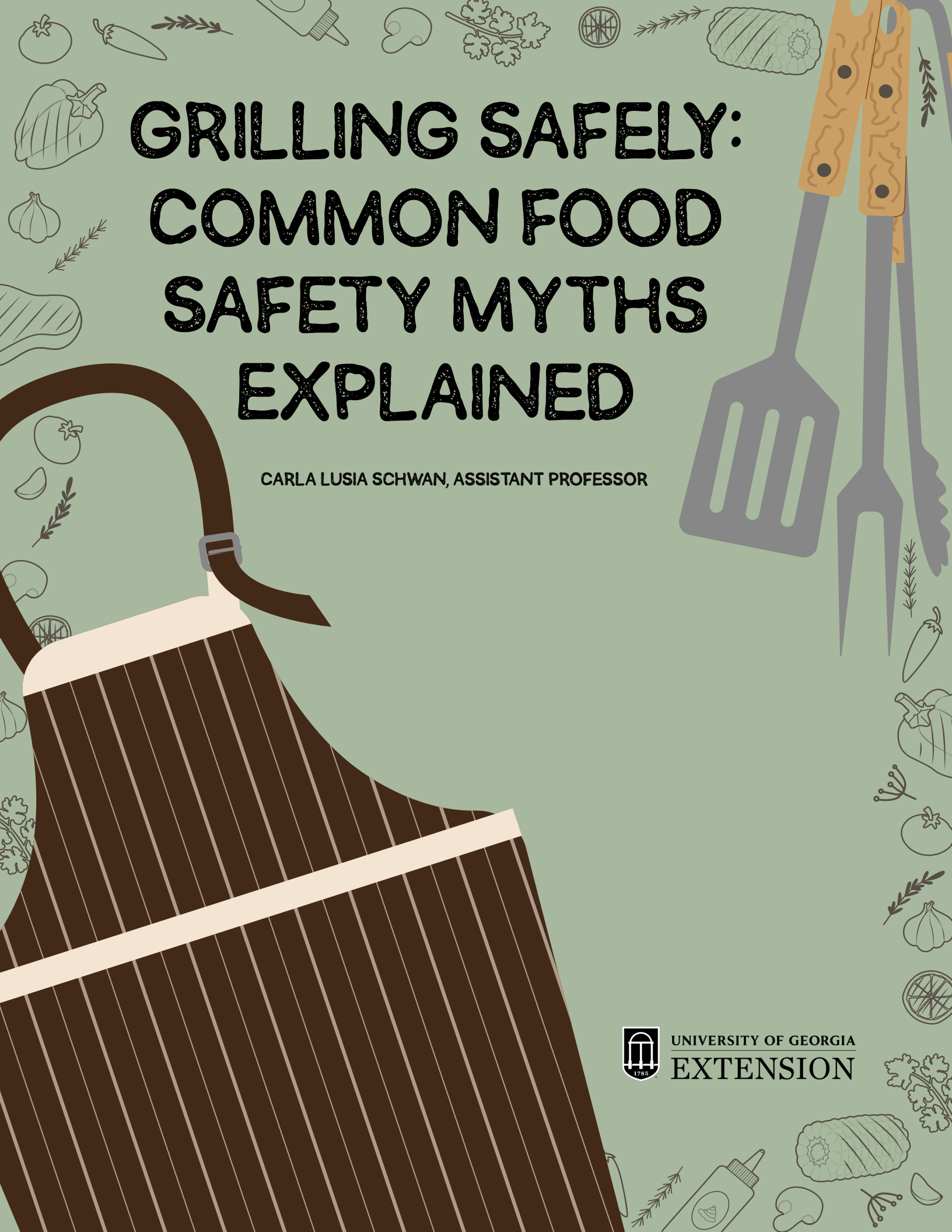


The background is a light green color. It is decorated with various line-art illustrations of food items and grilling tools. At the top, there are tomatoes, a pepper, a herb sprig, a bottle of sauce, a mushroom, a sprig of herbs, a lemon, and a head of lettuce. On the right side, there are two large grilling tools: a spatula and tongs, both with orange handles and grey heads. On the left side, there is a large illustration of a brown and white striped apron with a brown strap and buckle. The title is written in a large, bold, black, distressed font. The author's name is in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

GRILLING SAFELY: COMMON FOOD SAFETY MYTHS EXPLAINED

CARLA LUSIA SCHWAN, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION

As summer arrives and folks fire up grills across the country, food safety misinformation also tends to spread online. Social media trends, viral “hacks,” and outdated kitchen habits can increase the risk of foodborne illness, especially when cooking outdoors and during warm-weather gatherings.

