

# **Don't spoil the holidays by ignoring fire safety**

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Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service experts are asking Texas residents to be aware of potential fire dangers associated with the holidays. Credit: Texas A&M AgriLife Communications photo by Paul Schattenberg

While the holidays should be a time of joy, there are many potential fire hazards that could ruin them if people don't take adequate precautions to protect themselves, said Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service experts.

They said some of the dangers include turkey fryers, Christmas lights, candles and even Christmas trees.

"Serving a fried turkey has become a Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday tradition for many families, but deep-frying a turkey takes skill, preparation and caution," said Jenna Anding, AgriLife Extension associate head of the nutrition and food science department, College Station.

"The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends reducing the risk of burns due to splashing by thoroughly thawing and drying the turkey before placing it in the heated oil," Anding said.

She also recommended the fryer be placed "in an open area and away from walls, fences or other structures as well as away from compost heaps, wood piles or other potentially flammable sources."

Anding and the Consumer Product Safety Commission offered some additional safety guidelines when deep-frying a turkey, including:

- Make sure the fryer is in full view while the burner is on.
- Never cook a turkey in or under a garage, carport, deck or other structure that might catch [fire](#).
- Check the oil temperature frequently and if the oil begins to smoke, immediately turn off the gas supply.
- Raise and lower the turkey from the fryer slowly to reduce splatter and avoid burns.
- Cover bare skin when placing or removing the turkey.
- Call 911 if a fire occurs and avoid trying to extinguish the fire with water.

Anding said it's also important to make sure a gas fryer is far enough away from the propane gas tank to protect from any wind blowing the heat from the fryer toward the tank.

"It's also important to thoroughly read the instructions about using the fryer and follow the manufacturer's guidelines on the proper amount of oil," she said.

Michael Lopez, AgriLife Extension program specialist in family and community health, College Station, said families tend to use more candles and may put up decorations that pose a potential fire hazard

According to the National Fire Protection Association, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's are the top three days of the year for home candle fires in the U.S.

"More than half of home candle fires occur when something that can

catch on fire is too close to the candle," Lopez said.

For candle fire safety, Lopez and the NFPA offered the following tips:

- Keep candles at least a foot away from flammable items or surfaces.
- Do not put candles directly on surfaces. Use a sturdy candleholder with a drip plate for wax.
- Blow out candles when you leave home or go to bed and avoid using candles in the bedroom or other areas where people may fall asleep.
- Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets.
- Replace candles before they burn all the way down or before the flame gets too close to the holder or container.
- In the event of a power outage, use flashlights or other battery-powered lighting instead of candles.

"Christmas trees also account for hundreds of fires annually and those fires typically start due to an open flame from a candle or a short in the electrical lights," Lopez said. "Consumers who prefer a real Christmas tree should choose one with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched."

He said before setting up the tree in the stand cut off about an inch from the bottom of trunk to remove any clogged areas that may prevent the tree from absorbing water.

"Monitor the water level and be sure to add water daily," he said. "Also, when determining the area for setup, make sure the tree is at least 3 feet away from any heat source and does not block a door or exit."

Lopez noted Christmas trees still pose a potential threat even after they have been removed from the home.

"Dried-out trees constitute a real fire danger and should not be left in the home or garage, or placed outside next to the exterior walls of your home," he said.

Lopez offered these additional tips for Christmas tree fire safety:

- If purchasing an artificial Christmas tree, choose one that is labeled as fire resistant.
- Use lights that have the label of an independent testing laboratory and use only where appropriate.
- Replace old or worn-out light strings and turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.
- Never use lit candles as a Christmas tree decoration.

"If people take adequate precautions and buy products tested for fire safety, they can improve their chances of having a safe holiday season," he said.

Provided by Texas A&M University

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