

The healthy burger that may make even carnivores opt for veg

By **MELISSA D'ARABIAN**
Associated Press

May shepherds in the season of the backyard barbecue, and for us that means one thing: burgers. Let me back up and say that just about anything I make on the grill in warmer months, I also make regularly inside on the stovetop. And while I do love a flat-top-smooshed burger with its crusty, dangly edges, the backyard barbecue burger remains in a league of its own.

Our family's burger bonanzas are a little legendary in our social circle (OK, so maybe with just my kids, nieces and nephews). The herby-garlicky sauce I make, called "magic" sauce by those in the know, is particularly popular. So when three of my extended family members went vegetarian, my burger-grilling game suffered. I did what any well-intentioned-but-misguided carnivore would do: I bought some frozen veggie burgers from the grocery store and called it a day. Now, to be fair, some of those veggie burgers are downright tasty. But, homemade-with-love-magic-sauce-worthy? Not so much. So, I upped my veggie burger game. While I do love the black-bean, quinoa or legume-based versions I've created over the years, the simplest veggie burger of all remains a family favorite: the giant portobello mushroom cap. Bonus: This dish is low-calorie (leaving wiggle room for cheese, sauce and a bun), and it's nearly fool-proof — no falling apart and disappearing into the flames between the grill grates.

I used cilantro in this version because it pairs nicely with the baked corn tortilla chips (just a few go a long way to add satisfying crunch), but feel free to experiment with other herbs, such as basil, or mint. Even carnivores might be converted.

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget. She is the author of the cookbook, "Supermarket Healthy."



AP Photo/Melissa D'Arabian

For this veggie burger, the secret is in the sauce. Portobellos make for a tastier choice than frozen options.

GRILLED PORTOBELLO BURGERS WITH CILANTRO GARLIC SAUCE

Start to Finish: 25 minutes
Servings: 4

For the sauce

- 1/3 cup low-fat Greek yogurt
- 3 tablespoons low-fat mayonnaise
- 3 tablespoons roughly chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 scallion, roughly chopped
- 1 garlic clove, roughly chopped
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce (or soy sauce, if vegetarian)
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon water, if needed
- Black pepper

For the burger:

- 4 large portobello mushroom caps, cleaned and gills removed
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- olive oil in a mister
- Salt and pepper
- 4 slices gouda cheese (or other favorite melting cheese)
- 4 large slices of tomato, or 8 small slices
- 1 cup peppery greens, such as arugula or other peppery green mix
- 12 baked tortilla chips
- 4 whole grain hamburger buns (not oversized)

To make the sauce, blend all the sauce ingredients in the blender until mixed, but with small flecks of green. Pour into a small bowl and chill, up to 3 days.

Heat grill to medium high. Brush the mushroom caps with the balsamic vinegar, spray liberally with olive oil, and salt and pepper. Grill the mushroom caps for 3 minutes on the smooth side and then flip. Top with cheese and grill, covered, another 3 minutes, until mushroom is tender (but not floppy) and cheese is melted. Meanwhile, toast the buns for 1-2 minutes on the cut side, or until barely golden. Place peppery greens on bottom of bun and then tomato. Remove the mushroom caps from the grill and place directly on the tomato. Top the still-hot mushroom with a couple of tablespoons of the sauce. Top with 3 chips on each burger and then the bun.

Nutrition information per serving: 357 calories; 175 calories from fat; 15 g fat (5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 23 mg cholesterol; 626 mg sodium; 45 g carbohydrate; 8 g fiber; 9 g sugar; 15 g protein.

A new trick for the perfect burger

By **ELIZABETH KARMEL**
Associated Press

I thought I knew how to make the perfect burger. Now I know better.

I still stand by most of my principles — making your own blend of ground meat, a combination of ground sirloin and ground chuck; working and mixing the meat as little as possible — but I recently discovered a far better way to cook the burgers. I discovered it while attempting to grill tiny samples of a variety of ground beefs (I was searching for just the right blend and didn't want to make lots of full-size patties).