Understanding which practices are unsafe—and what to do instead—can help protect you, your family, and your guests this barbecue season!



MYTH #1: WASHING RAW POULTRY CLEANS IT

- **The myth:** Many people believe rinsing raw poultry removes bacteria and makes the meat safer.
- **The reality:** Washing raw poultry can spread harmful bacteria around the kitchen when water droplets splash. Cooking poultry to the proper internal temperature destroys harmful microorganisms—and saves you time!
- **What to do instead:** Do not rinse raw poultry. Cook poultry to 165 °F and thoroughly clean hands, utensils, and surfaces after handling raw meat.

Note: If you choose to wash poultry despite food safety recommendations, thoroughly clean and sanitize the sink, faucet, countertops, and surrounding surfaces before preparing other foods. Bacteria can spread through water droplets and contaminate nearby areas.

MYTH #2: “NYQUIL CHICKEN” IS SAFE

- **The myth:** Online videos have promoted cooking chicken in cold medicine products such as NyQuil.
- **The reality:** This practice is extremely dangerous. Heating medications can release harmful vapors and may result in accidental overdose or poisoning.
- **What to do instead:** Never cook food using medications or nonfood substances.



MYTH #3: MEAT IS SAFE TO EAT IF IT “LOOKS DONE”

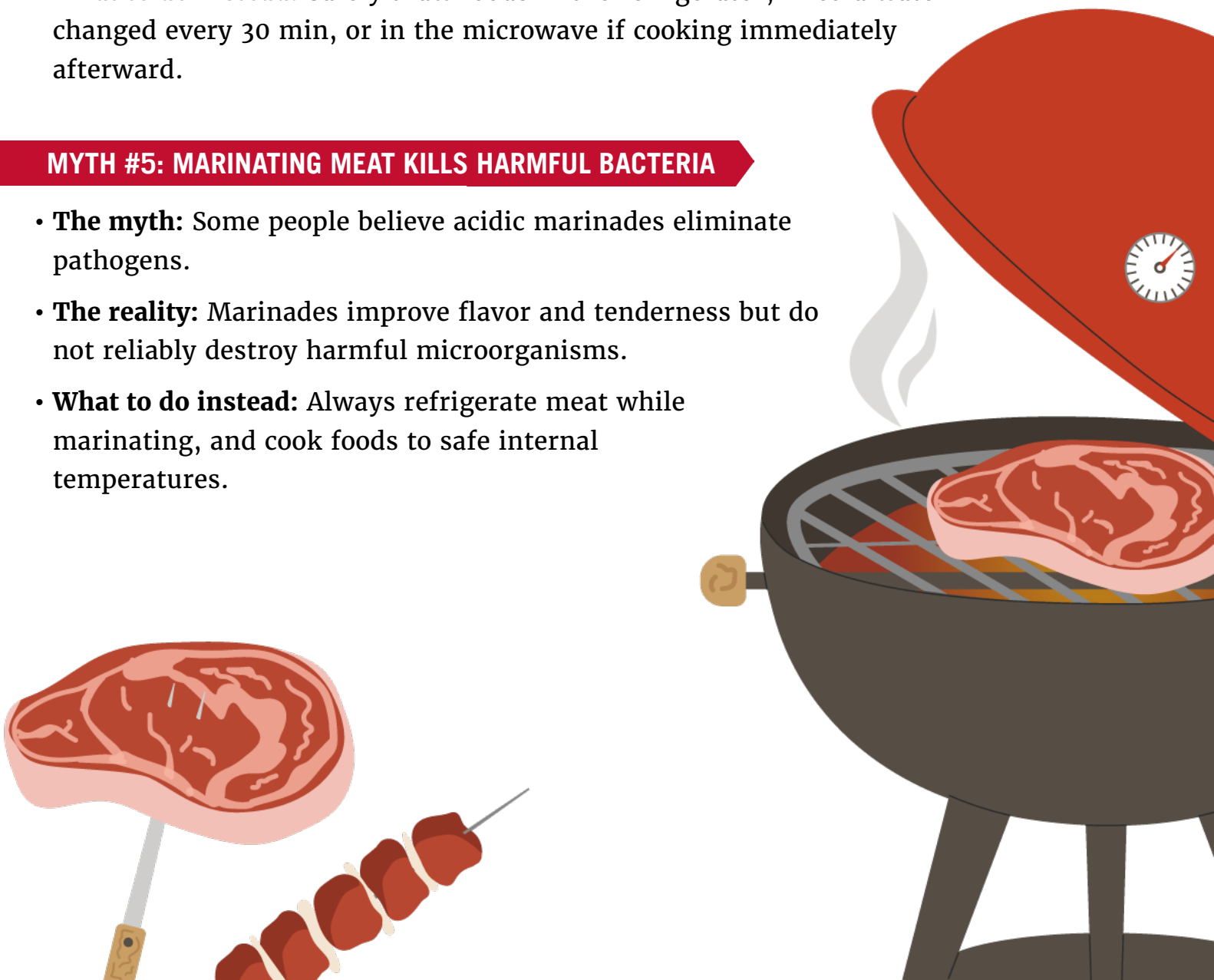
- **The myth:** People often judge doneness based on color or texture.
- **The reality:** Color is not a reliable indicator of safety. The only reliable way to determine safety is with a food thermometer.
- **What to do instead:** Cook poultry to 165 °F, ground meats to 160 °F, and steaks, pork, and fish to 145 °F.

