



November 2025

THE EXTENSION CONNECTION

Wyandotte County K-State Extension



Director's Note

Denise Dias

Wyandotte County Director

Gratitude and kindness are two things that rise to the top during the month of November. I am grateful for our Extension volunteers and staff. I am grateful to belong to an organization that supports people centered values and champions a culture of belonging for all! Happy Thanksgiving!

KANSAS STATE
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NAVIGATING FAMILY GATHERINGS DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season is often a time of joy and togetherness. However, stressors can lead to holiday blues, especially if you're interacting with a difficult family member. Whether it's due to unresolved conflicts, differing personalities, or longstanding tensions, sometimes spending time with family can be challenging.

In fact, adults are five times more likely to say that the level of stress in their lives increases during the holiday season. But we're here to help with that. You can create a more peaceful and positive holiday experience with a thoughtful approach and some strategic planning. Here are some practical tips to help you through the holiday season.

Set realistic expectations. Understand that family gatherings might not be perfect, and that's okay. Embrace the idea that your goal is to create a pleasant atmosphere rather than solve potential conflicts or create a "perfect" holiday for others.

Boundaries are crucial when dealing with difficult family members. Identify what topics or behaviors are off-limits and communicate these boundaries calmly and assertively if needed. Boundaries serve as protective shields for our mental health, which help nurture, support, and foster healthier relationships.

Plan your time wisely. If possible, plan your time with difficult family members in a way that allows you to manage stress and maintain balance. Consider scheduling shorter visits or breaks throughout the day.

Practice empathy and patience, focus on what you can control

While it may be challenging, try to practice empathy and patience with difficult family members. Remember that their behavior might stem from personal struggles or unresolved issues you are unaware of. Have a support system and know when to walk away

A good support network can remind you that there's still goodness even when there's stress. Reach out to friends, supportive family members, or a therapist before and after gatherings to discuss your feelings and seek advice. You can't control other people's behavior, but you can control your reactions. Concentrate on maintaining your composure and responding thoughtfully. Engage in stress-relief activities

Before and after family gatherings, engage in activities that help you relax and unwind. Try exercise, meditation, reading, or spending time with friends. Finding ways to manage stress will help you maintain a more balanced perspective. Sometimes, despite your best efforts, stepping away from a situation may be necessary to protect your well-being. If a conversation becomes too heated or uncomfortable, excuse yourself politely and take a break. Reflect and prepare for the future

After the holidays, take time to reflect. Consider what strategies worked well and what could be improved for next year. Looking back on these experiences can provide valuable insights and help you better prepare for future interactions.

By approaching the holiday season with these strategies, you can create a more positive atmosphere. Finding ways to coexist peacefully can help make the most of the time you have together

<https://blog.massgeneralbrighamhealthplan.org/navigating-family-gatherings-during-the-holidays>

Nutrition and Food Safety

COOKING HEALTHY FOR THE HOLIDAYS

When it comes to food, “healthy” and “holiday” don’t usually find themselves in the same sentence. However, tweaking holiday recipes to be healthier may be easier than you think. With a little planning, it’s possible to enjoy great tasting holiday dishes while maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Healthier Holiday Eating Tips:

Focus on star ingredients. Many holiday dishes begin with a healthy main ingredient such as apples, sweet potatoes, or green beans. The large amount of fat and sugar added cause these dishes to become less healthy. By focusing on whole fruits and vegetables — the “star” ingredients — and making simple tweaks to added ingredients, you can create healthier dishes.

Lower the fat. Use half the butter or oil in baked goods by replacing the other half with unsweetened applesauce or mashed banana. If a recipe calls for sour cream, mayonnaise, or milk, choose low-fat versions. For dip recipes, try using low-fat yogurt instead of mayonnaise. Choose lean meats, such as skinless turkey breast, and drain excess fat after cooking.

Reduce sugar. In baked goods (except for yeast breads), such as cookies, pie fillings, and fruit crisps, reduce the sugar by one-third. Add spices such as cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg, or flavorings such as vanilla extract to enhance the sweetness.

Reduce sodium. Except for yeast breads, salt may be reduced or removed altogether from many recipes. Choose low-sodium versions of products such as soups, broths, soy sauce, and canned goods. Rinse canned vegetables and beans. If a recipe calls for seasoning salt, such as garlic or onion salt, try using herb-only seasonings, such as garlic or onion powder or use finely chopped herbs, garlic, celery, or onions.

Increase fiber. Try using whole-wheat flour and bread, whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, oatmeal, or whole cornmeal in dishes. In recipes that call for all-purpose flour, substitute half with whole-wheat flour. Add beans to soups or stews. Add vegetables to soups, casseroles, and salads. Add fruit to salads and desserts.

Try healthier cooking techniques. Try using nonstick pans or spraying pans with nonstick cooking spray to reduce the amount of fat added to dishes. Choose healthier cooking methods that use less fat, such as baking, broiling, or steaming. Find some holiday recipes modified with healthy tweaks [here](#).

References:

<https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/publications/pocket-guide-preparing-fruits-and-vegetables>
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ROASTED VEGGIES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Have you ever noticed that a whole vegetable tastes different than one that has been cut up? Whole carrot compared to carrot sticks? Or a whole sweet potato baked compared to sweet potato slices baked? Taste them side by side at the same time. What are the differences? This concept is called the Maillard reaction. It is a non-enzymatic reaction between amino acids (that make up proteins) and reducing sugars (such as glucose and fructose) in the presence of heat. Sometimes it enhances the flavors, other times it doesn't. It also occurs in roasting coffee beans and the browning of bread. Less pleasant reactions occur when dry milk is not stored properly.

