

GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL HANGI OR UMU

A Hangi or Umu is a traditional Maori and Pacific Islander way of cooking food in the ground using hot rocks to produce steam. The rocks are heated on a pile of burning timber. Once heated they are then rolled into the cooking pit and wire baskets of food wrapped in foil or similar material are put on top of these rocks. The food baskets are covered with wet sheets and then with wet sacks. All this is then covered with dirt. The water in the cloths and sacks turns into steam that is trapped under the soil and cooks the food.

The following paragraphs contain guidelines that promote a safe and enjoyable hangi or umu

- Do not hold a hangi or umu if there are fire restrictions in place.
- Forty-eight hours before you hold the hangi inform your immediate neighbours and the Fire Service.
- The fire and the edge of the hole for the hangi or umu must be at least 3 metres from the property boundary or any other building or structure to reduce the risk of undermining, fire damage or smoke nuisance.
- The base of the fire must be less than 2 square metres in size. Any larger than this will require approval from your local fire brigade and it is unlikely they will approve it.
- A fire permit is not required from Council, but all reasonable steps must be taken to ensure the fire does not causes a smoke nuisance.
- To reduce smoke and obtain a “clean” fire, only use dry wood and paper. Do not burn any rubbish or plastic, or any timber that has been treated, painted or is otherwise contaminated.
- To control the fire and maintain safety, connect a hose to the garden tap and keep it within easy reach of the fire in case the fire gets out of control.
- Do not use petrol or other combustible fuels to light the fire. It can be very dangerous and lead to severe burns. Start the fire with dry paper and/or fire starters.
- Provide adult supervision at all times for the fire and cooking pit.
- Do not burn any of the remaining rubbish. Remove rubbish from the site of the hangi or umu immediately afterwards and dispose of it in the bin after it has cooled down.
- Left over food waste must be stored in a container/bin with a cover until the next rubbish collection day or safely composted. Do not compost any animal product (left overs, bones, fat).
- Do not bury meat or vegetables scraps as this could attract rats or other undesirable animals.

This fact sheet was compiled with the assistance of numerous New Zealand Environmental Health Officers and Cultural Advisers.

FOOD HYGIENE

Different cultures have different traditions concerning the conduct of a Hangi or Umu. The following points are not meant to change tradition but to refine the technique concerning the safe conduct of a Hangi or Umu.

- Only fresh food is to be used and it is best eaten steaming hot immediately after preparation.
- Only the amount of food that is to be eaten or stored safely is to be acquired for cooking.
- Many members of the extended family should be trained in the safe conduct of a Hangi or Umu.
- People who are ill or have early signs of the flu or other illness should not do any of the food preparation.
- Ensure that all eating utensils and food preparation surfaces are clean before use by first washing them in soapy water and then rinsing in boiling hot water (greater than 75°C).
- Wash your hands before handling food (use the bathroom sink and soap, not the kitchen sink).
- Clean down the tables and cover with clean tablecloths and do not permit sitting on tables.
- Food should be consumed in an area separate to where it is to be prepared.
- Don't contaminate ready to eat foods (cooked food, salads, fruit) by placing them on surfaces that have had uncooked foods on them (meat, unwashed vegetables). This can be assisted by using different cutting boards and knives for the different types of foods.
- Keep ready to eat foods such as salads separate from foods which are yet to be cooked such as raw vegies and meat, and do not store uncooked foods (raw meat) above ready to eat foods (salads) or they will drip onto ready to eat food and contaminate them.
- Store cold-cut meats and salads cold (less than 5°C) and hot food hot (more than 60°C).
- Ensure all frozen food is thoroughly defrosted before cooking (where possible defrost in the refrigerator to avoid the outside becoming warm while the inside is still frozen).
- Wash all salad vegetables well, store them in the fridge and don't prepare them greater than two hours in advance of the hangi or umu.
- All meat must be obtained from a registered butcher or some other similar food premises (supermarket, abattoir).
- Ensure all the food in the food baskets is effectively wrapped in aluminium foil, cabbage leaves, banana leaf or some similar clean material.
- Place large cuts of meat at the bottom of the cooking basket to ensure thorough cooking.
- The cooking time depends on the number and size of rocks, the amount and size of food baskets, the size of the largest meat joint and if any extra water is to be used. In many cases cooking time will be 3 to 4 hours. As an initial guide, place a large, full uncut potato in the top of the food basket in a separate parcel. Check this potato is cooked through to determine if the rest of the food is properly cooked. Also check the centre of the meat when the food is eventually unpacked.
- Cover all exposed food to protect it from dust and insects.
- Dispose of any perishable food that has been left out in the air for more than two hours as it can not be made safe by re-cooking, washing or re-chilling it.
- Left over food should be stored in clean covered containers in a fridge and eaten within 48 hours.
- Left over food includes food that was frozen and has been defrosted. This food should be either cooked and eaten or thrown out.
- Food that is still frozen can of course be put back in the freezer, but make sure it has not thawed.
- Dispose of all food scraps and used paper plates into covered rubbish bins or sealed bin bags.

For further inquiries please contact the Ipswich City Council Health and Environmental Protection Department on 3810 6822 during normal working hours.