

Grilling cauliflower requires proper preparation

By Genevieve Ko
Los Angeles Times

Whole roasted cauliflower impresses as a vegan centerpiece or fills you up as a one-dish meal. The vegetable can play the same role in outdoor cooking, but needs to be cut up first. If you haven't tried grilled cauliflower, you'll want to: It caramelizes beautifully on the outside and develops a chewy juiciness on the inside, making it the best meat alternative for live fire cooking. It's naturally a little sweet but still mild enough to serve as a canvas for any sauce or topping.

But you can't throw a whole head of cauliflower on the grill. By the time it cooks through in the dry heat, the florets either burn over a hotter fire or shrivel to jerky over a lower heat. Cauliflower "steaks" — thick slabs that leave you with floret-dense rounded ends, which are the best part — have been popular in the last decade, but they can't hold together and may fall through the grill grates.

My solution is to cut the cauliflower in quarters from top to bottom, leaving the core and leaves intact. These fat wedges offer a generous curve of florets and some meaty stalk and are easy to turn on a grill for even charring. To keep them from wither-



Genevieve Ko/Los Angeles Times/TNS

Grilled cauliflower caramelizes on the outside and develops a chewy juiciness on the inside.

ing and becoming tough, I start by steaming them just until they lose their raw edge. While you can use a stovetop steamer, I prefer to "steam" them in the microwave on hot days and when I'm in a rush.

A shower of olive oil and salt infuses the grilled cauliflower with enough flavor to serve it unadorned as a side dish. Add a pool of salsa

verde, zhoug, hummus or guacamole and a sprinkle of fresh herbs, sliced chiles, or nuts or seeds and you have a main dish. Dried fruit, such as dates or raisins, complements those savory elements, as does a final burst of acidity with a squeeze of lemon or lime juice. Chop up any leftover grilled cauliflower to scatter over a grain bowl or

salad, stir into fried rice or stuff into tacos.

GRILLED CAULIFLOWER WEDGES

Time: 30 minutes
Yields: Serves 2 to 4

These hearty cauliflower wedges can serve 4 as a side

dish or 2 as a main, with the addition of sauces and toppings. They're especially good with salsa verde, mole, zhoug, hummus, or guacamole and a sprinkle of fresh herbs, sliced chiles, or nuts or seeds. You can add dried fruit, such as dates or raisins, and a squeeze of lemon or lime juice.

1 whole cauliflower

(2 to 3 pounds)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons everyday olive oil

1. Prepare an outdoor grill for direct grilling over medium-high heat.

2. Trim the stem end off the cauliflower, cutting off only any browned parts and leaving the leaves intact. Place the cauliflower upright on the cutting board and cut in quarters to form wedges. Place the wedges in a large microwave-safe bowl and season with salt. Add enough water to come 1/2 inch up the sides of the bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and poke a hole in the top. Microwave until it starts to turn translucent and a paring knife slides through with some resistance, 3 to 5 minutes. Uncover and drain the water from the bowl.

3. Drizzle the oil over the cauliflower, rubbing it on to evenly coat. Sprinkle all over with salt and pepper. Place the wedges cut side down on the hot grill grate. Grill until grill marks appear and the wedges release easily from the grate, 6 to 7 minutes. Flip to the other cut side and grill until tender inside, 5 to 7 minutes. A paring knife should slide through easily. You can char the floret side too for a few minutes. Transfer to a serving platter and serve hot, warm or room temperature.

KERNEL

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After each cut, rotate the cob toward you and repeat until you've gone all the way around. Flip the corn over and repeat.

2. If you want to be really cool, do this: Use the back of the knife to scrape down the newly naked cob. This squeezes out any remaining pulp and liquid — some wags call this the "corn milk." Add it to whatever you're making with the corn.

Now, let's use that corn. Here are three good, general suggestions, all with the added bonus of being good band names:

- Raw. Super sweet corn — it's everywhere this time of year — you don't even need to cook. Use it raw in salads or salsas or sprinkle it along with crumbled bacon on vanilla ice cream.

- Soup and Other Liquids. No, I'm not talking about corn squeezin's, Li'l Abner. (For you youngsters out there, "corn-squeezin's" means liquor, and Li'l Abner was a popular comic strip created by Al Capp in 1934, based on offensive stereotypes of that group of Americans known insultingly as "hillbillies.")

First off, there's corn stock. It's like meat stock, without the gore. After removing the kernels, cover

the cobs in water and simmer them for an hour-ish to extract the flavor. For deeper flavor, add aromatics like onion, carrot and celery, and herbs like parsley, thyme and bay leaf. Use this as a base for soups or sauces, or just season it with salt and drink it warm like the psychopath you are.

Or, make corn chowder: Crisp some bacon lardons and set them aside, then sweat diced aromatics in the bacon fat. Add your corn and corn stock (or water or chicken stock) to cover. Simmer until the corn is tender, then pulse it in a blender to make it smooth-ish and thick-ish. Season it with salt, finish it with cream and garnish with the reserved bacon. Yum.

- The Hot Pan Progression. This concept leads to a splortillion variations. In ascending order of complexity:

1. Fatless char: Get your skillet hot — cast iron works especially well for this — then toss in fresh corn kernels with no fat. Stir while it cooks for about 5 minutes, until the corn is tender and has attractive little black, burned spots on the outside. Toss it with butter or not, or use it in salads or salsas or cornbread or just shove a handful into your pocket for later.

