Warmers Buying Guide

When should Warming and Holding equipment be used?

If your establishment wants to warm cold foods or keep recently cooked items at serving temperatures you'll need the right equipment to ensure food safety. Keep in mind that warming and holding equipment isn't solely for maintaining food temperature, but should also keep the food fresh for your customers.

Uses for Warming and Holding equipment

- Holding items with long cook times, such as stews or potatoes. These items can be placed in the holding equipment while hot for service.
- Warming or reheating foods such as breads, pastries and soups.
- Heating plates and bowls.
- As self-service units.

A note about use

- Warming and holding equipment shouldn't be used to reheat large, cold, perishable items such as whole birds or big pieces of beef because they spend too much time in the temperature danger zone.
- Hot foods usually need to be held at 140°F or above for safety. That often requires top and bottom heat to surround the food.

Dry or Moist Heat?

Warming and holding equipment use both dry and wet heat. Think about the different things you'll be storing in the equipment and make a decision based on your specific needs.

Dry Heat Equipment

Dry heat equipment works similar to standard ovens, either thermostatically or manually. It tends to use less energy than moist heat, although it heats less quickly. If you plan on moving the container, often dry heat holding and warming equipment may be a better option because there is no risk of spillage.

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Moist Heat Equipment

Moist heat comes from humidifiers in the equipment that release a small amount of moisture into the holding area. They prevent items from drying out without making the food soggy. Moist heat tends to use more energy, but heats up faster.

- Works well for most types of product.
- Items high in moisture or fat may not do as well in a moist heat environment.
- Humidifiers vary from a built-in water trough to automatic atmospheric controls.
- Water trough humidifiers allow water vapors to be released in the cabinet providing moisture.
- More sophisticated humidifiers have atmospheric and temperature controls so you can adjust the amount of moisture and heat for different products.
- Check for a feature that prevents condensation build-up so that your products can be properly viewed by your customers.

How do I choose between moist and warm heat equipment?

Warming and holding equipment has a variety of products for your needs. You should decide if you need equipment for the front or back of the house and what type of things you'll be warming or holding before making a purchase.

Drawer and Food Warmers

Drawer Warmers

- Drawer warmers are great for holding food, but **not for display**. These are usually cabinets or drawers that work well in a kitchen because they are smaller in size and don't take up valuable countertop space.
- Drawer warmers have a wide variety of uses from holding hot meals with lids for banquet serving to holding bread rolls or similar foods. They can have separate controls for multiple drawers, allowing a user to store various items at different temperatures and humidity levels.

Countertop Food Warmers

- Food warmers are traditionally used to serve hot food in a self-serve environment, such as a buffet. Some are tailored to specific products while others are all-purpose. Food warmers can hold hotel sized pans for solid foods or soup style dishes for liquid foods. They are available with electric hook-ups, which reduce mobility, but increase safety.
- Soup kettles and food warmers should be used to bring precooked foods up to a safe warming temperature, but you cannot cook raw food in them.

Food Bars and Hot Food Tables

Hot Food Tables

- Functional stainless steel appearance.
- Powered by electricity to keep food hotter longer.
- Adjustable thermostat prevents burning while maintaining optimal temperatures.
- Cutting board and attached workspace available on some models.
- Great for ideal cafeteria service.
- Insulated to preserve hot or cold temperatures.
- Optional end tables and tray rails for increase customer convenience.
- Ideal for self-serve buffets.

Food Bars

- Some models are available with optional sneeze guards or sun canopies.
- Flexible use because no electricity is required.
- Tabletop units can turn any table into a self-service station.
- Portable food bars come with bases which provide extra storage.
- Available in hot and cold units.
- These units are ideal for merchandising.

Heated Merchandisers and Cabinets

Heated Merchandisers and Cabinets

- Also known as snack warmers - are units with almost universal heating and merchandising application.
- They are containers available in various sizes with heating sources which sit on countertops displaying food to customers.
- Some units are self-serve which can be beneficial to businesses such as convenience stores.

Self Service Heated Merchandisers

- These snack warmers have walls that are insulated for better heat retention.
- Some have steps inside the case to maximize the display area.
- Available with a choice of two to four shelves for maximizing the amount of product displayed.
- Doors or openings on two sides are useful if you have a self-serve establishment so food can be loaded from the back while the customer takes it from the front.

Full Service Heated Merchandisers

- These heated Cabinets designed to hold pizzas sometimes have turning pizza trays.
- These units keep products uniformly warm by using both bottom and top heat.
- It is important that all your snack warmers are easy to clean as they may be seen by customers often and the product they contain should be appetizing.
- There is a range of accessories for your snack warmer that you may find necessary to purchase including tray slides, sneeze guards and temperature displays.

Soup Merchandisers

- Keep soup warm and accessible for your customers.
- Soup kiosks enhance soup presentation, an otherwise difficult item to promote well.
- Many merchandisers come with self-leveling dispensers for disposable cups and bowls.

Overhead Warmers

Overhead warmers are best used to keep food warm for a short period of time. They generally have toggle switches that simply turn them on and off or allow you to go from low to high heat; therefore you won't have much control over the temperature.

Heat Lamps

- Heat lamps - also known as bulb warmers - use an infrared bulb, a heated metallic rod or a heat panel.
- The traditional glass or quartz bulb heat lamps have the advantage of putting out some light in addition to heat.
- Typically, bulbs are used for spot warming of individual pans of food and therefore work well in buffet or self-service scenarios.
- The disadvantage to bulbs, besides warming only one spot, is they tend to break easily.

Heat Strips

- Heat Strips sit above a shelf and cover the length desired with even heat.
- The units have the advantage of coming in a variety of lengths, from about 18 inches to 12 feet.
- The rod-type warmers are high-powered and generate a lot of heat.
- Most models spread heat to cover a shelf with even, intense heat and are mounted 12-18 inches above the food.