

Grilling Outdoors Safely

FOLLOW THESE SIMPLE TIPS
TO KEEP YOUR COOKOUTS
BOTH SAFE AND FUN

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Outdoor grilling is popular among people who enjoy eating good food with family and friends. However, cooking out requires an extra measure of care to prevent foodborne illness. Careful grilling can also prevent excessive smoke and charring that may be unhealthy.

To keep your cookouts both safe and fun, follow these simple tips for proper cleanliness, safe food preparation and healthful grilling.

Food preparation

- For the best results in outdoor grilling, select meat, poultry or seafood that is fresh and of high quality.
- Maintain these perishable products at a refrigerator temperature of 40 degrees F or colder until immediately before grilling. If you are using frozen foods, thaw them in the refrigerator, not at room temperature. You can microwave-defrost the food if it will be placed on the grill immediately.
- Marinate foods in the refrigerator. Do not use the leftover marinade as a sauce on cooked meat. It may contain bacteria from the raw meat that could contaminate cooked meat.
- Always wash your hands before and after working with raw meat, poultry or seafood.
- Wash your work surfaces and cutting boards thoroughly with hot, soapy water before and after preparing food

for grilling. To sanitize them, use a solution of 1 teaspoon of bleach per quart of water. If possible, use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, poultry and seafood.

- When picnicking away from home, keep your meat and poultry cold by storing it in a cooler with ice. Do not keep other foods in the same cooler with raw meat and poultry. The meat juices may contaminate the other foods and the ice.
- After you place the raw meat on the grill, wash your utensils and platters with hot, soapy water before using them again to serve the cooked food. Although adequate cooking kills bacteria, unwashed utensils can recontaminate cooked foods.
- Cook foods to reach an internal temperature that is adequate to destroy harmful bacteria. Foods cooked on a grill often brown very fast on the outside. To be safe, use a food thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe internal temperature.

To check for the appropriate temperature, place a thermometer at the center-most part of the meat cut, but not touching the thermometer tip to a bone.

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Whole poultry should reach 180 degrees F; breasts, 170 degrees F. Ground-beef hamburgers should reach 160 degrees F and ground poultry, 165 degrees F. Cook beef, veal and lamb steaks, roasts and chops to 145 degrees F. All cuts of pork should reach 160 degrees F.

- Serve the grilled foods immediately after cooking, or keep them hot until served — 140 degrees F or warmer. Place the cooked food on a clean platter.
- Refrigerate all leftovers immediately at 40 degrees F or below. Discard any foods left out more than 2 hours (1 hour if temperatures are above 90 degrees F).

Grilling tips

Follow these cooking suggestions to help keep your food

from becoming too heavily smoked or charred. That also means less smoke in your eyes!

- Because smoke and flare-ups are caused by dripping fat, choose meats for cookouts that are low in fat. Trim the excess fat from the meat before grilling. To release some of juices that may cause flare-ups, you can precook the meat in the microwave before grilling.
- Avoid marinades or basting sauces that contain excessive fat.
- To protect some foods — especially fish and vegetables — from smoke while grilling, wrap them in foil.
- Cover the grill with aluminum foil. Punch holes between the grids to let the juices drip out.
- If dripping fat causes heavy smoke, move the food to another

section of the grill, rotate the grill or reduce the heat.

- Control the fire. Cook meat until it is done but do not char it. Remove any charred or burned material from the food's surface. Do not eat the charred parts.
- If you want to reduce the grilling time, you can precook many foods — including poultry and ribs — by boiling them or cooking them in the microwave and then grilling them briefly to add cookout flavor. However, you must place the precooked foods on the grill immediately to complete the cooking. Otherwise, bacteria can grow in the partially cooked foods and cause food-borne illness.

Favorite Fajitas

Juice of 2 to 3 limes

1 to 1½ teaspoons garlic salt

½ teaspoon pepper

Optional: *chopped tomato, green onions, guacamole, sour cream, picante sauce and taco sauce*

Combine the lime juice, salt and pepper in a heavy-duty zip-top plastic bag. Place the steak in the bag and secure it tightly, turning the bag to coat each side thoroughly. Refrigerate it for 6 to 8 hours.

Remove the steak from marinade and drain it well. Grill the steak over medium-hot mesquite coals 5 to 6 minutes on each side or until desired degree of doneness. Slice steak diagonally across the grain into thin slices.

Wrap the tortillas in aluminum foil and heat them at 325 degrees F for 15 minutes. Wrap the tortillas around the meat and top it with any of the following: chopped tomato, green onions, guacamole, sour cream, picante sauce or taco sauce.

Yield: 4 servings

Recipe provided by Mary Bielamowicz, Professor and Extension Nutrition Specialist, Texas Cooperative Extension

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