Your taste buds will notice the different flavors, as well as how vegetables are cooked.

Not a vegetable fan? [Check out this guide](#). Maybe you just haven't found the combination. Possible cooking methods include boiling, microwaving, steaming, roasting, grilling, and sautéing. Don't forget to enjoy them fresh. My favorite is roasting

Roasted Vegetables

Ingredients:

- 1 cup fresh vegetables per person (choose one vegetable or a mix of several, see list below)
- 1/2 teaspoon vegetable oil (per cup of vegetables)
- Sprinkle of salt and pepper

Directions:

1. Wash hands and counters
 2. Wash vegetables, peel if desired, and cut into similar-sized pieces. Smaller pieces (about 1/2-inch thickness) brown more and cook more quickly. Long, thin pieces (asparagus or beans) can be left whole.
 3. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
 4. Prepare a baking sheet that will hold the vegetables in a single layer. A metal baking sheet without sides allows more browning. Covering the pan with foil will make cleanup easy.
 5. Toss the vegetable pieces with just enough oil to make them shine.
 6. Spread the vegetables on the baking sheet in a single layer.
 7. Roast until tender and slightly browned on the edges. Baking time will depend on the thickness of the pieces. Thin pieces (asparagus or beans) may take 5 minutes; pieces about 1/2-inch-thick take about 15 minutes.
 8. Stir or turn about halfway through the roasting to obtain more even browning.
 9. Remove to a serving dish and sprinkle lightly with salt or seasoning of your choice.
- Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours



MEET OUR NEW HORTICULTURE AGENT

Hello, for my first newsletter as your Wyandotte County extension agent I wanted to introduce myself and some of the topics and fields I am familiar with. My name is Dylan Parsley and I am originally from Bloomington Indiana. I moved to Kansas in July of 2016 on army orders to Fort Riley near Junction City. Once my army service contract came to an end, I liked Kansas so much and decided to stick around! Living in Manhattan at this point I decided that attending Kansas State University to continue my education made the most sense.

After exploring a few different fields within the college of agriculture I settled on a horticulture program that ignited a passion for plant sciences that I never knew I had. Fast forward to 2024 I graduated K-State with a bachelor's degree in Horticulture production and a minor in plant pathology. After graduating I went on to work at Loma Vista Nursery where I grew woody perennials and ornamental trees. Just before taking this position, I had the opportunity to take a role as manager of an apple orchard where I oversaw plant health, crop planning, harvest and storage, and landscaping around the premise. I have also continued my educational journey studying a plant pathology program through Ohio State University.

Even though I have only been in my current position as a horticulture agent for a short time, I have had the opportunity to work with the extension master gardeners as they care and oversee several garden projects around the county, the most recent highlight has been officially taking responsibility for the Cooper-Foreman Heirloom Garden on the campus of Kansas City Kansas Community College. This garden features a wide array of annuals, perennials, woody shrubs, as well as ornamental and fruit tree varieties that date back prior to 1924 in order to highlight traditional garden culture that was common in Kansas during the time period. The Wyandotte master gardeners have been working diligently planting, pruning, and weeding as well as overseeing the installation of a new ADA compliant stone walkway that will make the garden even more accessible for everyone to experience its natural beauty.



Community Development

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Have you noticed the growing awareness and use of the word 'engagement'? Have you wondered how it might apply to the work you do in your community or organization? Businesses, non-profit organizations, public officials, and government agencies seemingly all tout their engagement of their customers, clients, constituents, members, residents, or citizens. Yet, most of these groups could benefit from a broader understanding of what we mean by 'engagement' and an awareness of the tools and strategies available to them.

There is an increasing body of research highlighting the changing expectations of our citizens and a growing importance of having a greater voice in the priorities and decisions that affect our daily lives. This is especially true at the community level. More and more, we are problem solvers in our personal and professional lives and expect our public decision makers to be the same. We are also increasingly civil in private but not in public, connected to information but not to each other, more educated with more capacity, but less trustful and with less time to devote to our communities or organizations.

In the face of these changing expectations, it is incumbent upon civic organizations, governments, and communities to incorporate the tools and concepts of effective community engagement into the work we do.

Effective community engagement - whether it is focused on a specific project or challenge, or creating a more engaged organization - is more than simply talking to, or informing our citizens or constituents about the things we want them to know about. Effective engagement goes beyond a one-way communication or public relations campaign. At its heart, it is a purposeful, two-way conversation that embraces the need to understand what our clients, constituents, members, or citizen want and what their values and priorities are - as well as effectively integrating these perspectives and preferences into our decisions, policies and programs.

Community engagement - done effectively - provides your community or organization with the opportunity to build local networks, enhance relationships, identify underlying concerns and values, leverage assets and resources, increase participation, improve decision making, get out ahead or avoid conflict, and perhaps most importantly increase trust in your organization and governance.

Source: Penn State Extension



Upcoming Events



November 5: Gifts from the Kitchen

November 5: K-State Garden Hour

November 7: First Friday E-Call

November 17: Annual Meeting

November 27-28: Office Closed for Thanksgiving

December 3: Gifts from the Kitchen

December 3: K-State Garden Hour

December 19: Office Closed for Staff Development

December 25- January 2: Office Closed for Holiday

Connect with us!



K-State Extension is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Program information may be available in languages other than English. Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, including alternative means for communication (e.g., Braille, large print, audio tape, and American Sign Language) may be requested by contacting the event contact Jo McLeland two weeks prior to the start of the event (insert deadline date) at (913-299-9300 or jo1@ksu.edu). Requests received after this date will be honored when it is feasible to do so. Language access services, such as interpretation or translation of vital information will be provided free of charge to limited English proficient individuals upon request.

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