As I pondered how I was going to grill tiny patties without them falling through the grates, I considered a cast-iron grill platter, a thick, flat sheet of cast iron. Bingo! We could grill the bite-sized burgers on the sizzle platter!

I placed the platter on the grill grate and started grilling the bites. They were all delicious. But the most exciting part was the rich, brown crust they all developed. The platter turned the gas grill into a flat grill, while the heat of the cast-iron surface deeply caramelized everything it touched. Because the lid was down and there were other foods on the grill, the burgers still got that smoky outdoor grilled flavor, but with a griddle-style crust.

It was the perfect cooking mashup of grill and griddle for my all-American cheeseburger topped with melted American cheese. Since that evening, it is the only way that I grill burgers — of any size!

The recipe below is my favorite burger these days. I traded in my aged cheddar cheese for old-fashioned American, which melts



AP Photo/J.M. Hirsch

Consider a cast-iron grill platter, a thick, flat sheet of cast iron, to grill up the perfect summer burger.

better and adds a layer of soft gooeyness on top of the crunchy caramelized crust of the burger. To me, this is the best condiment and I don't need anything else except maybe pickles, which I layer on the bottom bun so that the cheese and the top bun stick together and become one.

Of course, you can add any of your favorite condiments and toppings, but try this minimalist burger at least once. When you use the best quality beef and grill the burgers using the cast-iron sizzle platter, you hardly need anything besides the cheese and a soft potato bun to make it summer's best burger.

Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pitmaster at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and author of three books, including "Taming the Flame."

GRILLED GRIDDLED CHEESEBURGER

Start to finish: 20 minutes
Servings: 6

- 1 pound ground beef chuck
- 1 pound ground beef sirloin
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce (optional)
- 1 teaspoon Coleman's Mustard powder (optional)
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- Olive oil
- 6 slices American cheese
- 6 potato burger buns
- Dill pickle chips

Being careful not to overwork the meat, in a large bowl mix together the chuck and sirloin with the Worcestershire sauce, mustard powder and generous pinches each of salt and pepper. Gently shape the meat into 6 burgers, each about 3/4 inch thick. Brush each patty on all sides with olive oil. Use your thumbs to make an indent at the center of each burger.

Heat the grill to medium. Place a flat cast-iron griddle on the grates at the center of the grill.

When the grill and griddle are hot, place the burgers on the griddle and cook, covered, until the meat is no longer pink, 8 to 10 minutes, turning once halfway through grilling time. Top each burger with American cheese about 2 minutes before you remove them from the grill. You want the cheese to be soft but not too melted.

Let the burgers rest 2 to 3 minutes and serve on a potato bun with pickle chips.

Nutrition information per serving: 550 calories; 230 calories from fat (42 percent of total calories); 26 g fat (10 g saturated; 1 g trans fats); 115 mg cholesterol; 900 mg sodium; 38 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 7 g sugar; 40 g protein.

Summer means grill, but why not add some smoke?

By **LEANNE ITALIE**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Summer's on its way and that means grilling for many people, so why not try smoking?

Steven Raichlen, who wrote "The Barbecue! Bible," has followed with "Project Smoke," also the name of a PBS series he hosts that will launch its second season over Memorial Day weekend.

"By now, in 2016, most people know how to grill, and even if they don't know how to grill and they have the Y chromosome, they think they know how to do it," he said in a recent interview. "Smoking is not something that most people grew up doing, so there is a learning curve and there's an intimidation factor, but once you do it, it can give you tremendous satisfaction."

The step-by-step book, out this month from Workman Publishing, covers gear, technique, recipes and the science behind the cooking method that Raichlen shows can be used on everything from appetizers to dessert.

"Basically every grill works the same. Charcoal may need a little more care with heat control, and gas you need a little more care in how to boost the flavor, but each smoker operates a little bit differently," he said. "You can be convenience-oriented or get as nerdy as you want to be."

A conversation with Steven Raichlen:

Associated Press: What are the biggest misconceptions among home cooks about smoking?