MYTH #4: IT'S FINE TO THAW MEAT ON THE COUNTER

- **The myth:** Leaving meat out on the counter is a quick way to thaw it.
- **The reality:** Room-temperature thawing allows food to enter the *temperature danger zone* (40 to 140 °F), where bacteria multiply rapidly.
- **What to do instead:** Safely thaw foods in the refrigerator, in cold water changed every 30 min, or in the microwave if cooking immediately afterward.

MYTH #5: MARINATING MEAT KILLS HARMFUL BACTERIA

- **The myth:** Some people believe acidic marinades eliminate pathogens.
- **The reality:** Marinades improve flavor and tenderness but do not reliably destroy harmful microorganisms.
- **What to do instead:** Always refrigerate meat while marinating, and cook foods to safe internal temperatures.



MYTH #6: IT'S SAFE TO LEAVE FOOD OUT FOR A FEW HOURS DURING A COOKOUT

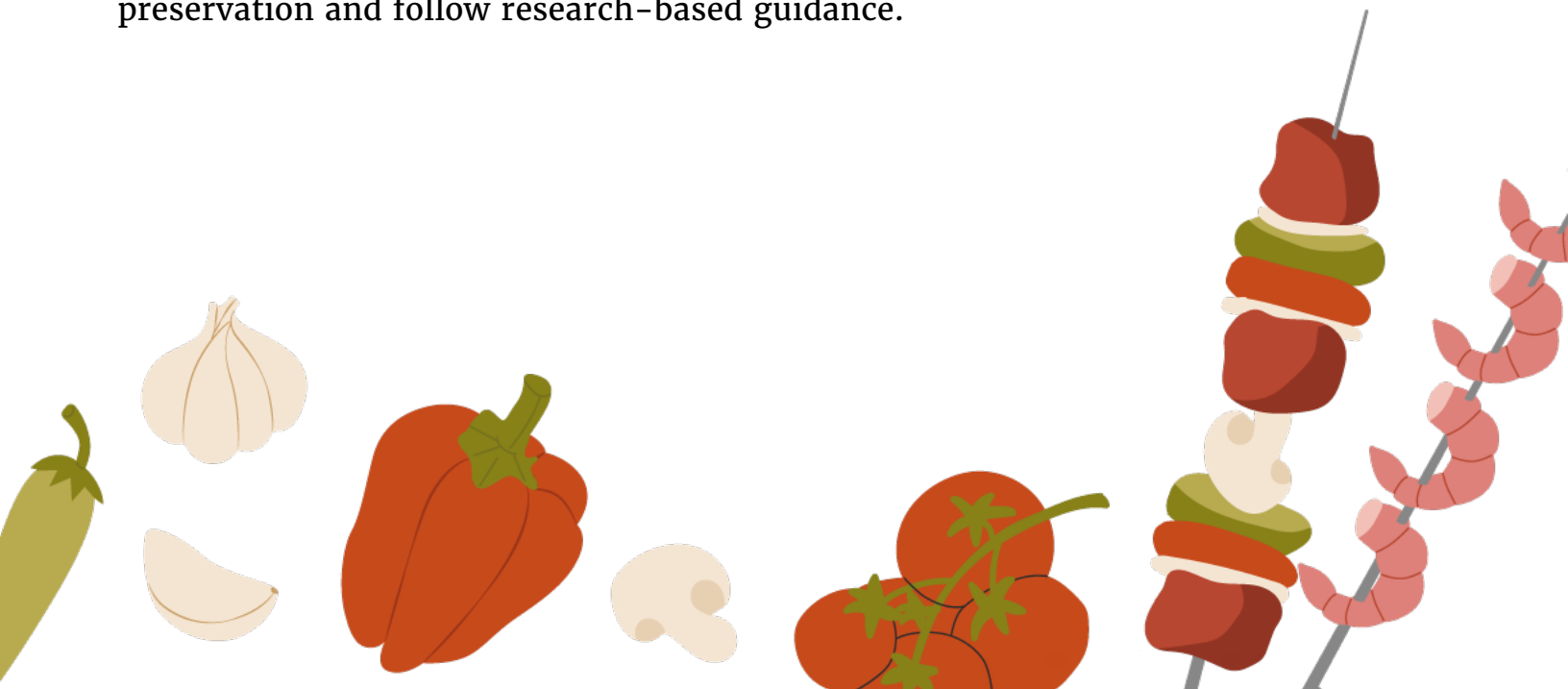
- **The myth:** Cooked foods are often left outdoors during parties and cookouts for extended periods.
- **The reality:** Perishable foods should not remain at room temperature for more than 2 hr, or 1 hr if air temperatures exceed 90 °F.
- **What to do instead:** Keep hot foods hot with warming trays, chafing dishes, or slow cookers, and keep cold foods cold with coolers or ice packs.

MYTH #7: GRILLING AUTOMATICALLY MAKES FOOD SAFE

- **The myth:** Because grilling uses high heat, some people assume all bacteria are automatically destroyed.
- **The reality:** Uneven cooking and cross-contamination can still occur during grilling.
- **What to do instead:** Use separate plates, tongs, and utensils for raw and cooked foods, and verify internal temperatures with a food thermometer.

MYTH #8: FREEZE-DRYING OR DEHYDRATING FOODS KILLS ALL BACTERIA

- **The myth:** Some online content incorrectly suggests that removing moisture completely sterilizes foods.
- **The reality:** Certain microorganisms can survive freeze-drying or dehydration if foods are contaminated before processing.
- **What to do instead:** Use safe food-handling and pretreatment practices before preservation and follow research-based guidance.