2. Sauteed: Get a saute pan hot, then add some fat of your choice. If

it's oil, use just enough to coat the bottom of the pan. With butter, I add more because it coats the kernels with that sweet, buttery flavor. With bacon fat, I split the difference. Regardless, saute the corn until it's cooked through, anywhere from 2 to 6 minutes, depending on how hot your flame is, what kind of pan you're using and how much corn there is.

3. Added aromatics. Saute diced onion and/or bell pepper and/or garlic for a couple of minutes before adding the corn. Continue cooking, stirring until corn is cooked through. Season and serve.

4. Creamed corn and its cousins. My mother used to open cans of "creamed corn" and bake it in a casserole topped with slices of Velveeta until it was golden brown and bubbly. My father loved it. I ranked it just above canned, cubed beets in heavy syrup, and just below stabbing myself in the eye with a fork. I have since learned to love creamed corn, and here are a couple of the many ways to make it:

Proceed as in numbers 2 or 3 above, sauteing your corn with or without aromatics. For something like maque choux (see accompanying recipe), just add heavy cream (the late, great New Orleans chef Paul Prudhomme used sweetened,

condensed milk) and reduce it until it thickens.

Or you could sprinkle a couple of tablespoons of flour over the whole lot, then stir it in until it looks like a big, gloppy nightmare, then add milk or half-and-half or cream, depending on your feelings about arteriosclerosis.

Personally, I prefer chicken stock, then finish it with a bit of cream. It's still rich, but not nearly as heavy.

MAQUE CHOUX WITH OR WITHOUT BACON

Prep: 15 minutes
Cook: 25 minutes
Makes: 6 servings

This popular side dish from the cuisine of Louisiana has as many interpretations as there are cooks. Bacon adds great flavor and texture, but it's just as nice when it's completely vegetarian. Adjust the amount of spices and cream to your liking. You can also turn it into a main dish to serve over rice with additional proteins like shrimp or andouille sausage.

1/2 pound bacon, cut into lardons (1/4-inch wide pieces) or 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 onion, cut into 1/2-inch dice

1 bell pepper, cut into 1/2-inch dice
6 to 8 ears fresh corn, shucked, kernels cut off
1 to 2 cloves garlic, minced
Salt as needed
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon ground white pepper
1/4 teaspoon cayenne
1/2 cup heavy cream

1. If using bacon, crisp it in a heavy-bottomed skillet over medium heat. Remove bacon and pour out all but a couple of tablespoons of bacon fat. (Note: Keep remaining bacon fat in a covered jar in the refrigerator for later use.)

2. Increase heat to medium high; saute onion and bell pepper in bacon fat (or oil, if you're not using bacon) until soft and starting to color, about 5 minutes.

3. Add corn kernels, garlic and reserved, crisped bacon; saute until cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes.

4. Season with salt and the spices, then add cream and simmer to reduce and thicken, about 10 minutes. Serve immediately.

Nutrition information per serving: 212 calories, 14 g fat, 5 g saturated fat, 23 mg cholesterol, 22 g carbohydrates, 7 g sugar, 5 g protein, 7 mg sodium, 3 g fiber



Submitted photo

Bob Baum, left, with NFL star Larry Fitzgerald.

NICE GUYS

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Now I'm no hockey expert but I did cover a few dozen games over the years, even a couple of Western Conference finals contests.

Every time I did show up, Doan would remember me and ask why I wasn't there more often. Collectively, NHL players were the easiest athletes to talk to of any sport.

In basketball, it's hard to top Magic Johnson, who enjoyed the press and was a great talker in his days as a player. They tell me Charles Barkley was one of the best with reporters, which is not surprising.

Sadly, I only covered him a few times. By the time I transferred to Phoenix, he was gone from the Suns.

One day I was in the Cardinals locker room when Fitzgerald approached.

"You doin' all right?" he asked, adding "Everything OK at home?"

You see, my shirt was on inside out.

Or there was the time he looked up a story I wrote about him, read it and said, "Bob, why you have mention how much money I make?"

Cardinals Hall of Fame quarterback Kurt Warner would have long, expansive answers to every question. I told him there was one question I'd never ask: "Can you elaborate on that?"

Thinking of others from farther back in my history, Maurice Lucas was so good to me when I was a novice sports writer in the Trail Blazers' 1977 championship season.

Clyde Drexler and Terry Porter were great to deal with on the Blazers' team that twice made it to the NBA Finals. Years later, Porter called me

early one morning to tell me he had been fired as Suns coach. Now that's a nice guy.

Randy Johnson went to visit a child who was sick at Phoenix Children's Hospital. But the girl's father had invited his whole office there.

It's the kind of scene that Johnson hates, so he made a quick visit and left. He hid alone in a hospital rest room while all the people left her room, then returned and spent a half-hour or more with just the child and her mother there.

There was the time Fitzgerald was dealing with a minor knee injury.

I asked if it bothered him. "I can still beat you in a race," he said.

He proceeded to say we could bet one week's salary on a race.

"But you can afford to lose," I said. "I can't."

"But think of the upside Bob," he said.

Once, speaking to the entire Cardinals press corps, he wished me a happy birthday.

"Bob's a real dinosaur in the business," Fitzgerald said.

Yes Fitz, I was.

Bob Baum retired last year after 43 years with *The Associated Press*, 23 in Portland and the last 20 as a senior sports writer based in Phoenix, Arizona. He and his wife Leah live in Island City with four cats and two dogs.

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