



Thrill of the Grill

Why do people grill? According to the Barbecue Industry Association, most people love the great flavor grilling gives food and they like being outdoors. The easy clean-up appeals to many people. Grill ownership is at an all-time high with backyard chefs grilling year-round using side burners, wood chips, or other products to enhance their cook outs. Using the following safety and cooking tips, you too, can feel the successful thrill of the grill as a **Super Star Chef!**

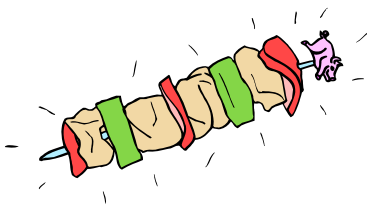
Methods of Cooking

Any food that can be broiled or roasted can also be cooked on the grill. The type of food you grill and the type of grill you use determines whether you should cook by the direct or indirect method. Grilling times will vary, depending on the size and temperature of the food, the coals or heat source, and the weather.

Use the direct method for foods that cook quickly, such as vegetables. The food is placed directly on the grid above medium coals or heat. The grill is best left open for grilling vegetables. Roasts and larger foods that require a longer cooking time at a lower temperature must use the indirect method. The food is placed on the grid over a hot heat source. Cover the grill and cook with the vents open.

Purchasing the Grill to Fill the Bill

When you buy a grill, base your decision on the sturdiness of the grill and which features are important to you. Three types of grills are available for purchase: gas, charcoal, and electric.



Gas Grills

Gas grills can be fueled by either liquid propane (LP) or natural gas. Gas grills generally offer more features than charcoal or electric grills. The BTU of the grill is considered an important feature. This stands for the British thermal unit, which is the total amount of heat output by all the burners per hour. Other features to consider include a large cooking surface, warming racks, a side burner for cooking side dishes, an easily cleanable grease catcher, a built-in grid for grilling delicate foods, or a rotisserie attachment. Some feature a water or wood chip compartment for steaming and smoking.

Consumer Reports rated 16 grills in June 2005. The best rated grill was the Weber Genesis Silver B (\$500); best stainless steel grill was the Vermont Castings VM450SSP (\$630); best budget gas grill was the Char-Broil 45,000 BTU Grill (\$270); and the best portable gas grill was the Weber Q220 Portable Grill (\$175). Gas grills priced from \$100 to \$300 are fine for basic grilling. More money usually buys better construction, more features, and the ability to cook foods besides steaks to perfection.

Charcoal Grills

Charcoal grills range in size from small portable models and open braziers to kettle grills, square covered cookers, and large wagon grills. Charcoal grills are generally less expensive than gas grills. Features to look for include sturdy construction, porcelain coatings, vents in the top and bottom of the grill, and an ash catcher. Charcoal grill cooks are more likely to use wood chips to enhance the flavor of grilled foods. Indirect cooking is easily accomplished on a charcoal grill.

Electric Grills

Electric grills are good options for those who live in apartments or condominiums where charcoal or gas grills are not allowed. The biggest drawback is that electric grills don't seem to give the characteristic flavor that you expect from grilled foods.

Equipment Safety

Gas grills should be inspected after storage for gas leaks, deterioration, proper assembly, and burner obstruction. Never attach or disconnect a propane cylinder when the grill is in use or hot. Never store a gas tank indoors. When lighting a gas grill, keep the lid open to prevent an explosion. If the burners fail to light in five seconds, shut off the gas and wait five minutes before attempting to relight the grill.

Food Safety for Grilling Foods

Meat and poultry cooked on the grill often brown very fast on the outside, so use a thermometer to make sure the food has reached a safe internal temperature. All poultry should be cooked to a minimum temperature of 165°F. Ground burgers should reach 160°F. Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops can be cooked to 145°F. All cuts of pork should reach 160°F. A thermometer is the only way to guarantee that the safe minimum temperature has been reached.

Here are some tips towards safe food handling, no matter what type of food you are planning to grill.

- ▶ Refrigerate all foods as soon as you get home from shopping.
- ▶ Marinate foods in the refrigerator. Don't reuse marinades unless they have been boiled.
- ▶ Precook foods just before placing on the grill.
- ▶ Use different utensils and serving dish when handling raw and cooked foods.
- ▶ In weather above 90°F, don't allow food to sit out for over one hour.
- ▶ After cooking any food on the grill, keep it hot until served. Either set the cooked meats to the side of the grill rack, not directly over the coals, or keep in a 200°F oven, in a chafing dish, slow cooker, or on a warming tray.

Grilling Out

When you think of grilling, traditionally you think of meat and poultry. In the early years of grilling, the adventurous cook would roast an ear of corn, or stick a whole potato in the hot coals to bake. Skewered cooking evolved in the 1950s by adding vegetables to a skewer with meat. As our tastes have broadened, so has our grilling selection. From asparagus to zucchini, many vegetables cook well directly over a grill fire. For best success, use moderate heat and a marinade, paste, or simple oil coating. Experimenting with the bounty from your local farmers market, including locally grown meat and poultry will expand your cooking repertoire.



Grilling Tips

First and foremost, it is important to start with high-quality ingredients. The selection, storage, and handling of any food will help to prevent foodborne illness and retain important nutrients. Nothing you do with seasoning or grilling techniques will change less than premium ingredients. Seasonings should also be used only to enhance the natural flavor of the food you are grilling.

It is best to gather all your grilling equipment, utensils, and foods before you start grilling. Cooking by grill moves quickly, so you should be prepared. Even your table should be already set, so you can serve the food hot off the grill, when it's at its peak.

Keep the grate clean. Coating lightly with oil will keep the food from sticking. Scrub with a wire brush after use. Have the grate hot before placing food on the grill.

Foods that need to retain their juices should be seared over a fairly hot fire and then covered to finish cooking on lower heat. Use low heat for fish and poultry. Grill vegetables on moderate heat, with a marinade to prevent drying. Use barbecue sauce only in the last few minutes of cooking as it burns easily.

Cook with the lid down as much as you can. Fast-cooking foods like hamburgers and vegetables should be grilled without a cover.

Marinating

Marinades add flavor and moisture, and sometimes tenderize. Always marinate in the refrigerator, covered, and do not reuse the marinade, unless you boil it. Reserve a portion of the marinade, before adding to your food, for later use as a sauce or for basting.

To marinate for flavor, cover with a marinade for 15 minutes to two hours. The thicker the food, the longer you marinate.

To tenderize, a marinade must contain an acidic ingredient such as lemon juice, wine, vinegar, or yogurt. The acid penetrates the fibers of the food about ¼-inch from the cut surface. Marinate large pieces of food for 6 to twelve hours. Anything over 24 hours yields a mushy texture.

Cancer Risk

Some studies indicate there may be a risk of cancer from eating food cooked by high heat cooking methods. However research also shows that eating moderate amounts of grilled foods cooked without charring to a safe, yet medium temperature, do not pose a risk. Flare-ups from fat or oil dripping into the heat source and high temperatures seem to be the greatest problem. The American Cancer Society suggests trimming visible fat that could make the fire flame up and char the food. Cleaning the grill thoroughly each time, precooking in the microwave to lessen grilling time, and raising the cooking level of the grill so food is farther from the heat can also reduce the risks of charring.



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