REFERENCES

- Food Safety and Inspection Service. (2024a, February 7). *Washing food: Does it promote food safety?* U.S. Department of Agriculture. Retrieved May 21, 2026, from <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/washing-food-does-it-promote-food>
- Food Safety and Inspection Service. (2024b, August 9). *Freezing and food safety*. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Retrieved May 28, 2026, from <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/freezing-and-food-safety>
- Food Safety and Inspection Service. (2024c, September 30). *Chicken from farm to table*. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Retrieved May 21, 2026, from <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry/chicken-farm-table>
- Food Safety and Inspection Service. (2025, January 8). *Food safety: Poultry*. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Retrieved May 26, 2026, from <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry>
- Food Safety Education Staff. (2019, August 20). *Washing raw poultry: Our science, your choice* [Press release]. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Retrieved May 21, 2026, from <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2019/08/20/washing-raw-poultry-our-science-your-choice>
- Foodsafety.gov. (2023, September 18). *4 Steps to Food Safety*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Retrieved May 28, 2026, from <https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/4-steps-to-food-safety>
- Gravely, M. (2016, November 16). *To wash or not wash*. *USDA Blog*. Retrieved May 26, 2026, from <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/blog/wash-or-not-wash>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2022, September 15). *A recipe for danger: Social media challenges involving medicines*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220915152720/https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/recipe-danger-social-media-challenges-involving-medicines>

The permalink for this UGA Extension expert resource is fieldreport.caes.uga.edu/publications/C1377/