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Grill Tips for Your Backyard Barbeque

With summer in full swing, the time is just right to head out of the kitchen and into the backyard for a little cooking al fresco. Whether a quiet evening at home with the family or a full-fledged block party, there's nothing quite like a meal freshly cooked and hot of the grill. Here are some grilling tips for novices and summer pros alike!

The All Important Grill

Gas vs. Charcoal: This one can spark heated debates between even the closest of friends. Gas cooks at an even temperature, is easy to use, and requires little clean up. Propane/gas grills are also healthier than charcoal grills



(charcoal-grilled meats contain more carcinogens).Charcoal is generally considered better for smoking and searing food, and many prefer the taste of food cooked on a charcoal grill. Charcoal grills are also less expensive than gas grills, and are somewhat more portable.

Material: For gas grills, stainless steel is the way to go. Grade 304 stainless steel is more durable than the cheaper grade 430, which will rust.

Cooking Area: If you're typically grilling for just your family or a small group of friends, a surface area of 600 to 900 square inches should be adequate. If you're planning on hosting larger events or keeping the grill fired up all summer, you will want to look for cooking areas of 1,000 square inches and up.

Gas Grill Tips

- Look for models with a built-in thermometer.
- Choose a grill with two or more distinct burners. This is crucial for times when you're cooking many different types of food at once, as well as for "indirect grilling".
- Weatherproof covers will extend the life of the grill.

Charcoal Grill Tips

Direct Heat vs. Indirect Heat –

There are two main ways of cooking when using a grill, each suited to specific dishes. Cooking with food squarely over the heat source is known as "direct heat" grilling. The food is cooked for shorter time spans, typically with the lid open. This type of grilling is appropriate for thin cuts of meats, kabobs, fillets and veggies.

Cooking larger, thicker portions of meat such as steaks, whole fish and roasts calls for grilling with indirect heat. With this technique, food is grilled just off of the heat source at temperatures around 350 degrees Fahrenheit. On a gas grill this typically involves leaving the outside burners on with the food centered over the dormant inside burner(s). With charcoal grills, the coals are pushed to the sides of the grill leaving a cooking area in the center. Cooking times with indirect heat are usually longer, and the lid is typically closed.

Fire it up –

You'll want to fire up the grill fifteen to twenty minutes before you start cooking to ensure that it reaches optimal temperature and kills any bacteria. Your grill should be 250 – 300 degrees Fahrenheit for low heat, 300 – 350 degrees Fahrenheit for medium, 350 - 400 degrees Fahrenheit for medium-high and 400 - 450 degrees Fahrenheit.

Don't Stick With It –

Expertly prepared foods can still end up stuck to your grill if you don't take proper precautions. Brush the grill vigorously at the end of the preheating period (the surface will be easier to clean when hot). Lightly coat the grill in vegetable oil (the easiest method is to soak a paper towel or dish towel in vegetable oil, then brush it along the grill using tongs). You can also lightly oil your food, although avoid overdoing it. Keep both a grilling spatula and barbecue tongs handy.

Mind the Flames –

It may look impressive to have flames bursting up through the grill to kiss your food, but flare ups are actually bad news. Flare ups cause carcinogens to accumulate on your food, char the outside of the food before the inside is fully cooked, and alter the taste of the grilled item. Flare ups occur when fat drips down into the heat source and catches fire. Help prevent flare-ups by choosing lean cuts of meat and by trimming off excess fat before you grill. When the heat is on, keep a squirt bottle of water handy to help you tame the flames.

Grill Baskets –

Grill baskets are ideal for small food items or food that is difficult to flip. There are two main styles of grill baskets, each with a different ideal use. The first is a deep set open-angled bowl (think a square-ish wok with vented holes), a design that is ideal for veggies and other small items that might otherwise slip

through the grill grating. The other design is a thin wire basket with a long handle. The food (typically fish) is placed in the tray of the basket and the wire basket closed and latched around it. With this setup, you can now easily turn the item for even cooking.

Grill Master(s) –

Barbequing can be rewarding, but truth be told it ain't easy running the grill all by your lonesome. Set up a rotation to man the grill so that everyone gets a chance to enjoy the barbeque and no one person spends the whole afternoon feeling the heat.



Cross Hatching –

Line the meat up on the grill at a 45-degree angle away from yourself. In other words, if you think of the grill surface as a clock, point the meat towards 2 o'clock. Cook until a set of grill marks appears on the meat (use a spatula to gently lift the meat and look underneath). Once marks have appeared, turn the meat 45 degrees without flipping it over (using our clock analogy again, point the meat towards 10 o'clock). Flip the meat and repeat this process on the other side.