

# Get grilling: Veggies can take the heat

By Grace Dickinson  
The Philadelphia Inquirer

It's never a bad time to start eating more plants. And that includes now.

Whether you're nervous about the meat shortage or just want to get back on track after a bout of pandemic-spawned stress eating, fruit and veggies are your friend, always. They'll give you energy and make you feel better.

And they're perfect for the grill. We've got a few plant-based recipes that make it easy to incorporate more vegetables into your diet. They are designed to be entrees rather than side dishes, letting veggies become the star of your next cookout.

We chatted with executive chef Andrew Henshaw of Laser Wolf, the newest restaurant from James Beard Award winners Mike Solomonov and Steve Cook, where a charcoal grill is responsible for cooking up more than 75% of the menu.

Amidst the pandemic, Henshaw remains firing up dishes like grilled asparagus with spring peas and whole grilled baby eggplant for Laser Wolf's rotating Saturday to-go menu.

He shares his best general advice for cooking grilled veggies to perfection — plus a simple idea for dessert.

## HOW TO GRILL VEGGIES BETTER

For starters, treat veggies as if you were grilling a piece of meat, says Henshaw.

"I'm not a vegetarian or anything, but the more that we think about vegetables as entrees, the better we'll all be — they're better for your health, the environment, your wallet," he says. "When you stop treating them as just an afterthought, they become incredibly delicious."

Zucchini, corn, onions, tomatoes, and mushrooms top Henshaw's list of favorite ingredients to grill. For all of them, seasoning is crucial. Just as you wouldn't throw a chicken breast on the grate without a proper marinade, a zucchini needs more attention than a quick drizzle of oil. Ideally, you'd start the seasoning process the night before.

"Four to six hours is the minimum for marinating — you really want the marinade to penetrate the vegetable," says Henshaw. "If you just rub it on the outside right before, it'll fall off and can create flare-ups, so then the food will not only be flavorless but it'll get singed."

For vegetables with a higher moisture content, like eggplant, mushrooms, and zucchini, apply salt first to eliminate excess water. Sprinkle Kosher salt on top of cut veggies, and let them hang out in a strainer for a few hours before marinating. (For eggplant, salting overnight is ideal.) This will enhance the sear or caramelization process when they finally hit the grill.

Henshaw's go-to marinade recipe is simple, and encourages you to play the classic pandemic substitution game where you utilize the ingredients you have on hand. In



Dreamstime/TNS

Now is a good time (it is always a good time) to eat more plants. And they're perfect for the grill.

a blender, process one onion (roughly chopped), a few cloves of garlic, and either a half of a bunch of herbs (cilantro/chives/parsley) or a tablespoon of your favorite spice (like cumin or coriander). You can also use a combination of herbs and spices. Add salt, to taste, and as it's blending, slowly start to stream in one cup of vegetable oil. It's a recipe that'll work well for most veggies, says Henshaw.

"Play around with whatever you have lying around in your fridge — but don't forget the lemon," says Henshaw. "After you're done marinating and you move to the cooking, you'll want to add a squeeze of lemon just before everything comes off the grill."

To gear up your grill station, Henshaw recommends getting a long pair of tongs, metal skewers, and a grill basket.

"It's easy for vegetables to fall through the grates when flipping, so a vegetable basket will make your life a lot easier," says Henshaw. "You can just shake it and toss everything at once."

Don't be afraid to get creative. One of Henshaw's secret weapons is flash-grilled cilantro stems (30 seconds, grilled as is), which he mixes into soups, stocks, and salsas. And for dessert, grilled fruit is as easy as it gets.

"Pineapple is awesome — just cut it into one-inch thick slices, and grill five minutes per side on medium to low heat," says Henshaw.

Eat it straight off the grill or serve it with vanilla ice cream. Henshaw also recommends skewered strawberries and peaches, a perfect topper for angel food cake. Brush the fruit with honey, and grill the skewers for one to two minutes on each side over high heat.

## CHEAT SHEET: GRILLING VEGGIES

- Treat vegetables with

the same care you treat meat. Seasoning is crucial. If you prepare them properly, they can make a satisfying main.

- Salt veggies with higher moisture content to eliminate excess water. Sprinkle salt over cut veggies and let sit in a strainer. Drain well before proceeding.

- Allow time for marinating. Four to six hours is a good start, but overnight is ideal to let the flavors penetrate the vegetables.

- Hit veggies with a squeeze of lemon just before they come off the grill.

- A veggie basket will make your life easier. This simple tool lets you toss and flip without fear of anything slipping through the grate.

- Think outside the box. From cilantro stems to strawberries, there's plenty that the grill can make delicious.

## SHIITAKE MUSHROOM SKEWERS

(Serves 4)

These hearty skewers were among the first entrees on Laser Wolf's opening menu. If time allows, let the mushrooms marinate overnight, and serve them with a side of glazed onions (recipe below). "Salty, savory mushrooms with sweet and sour onion hits all the flavor centers," says Henshaw.

**2 pounds shiitake mushrooms**  
**2 tablespoons plus two teaspoons kosher salt, divided**  
**1 yellow onion, diced**  
**4 cloves garlic**  
**½ bunch parsley, roughly chopped (or whatever herb you have in the house; can also swap for 2**

**tablespoons of dried parsley)**  
**1 teaspoon black pepper**  
**1 teaspoon white pepper (if not available, double up on black pepper)**  
**1 teaspoon coriander**  
**1 teaspoon kosher salt**  
**1 cup vegetable oil**

outside, remove from the grill. Serve immediately, aside glazed onions (see below).

— Recipe courtesy Andrew Henshaw, executive chef of Laser Wolf

## GLAZED ONIONS

**8 ounces pearl onions**  
**½ cup red wine vinegar**  
**1 tablespoon vegetable oil**  
**1 teaspoon salt**  
**¼ cup pomegranate molasses (if needed, substitute honey, any fruit molasses, or even a 1:1 water-to-sugar simple syrup)**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Toss the onions in the vinegar, salt, and vegetable oil. Place in an 8-by-8-inch dish.

Bake for 20 minutes. Onions can be cooled and stored in the refrigerator for up to five days, covered tightly. When ready to grill, toss them with the molasses and grill (preferably in a grill basket, or carefully directly on grates) for four to five minutes, tossing to cook evenly all around.

— Recipe courtesy Andrew Henshaw, executive chef of Laser Wolf

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