Raichlen: Maybe the first is that you need a heavy-duty smoker to do it. In fact, it's easy to smoke on a charcoal kettle grill, for example.

I think another misconception is that smoking has to be very time-consuming. While it's true that to smoke a brisket or a pork shoulder, you are looking at the better part of a day, there are many quick smoking techniques. For example, in Italy they smoke mozzarella using hay. The process maybe takes five minutes.

Another misconception is that all smoked foods are barbecued. That is certainly not the case. All good barbecue is infused with wood smoke. That's its very nature, but there are a lot of smoked dishes that are not barbecue. Think of smoked salmon, think of smoked cheese. These are very traditional smoked dishes.

AP: What about smoking indoors?

Raichlen: You can smoke indoors. There are a variety of indoor smokers that work on your stovetop. Two that I feature in the book are the Cameron Stovetop Smoker cooker and the Nordic Ware Kettle Smoker.

Another tool that I use a lot in the book is what's called a hand-held smoking device. Kind of the most famous brand is the Smoking Gun by Poly-Science. It's sort of like a reverse bong that you fill with hardwood sawdust instead of you know what. That's great for smoking cocktails. You can use it for smoking ice cream.

AP: Can you smoke anything?

Raichlen: That's really another misconception, that all smoked foods are either meat or fish, but in fact the realm of smoked foods is enormous. It stretches from appetizers to desserts.

AP: You call smoking the new grilling. What evidence do you have to back that up?

Raichlen: Many, many pieces of evidence. One, if you look at grill and smoker sales statistics. Pellet grills and pellet smokers, the sales are going through the roof. That's probably the fastest growing segment. Big Green Egg, that's another company that's enjoyed double-digit growth for the last 10 years.

Things like wood sales are up. Ten years ago, smoking was more a regional phenomenon. It was done a lot in the American South, in Texas, in the Midwest. Now it really is going mainstream.

AP: Do you have a general philosophy about smoke?

Raichlen: I like to think of smoke as the umami of barbecue. What I mean by that is umami flavors from Asia. You find them in seaweed, you find them in Asian fish sauce, soy sauce, mushrooms, Parmesan cheese. These are rich, earthy flavors that are called the Fifth Taste. They sort of make foods taste more intense. They keep a food's flavor but they make it taste more interesting.

I think smoke very much serves this function. A piece of grilled salmon, delicious. A piece of smoked salmon, delicious, and the salmon has been somehow transformed in an otherworldly way.

AP: Tell us about smoking cocktails and what some of your favorites are.

Raichlen: When you smoke cocktails you are joining two worlds: the cocktail world and the barbecue world. You're sort of creating barbecue you can drink. I'm not the first guy to come up with this concept. When you think about Scotch whisky, it's a whisky that's made with smoked barley, so thousands of years ago people conceived the notion that smoke and booze are a very good combination.

Mezcal is another classic example. I know this summer I'm going to be making a lot of mezcals. That's sort of a cross between a mojito and a margarita. It's made with muddled mint and cucumber. Mezcal is an agave cactus-based spirit from the Oaxaca region in Mexico. The cactus hearts are smoke-roasted in a pit before distilling so it has a good smoky flavor. I like to beef that flavor up by adding smoke using a smoking gun to fill up the cocktail in the pitcher.

AP: How can home cooks get started on smoking?

Raichlen: There's one thing I'm going to say that will probably be a little bit unpopular. There's one way that you really can't smoke very well and that's with a gas grill. At the very least they need a charcoal kettle grill. You can smoke anything in a charcoal kettle grill.

Indoors, it's harder to get a crust, what in barbecue circles would be called the bark that we would look for in a Texas brisket or Memphis-style ribs. You also have to choose somewhat judiciously what you smoke indoors. It's theoretically possible to smoke a brisket or a rack of ribs on an indoor smoker but you will get far better results if you do it outdoors in a kettle grill, for example. The kettle grill is amazing. You're looking at \$150 for a kettle grill.

Everybody thinks they need to spend thousands of dollars but there are many, many effective smokers that cost less than \$300.