down the interior, then dry with a clean paper towel.

If you use kitchen sponges, have you ever caught the aroma of a damp sponge past its prime? I have a radical suggestion: use cloth rags instead of sponges and launder them on the hot cycle of a washing machine. Change the cleaning cloth daily.

Sponges are like hotels where germs like to set up their living quarters and have large families of little germs. A 2007 microbiology study in Germany found more than 362 types of bacteria in the sponges they studied, with 45 billion bacteria per square centimeter (one inch equals 2.54 centimeters).

Bacteria in the presence of warmth, moisture and food can double every 20 minutes or so. In other words, one germ can grow to thousands, millions and billions in a number of hours.

Some researchers have studied whether zapping damp sponges in a microwave kills germs. A 2007 study found that microwaving a moist sponge on high for a minute or running the sponge through the hot cycle of a dishwasher killed nearly all of the bacteria.

However, once you use a damp sponge to wipe up spills again, the sponge becomes contaminated. At any rate, avoid using a sponge to wipe up meat juices. You could have multiple sponges available, then use the clean ones once before putting them in the microwave or dishwasher.

Most people are busy and would use the same sponge repeatedly and risk spreading germs around their kitchen.

Next time, my column will focus on food storage and just how long food remains safe in your cupboard and fridge. In the meantime, here's a recipe that makes use of some canned food items:

Cowboy Caviar

1/3 cup olive or canola oil
2 tablespoons sugar
1/3 cup white wine vinegar
1 teaspoon chili powder
2 medium tomatoes, diced
1 cup red onion, chopped
1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
1 (15-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
1 (10-ounce) bag frozen corn, thawed
1 cup chopped cilantro
1/2 cup diced red bell pepper
1/2 cup diced green bell pepper

Whisk together olive oil, sugar, white wine vinegar and chili powder in a large bowl. Stir in the remaining ingredients, cover and refrigerate.

Makes 12 servings. Each serving has 170 calories, 7 grams (g) of fat, 5 g of protein, 23 g of carbohydrate, 5 g of fiber and 100 milligrams of sodium.

Did You Know?

Getting engaged is a momentous occasion worthy of celebration. However, soon after the question is popped, people in the couple's lives tend to start asking when the big day might be. Newly engaged couples may feel pressured to rush into setting a wedding date, but enjoying one's engagement for however long it may last is an option for brides and grooms. Some couples want to run to the altar in a month, while others are happy to stay engaged indefinitely. The Knot, a trusted wedding resource, surveyed nearly 170,000 American couples in 2024 to gauge how long most were waiting to wed. The Knot 2025 Real Weddings Study found that the average engagement length is 15 months. This number has held steady since 2022.

-metrocreativeconnection

North Dakotans reminded to call before they dig

Governor Kelly Armstrong has proclaimed April as Safe Digging Month in North Dakota. In recognition, the ND Public Service Commission (PSC) is reminding everyone of the potential dangers and consequences of digging without first clicking or calling 811, North Dakota's Call-Before-You-Dig number.

"Spring is here, and that means outdoor projects are on the rise! Before you pick up that shovel or start digging, the North Dakota Public Service Commission has a crucial reminder: call 811 first," said Commissioner Sheri Haugen-Hoffart, who holds the damage prevention portfolio. "It's not just a good idea -- it's a safeguard against striking underground utility lines like gas, power, communications, water and sewer systems. Hitting one of these can lead to serious hazards and racks up billions in damages every year. With one quick call to 811, you can ensure a safe, hassle-free project and protect your community from avoidable risks. Don't dig into danger -- make the call!"

North Dakota law requires anyone conducting an excavation to notify 811 at least two business days in advance of digging. This is a free service to homeowners and farmers working on their own property/land. Personnel will be sent to mark the locations of the underground facilities, typically within a couple of days. The markings are valid for 21 days after they are placed as identified on your excavation notice ticket. This process is coordinated through ND One Call. The Public Service Commission's role is to enforce the requirements of the state's damage prevention laws and take action when violations are reported to the commission. The PSC can levy a fine up to $25,000 per violation depending on severity.

Each year, North Dakota's underground utility infrastructure is jeopardized by unintentional damage from those who fail to call 811 to have underground facilities located prior to digging. Since 2009, the PSC has received and processed 364 complaints related to violations of the Call-Before-You-Dig law. In total, approximately $466,150 in fines have been assessed against companies or individuals who have violated the law. The consequences of striking an underground utility can be severe, including explosions resulting in injury or death, service interruptions or damage to the environment.

The significant residential and business growth occurring throughout North Dakota and the increased demand for pipeline infrastructure to support the energy industry have dramatically increased demand for the One Call Program.

Safe Digging Month is endorsed each April by the ND Public Service Commission, the Common Ground Alliance and the ND One Call Board. For more information about 811 and begin your excavation notice, visit the ND One Call Board's website at www.ndonecall.com. For safety tips, best practices and other information, visit the Common Ground Alliance website at www.commongroundalliance.com.

Alzheimer's group to meet

The Alzheimer's Association will be offering an in-person caregiver support group. This group will meet on the third Tuesday of each month from 10 to 11:00 a.m. at the Lake Region Heritage Center, 502 4th St. NE, Devils Lake.

The support group is free and open to all caregivers of an individual with Alzheimer's or related dementia.

Registration is required. Call 1-800-272-3900 or visit www.communityresourcefinder.org.

TOPS meetings in McVille

TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly), a weight-loss group, meets every Monday at the Cedar Ridge Apartments in McVille. Weigh-in time is 6 p.m. and meetings start at 6:15 p.m. Meetings take place on Hamlin Street North, just south of the school. A meeting sign will be posted on the door to use, on the west side of the apartments.

Attendees' first meeting is free.

Chapter fees go to purchase TOPS supplies and awards for members. For more information, call Artha at 322-4341 or Gayle at 322-5136.

Tasty caramel apple wraps

Snack time just got a bit sweeter. These wraps are simple enough to make that even kids can enjoy putting them together.

For more snack recipes, visit culinary.net.

Caramel Apple Wraps

Adapted from Milk Means More

3 large apples, any kind
1 tablespoon granulated sugar
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 cup fat-free vanilla Greek yogurt
1/3 cup creamy peanut butter, or almond butter
8-10 fajita-sized tortillas
Caramel sundae syrup

Wash and dice apples. In medium bowl, mix sugar and cinnamon. Add diced apples to sugar mixture. Toss apples to coat.

In small bowl, stir together yogurt and peanut butter until smooth.

Layout tortillas and spread 2 tablespoons yogurt mixture on each. Spoon small amount of apple mixture at one end of each tortilla. Start from end with apples and roll tortillas.

Drizzle with caramel syrup.

--Family Features

CONSERVATION CADETS
ATTENTION
Nelson County 1st - 6th Graders:
Our next gathering is scheduled!
April 28
5 p.m. >>>> Lakota City Library
Nelson County Soil Conservation District SINCE 1941
April showers hopefully bring May flowers. And we may be getting our hands dirty while we learn about water quality and ways to help keep water clean for those flowers.
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Denise 701-247-2514 ext. 114 or Kristi 701-247-2543

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Lakota Public Pool Family Pass
Dockside Family Pass
Propane Fire Table
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2 - $100 and 1 - $300
3 Till House Gift Cards - $100 each
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