

# Fire Up the Barbecue



## May 2010 Feature

As the weather gets warmer, people spend more time outside and one of the most celebrated outdoor activities is the good old American barbecue. May is National Barbecue Month and a great time to think about all of the fun and tasty ways to grill foods safely.

If your barbecue pit has been undercover for the winter months, take time to make sure your grill is clean and ready for safe use before throwing on your favorite food. Clean your grill by scrubbing it with hot, soapy water before every use. When you're ready to cook, allow the grill to heat up sufficiently to eliminate potential bacteria problems. Also, if you are using a gas grill, check the burner orifices to make sure they are clear of any deposits to ensure a safe ignition and even flame.

Your grill is clean, hot and ready to go. Now comes the most important question: what to cook? There are the traditional barbecue favorites of hot dogs, hamburgers and chicken, but there are a number of other creative options. Try a few of these non-traditional ideas:

- *Cut the fat.* Grill up some turkey burgers instead. Ground turkey breast can be as lean as 99% fat-free. Add cilantro, shallots or chili sauce to spice things up. Or mix in feta cheese, kalamata olives, oregano and pepper and serve on a pita for a Greek-style burger.
- *Pile on the vitamins and nutrients.* Add flavor and nutrition to your meal with vegetables cooked right on the grill. Baste vegetables such as peppers, corn, eggplant or onions. Season them with herbs and place on a hot grill until they are tender and brown. Or sprinkle sliced zucchini, tomatoes and carrots with a little water and seasoning, wrap in heavy-duty aluminum foil and grill until vegetables are tender.
- *Don't forget dessert.* Grill fruit kabobs, pineapple slices or peach halves on low heat until the fruit is hot and slightly golden. Serve them on top of a scoop of low-fat ice cream or angel food cake for a tasty and nutritious dessert.

Finally, be sure to use one of the most important (and overlooked) grilling accessories: the meat thermometer. In addition to taking the guesswork out of cooking, the meat thermometer helps to prevent foodborne illness by assuring your food is cooked to proper temperatures. When buying a thermometer, read the package label to be sure you're buying a type designed to use with meat. Look for a thermometer made of stainless steel and with an easy-to-read dial and shatterproof lens.

## Can Grilling Cause Cancer?

According to the USDA, recent studies suggest a link between cancer and charred meats and fish. Charring commonly occurs as a result of high temperature cooking methods, such as grilling, frying and broiling.

Here are some tips to prevent your meats from charring:

- Remove fatty areas
- Pre-cook meat in the microwave before placing it on the grill
- Make sure the coals of the grill are not directly below the meat
- Avoid grilling meats until they are well done or burnt