

How To Become An Expert On the Grill

By Amy Kennedy

Taking the time to determine the best cooking method and temperature for the food you want to grill will ensure a better result. If you will be using a charcoal grill, light the coals at least 30 minutes before you plan to cook. Wait until the fire dies down to glowing coals before placing food on the grill.

Direct heat involves cooking foods over the heat source. Direct heat works best on foods that require 25 minutes or less to cook such as steaks, sausages, hot dogs, hamburgers and kabobs. Indirect heat requires placing the food away from direct heat and using the lid to circulate heat. The indirect method works best for larger meats like whole chickens, turkeys, roasts and leg of lamb.

To keep foods from sticking, always lightly coat the grill surface with a little cooking oil. Clean the grill grates and inside of the lid regularly. Be sure to remove coals and liquids that have accumulated from prior use of the grill. Make cleanup easier by using plastic bags to marinate foods. When the meat is removed simply discard the bag with used marinade.

Keep a close watch on the temperature and flames when grilling. If food seems to be cooking too fast or flames get too high, spread out the charcoal or turn down the flames on a gas grill. Stash a water bottle near the grill to handle flare-ups.

When choosing steak for the grill, look for prime cuts like T-bone, New York strip steak, porterhouse, and top sirloin. Cuts with layers of fat within the meat will stay moister as they cook. Choose flank steak or London broil when cooking for a crowd. They should be marinated in advance to ensure juiciness and enhance flavor. Try using a covered grill for less tender cuts of meat.

If you would like to speed up grilling time for thick steaks or chops, make a deep cut horizontally, but not completely through the thickest part of the meat, then open it up to lay flat. This butterfly cutting technique makes a larger surface area for sauces and marinades to adhere to, and it speeds up the cooking time.

Measure fish at its thickest point and allow about 10 minutes of grilling time per pound for every one-inch thickness. Fish is done when it turns opaque and flakes easily when touched with a fork. Shrimp is done when it turns pink. Be careful not to overcook fish. Always try to use tongs or a spatula for turning fish on the grill. Or try using a grill basket that has been coated with nonstick cooking spray.

Soaking vegetables in cold water for 30 minutes before placing them on the grill will prevent them from drying out. Before placing kabobs on the grill, soak wooden skewers in water for 15 minutes to prevent the skewers from burning before the food is cooked. Try placing vegetables and meats in sealed foil on the grill to retain juices and make cleanup easy.

When you don't have a lot of time to spend grilling but want a charcoal flavor, precook chicken, ribs or roasts and finish by cooking for 20 or 30 minutes on the grill.

Avoid brushing on barbecue sauce until the last five to ten minutes of cooking time on the grill.

Before cooking chicken remove all or part of the skin to reduce fat and help prevent flare-ups. If you are cooking on an open grill, place chicken pieces around the edge of the grill where the heat is moderate. Turn the pieces every five minutes. After 10 minutes, move them toward the center of the grill and continue turning every five minutes. Using this method of cooking chicken takes about 30 minutes. If you are using a closed grill, keep the bottom vents open and the top vents one-quarter closed. Turn the chicken frequently after basting with the sauce to prevent burning. Using the covered grilling method takes about 40 minutes. Thinner pieces of chicken like boneless breasts, wings and small legs can be cooked over direct heat. Larger pieces should be cooked over indirect heat.

After removing steak, chicken, or seafood from the grill, let it stand on a cutting board or plate for a few minutes to enhance the taste and juiciness before serving.