

# BARBEQUE FREAKS, TAKE NOTE

GRILLING'S NOT JUST FOR BURGERS AND HOT DOGS ANYMORE.

BY SARA BRICKNER



## GOOD GRILLING TECHNIQUES

Like any culinary endeavor, the subtle nuances of grilling are what make a raw meat canvas into either a succulent masterpiece or just another dry piece of burnt flesh. And while most people think the word "grilled" applies only to hamburgers and hot dogs, you can cook almost any meal on the grill with a choice accessory or two. Whether you're using charcoal, gas, or new infrared technology, grilling isn't just for summer cookouts anymore.

You can grill two ways: directly and indirectly. **Direct grilling** is when meat is cooked quickly over a direct heat source. It works better for burgers and foods with low fat content that can be cooked quickly at high temperatures without burning or undercooking.

**Indirect grilling** is just that. The meat is cooked away from the heat source, more slowly at lower temperatures. It takes a little longer but if you're cooking up a honkin' slab of meat, it ensures thorough cooking without burning your succulent dinner.

To prepare your grill for indirect grilling, spread coals or whatever fuel you're using on one side of the grill bottom. If you're using a two-burner gas grill, only light one burner. This is the "hot" side. On the other, place a metal pan of water to make the "cool" side. Don't be fooled,

though — for our purposes, cool still means pretty darn hot.

The steam from the water helps keep the meat from drying out so you don't end up with a crusty, charred exterior and a raw bloody interior. Whatever you do, don't use lighter fluid or other chemicals to start an old-fashioned grill fire or your dinner could end up tasting like a chemical flambé. Instead, use crumpled up newspaper or kindling and an electric lighter.

## THE GREAT SMOKE OUT

Even if you don't have a smoker, it's pretty easy to smoke meat using a grill. But **smoking** isn't about exposing meat to burning wood smoke, which can contain carcinogens and infuses meat with noxious flavors.

The wood chips should be smoldering embers and higher-end grills often come with built-in trays for wood chips so they don't burn. If you don't have one, in the book *Grilling America* Rick Browne suggests taking one or two handfuls of wood and wrapping them in a layered, heavy duty foil packet and poking a few holes into just the top layer of tinfoil so that the wood smolders without catching fire.

At Fire for Life, a local Eugene store that specializes in grills and flame-related merchandise, owner Mike Alford and employee Jim O'Hare say it doesn't matter,

as long as the chips aren't on fire. Just make sure to get the smoke going before cooking the meat, O'Hare advises. Otherwise the meat will be done before the wood chips get going.

But the most important rule seems almost counterintuitive: don't get too creative when selecting wood chips. Hardwoods work best. Unless you want meat that tastes like a charred tree branch, avoid soft woods including pine, cottonwood, willow, eucalyptus and poplar. Instead, try hickory, oak, pecan, mesquite, alder, apple, or maple.

Also, be sure to select wood that will complement your meat. Different woods yield different flavors, and what tastes good with steak might ruin chicken or seafood. Some chefs, including Mike and Jim, believe that it's best to soak wood chips before smoking; others, such as Rick Browne, believe that dry is the way to go. When smoking, low temperatures and a slow cooking time help keep the juices in the meat.

## SOAK UP THE FLAVOR

Marinades and rubs are the foundation of all amazing grilling, adding flavor and zing like splashes of color to your meat masterpiece.

Rubs, an assortment of spices, either dry or with a liquid element, are "rubbed" into the meat for additional zest. On their website, *Better Homes and Gardens* suggests refrigerating your rubbed meat for anywhere from 15 minutes to two hours before cooking so it can fully absorb the flavors.

When it comes to marinating, barbecue sauce tends to be the standard choice. How boring. Get zippy with one of the thousands of pre-made marinades and rubs in stores or make your own at home. The only real rule is to use plenty of salt, which helps the meat absorb the other flavors.

The longer you let meat sit, the better, but marinating times vary depending on the recipe and type of meat you're using. For roasts and other whole meats, injectable marinades are available to spread flavor evenly throughout the meat.

## MAGICAL MARINADES AVOCADO-TOMATILLO SAUCE

From Bobby Flay's new book, *Boy Gets Grill: 125 Reasons to Light Your Fire!* Scribner, Hardcover, \$30.

Bobby Flay suggests using this sauce with swordfish, salmon, mackerel, bluefish or any other rich fish.

- 8 tomatillos, husked and rinsed
- 2 jalapeño chiles
- 1/2 C. mild vegetable oil, such as canola, plus extra for brushing
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 C. fresh lime juice
- 2 T. honey
- 4 ripe Hass avocados, halved, pitted, peeled, and cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1/4 C. chopped fresh cilantro leaves

Heat your grill to high. Brush the tomatillos and chiles with oil and season all over with salt and pepper. Grill the tomatillos and chiles, turning, until blackened on all sides. Remove from the grill and coarsely chop the tomatillos. Stem, seed and chop the chiles. Combine the tomatillos, chiles, lime juice, and honey in a blender and blend until smooth. With the motor running, gradually pour in the oil and blend until emulsified. Transfer to a bowl and fold in the avocados, onion, and cilantro. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Makes 2 cups.

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