

Grill the Perfect Steak

By Jack Denison

It is hard to compete with the taste of burgers and hot dogs cooked on the grill, but there are times when you want a something a little more special and that's when it is time to drop a couple of T-bones on the grill. What's better, making them or eating them? It is hard to say. I vote for eating them but only after they are grilled properly.

Standing around the grill, maybe even debating the merits of history's greatest second basemen with your dad while the kids run around the backyard or splash in the pool -- boy, its hard to top that. Unless of course you compare that to sitting down at the table on the patio and digging in to that cooked-to-perfection steak.

Cooking on the grill can be just as simple as placing a piece of meet on the rack and waiting, but putting just a little more thought into it can add plenty to the experience.

Where do you start?

Clean the grating off with a wire brush. If you are using charcoal, you need to wait until the charcoal is completely ashed over.

Now, you need to get an idea of how hot your grill is. Things are a little easier to control with a gas grill, but the purists say only charcoal will do. And, for the record, you can count me in their number.

To get a quick estimate of the temperature, Kingsford Charcoal offers this tip:

Hold your hand, palm side down, about six inches above the coals. Count "one thousand one, one thousand two, etc." until the heat is uncomfortable and you have to pull your hand away. If you can keep your hand in place for:

2 seconds – it's hot, about 375 degrees or more

3 seconds – it's medium-hot, about 350 to 375 degrees

4 seconds – it's medium, about 300 to 350 degrees

5 seconds – it's low, about 200 to 300 degrees

Generally speaking, for steaks at least an inch thick, you want a grill about 350 degrees and you want the rack about three inches above the heat source, be it gas or charcoal.

Before the steak goes on the grill, consider adding a little seasoning.

Use rubs, marinades, sauces, butters, and bastes to add an extra dimension of flavor. Even something as basic as sea salt and cracked black pepper adds a spectacular taste to beef. Steaks partner deliciously with a world of interesting flavors – the possibilities are endless.

When grilling, Steven Raichlen of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association offers these tips:

* Know when your steak is done. Remember medium rare is 145°F; medium 160°F and well done is 170°F. Use an instant-read meat thermometer or the “poke” test to check for doneness. An instant-read thermometer gives you the internal temperature immediately.

* Turn, don't stab. Tongs are the most important tool in the griller's workshop, enabling you to turn the steak without stabbing it. Look for spring loaded, long-handled tongs – 14 to 16 inches.

Give it a rest. After grilling, give the steak a rest for a couple of minutes to let the juices redistribute before cutting into it. A drizzle of olive oil or a pat of butter gives the steak a handsome sheen and spectacular flavor and finish.

Kingsford also has a few ideas you might want to keep in mind to make grilling simple:

- Keep food from sticking by rubbing the grill with vegetable oil or non-stick cooking spray.
- Leaving space around each food item on the grill allows for even cooking and smoke penetration.
- Turn meat just once on the grill – for steaks, turn them when the juices start to bubble on the uncooked side (the clearer the juice, the more well done the meat).
- Apply sauces containing honey, brown sugar or molasses during the last 10 minutes to prevent the sauce from burning.

Ever get steaks that want to curl up into kind of a bowl shape? The Food Network says if you trim off the fat to 1/8 inch around the edges and then score the edges, your steak won't curl.

The Food Network also recommends bringing the steaks to room temperature before you start grilling, to help you better estimate cooking time.

For a 1 1/2" thick steak at room temperature on a grill 350 degrees hot, you'll need about 20-25 minutes for a rare steak; 30-35 minutes for a medium steak; and 35 or more minutes for a well-done steak.

Of course, a steak is a perfect meal just plain off the grill, but there's lots of ways to enjoy a good cut of beef. At our house, we're big shish-kabob lovers.