

How to grill for a crowd



Cooking over an open fire is a staple of warm-weather entertaining. Tossing some steaks or vegetables on the grill for a family dinner is usually an easy undertaking. But even the craftiest grill cooks may need to apply some tricks of the trade when grilling food for the masses.

* Cook a large piece of meat. Rather than individual burgers or chicken wings, think about barbecuing an entire pig or a roast. In many cases, the meat can be set up on the barbecue early in the morning. By the time the evening arrives, the meat should be tender and cooked through. With just occasional checking, turning and basting, this may be the

most low-maintenance option when feeding a crowd.

* Rent or borrow a second grill. Unless you are working with industrial-sized or commercial equipment, a standard grill may not have enough surface area to cook a lot of food at once. Find a friend or family member who is willing to lend you his or her grill. Having twice the room means you can cook twice the amount of food. You also may be able to rent a larger grill for an event.

* Precook the food. You can put bratwurst, hot dogs or burgers on the grill to partially cook them before the party, then store them in aluminum pans. When guests arrive, simply reheat the food to the right temperature

and they'll be hot and ready in no time.

* Make steak sandwiches. Make the food go further with less work by cooking ribeye steaks or flank steaks on the grill. Slice up the meat and serve it over garlic bread with melted jack or mozzarella cheese. The result will be savory, and such sandwiches don't take much time to create.

* Opt for pulled pork. Start the basics of pulled pork in a slow cooker so that the meat cooks for several hours under low heat. If you have a smoker, you can opt to use that, but smokers may take longer to cook the meat and require more maintenance. If you opt for the slow cooker, transfer the meat to an aluminum pan when it is nearly done and put it on the grill to impart that smoky flavor. Add more seasonings to the meat and keep it warm until guests are ready to dine.

* Go with hot dogs. Hot dogs are usually precooked and will heat up quickly on the grill. Their small size means they don't take up much space, and several can fit on the grill at one time.

Grilling for a crowd is easier when you plan with foods that are precooked or heat up quickly. This way you can enjoy more time with your guests.

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How to clean your grill during summer party season

Grilling season has arrived, and amateur grillmasters everywhere are gearing up for another summer of backyard barbecues and family dinners outside under the summer sun. But once you fire up that grill and cook your first hot dog of the season, your work is not quite done. Cleaning the grill after you have eaten makes it easier to prolong the life of your grill and ensure the foods you eat are safe to consume.

Turn the grill off

Unless you own a charcoal grill, chances are your grill has dials that govern how hot the grill gets when cooking. Make sure these dials are turned to the off position before you start cleaning. If yours is a gas grill, disconnect the gas while wearing gloves to reduce your risk of accident or injury.

Use the residual heat to make cleaning easier

The sooner you start cleaning the grill after you cook, the easier it might be to make the cooking surfaces sparkle. That's because the residual heat can make it easier to remove any leftover buildup from barbecue sauce or seasoning that stuck to the grill after you removed your food.

Use a wire brush to clean the cooking grates

Wire brushes are ideal for cleaning cooking grates. Such brushes can quickly remove grease and food particles, saving grill owners the trouble of scrubbing away with traditional sponges. Once the wire brush's work is done, you can then clean the grill with a soapy sponge.

Remove food that fell into the well

Food inevitably falls into the well of a grill no matter how skilled a grillmaster might be. If left to fester in the well, such foods can pose a safety risk and promote the growth of bacteria.

Clean the remaining areas of the grill

Marinade, sauce or condiments may find their way onto areas of your grill, and if left unattended, such substances can make a grill very dirty over time. Remove these substances after each barbecue to keep your grill looking new through the summer.

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Host an outdoor movie night

During the golden age of outdoor movie viewing, drive-in movie theaters were a phenomenon. By the late 1950s, one-third of theaters in America were drive-ins.

Over the last 40 years or so, the number of drive-in theaters has declined considerably. It's estimated there are fewer than 400 drive-in movie theaters in the United States today. Those that are still in operation face pressure from traditional theaters as well as people viewing movies and digital screenings at home.

New York, California, Ohio, and Pennsylvania boast some of the highest numbers of drive-in movie theaters across the United States. The United Drive-In Theater Owners Association also lists four active drive-ins in the Ontario area of Canada. Those looking for some summer fun that includes a movie night out can visit www.driveintheatreowners.org to find a nearby drive-in theater.

Taking a road trip to visit a drive-in theater can be an entertaining adventure. But outdoor movie enthusiasts also can construct an outdoor theater in the comfort of their own backyards.

Concession sales provided much of revenue of drive-in theaters in their glory days. When creating an outdoor viewing experience at home, don't forget to make food part of the experience. A classic popcorn maker can keep freshly popped corn ready on demand. In addition, fire up the grill to ensure there are plenty of tasty items available.

Projectors enable viewers to display a movie on just about any large, unobscured surface. While a large, hanging sheet can be handy, any smooth surface on your home, such as a large expanse of wall, can do the trick. Projectors now come in various sizes, and there are some pocket-sized varieties that can work with phones and other mobile devices.

Create multi-leveled viewing by setting up seating on an incline in the yard, if available. Otherwise, place lawn chairs toward the back and have viewers in the front sit on blankets or towels so they do not obscure the screen for viewers in the back.

Choose a family-friendly or kitschy movie to display. Delve into the classics of your movie library. Imagine seeing 'Jaws' on a big screen once more or a cult-classic

like Ferris Bueller's Day Off.

Build in some intermission time when everyone can get up from their chairs or picnic blankets and mingle. Also, plan some pre- and post-viewing activities.

Drive-in theaters were known to include some additional entertainment to boost attendance. Having a dance party or including some carnival-type games can make for a well-rounded and enjoyable night.

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Fourth of July barbecue essentials

Precious few Americans can say they have not been present at a 4th of July barbecue or witnessed a fireworks display honoring America's official declaration of independence from Great Britain. Hosting a July 4th barbecue for the first time may have some hosts anxious about throwing a summer soiree to remember, but fun is sure to be had if hosts remember to include the following backyard barbecue essentials this Independence Day.

Food

No Fourth of July barbecue is complete without food, so hosts should be sure to stock up on popular barbecue fare like hot dogs and hamburgers. Though such foods likely won't be mistaken for gourmet fare anytime soon, Fourth of July revelers often embrace the tradition of grilling up some hot dogs and hamburgers even if they tend to avoid such foods throughout the rest of the year. Hosts should not feel pressured to provide gourmet fare on July 4th, but it is a thoughtful gesture to ask guests in advance if they have any food allergies or need to avoid certain foods for other reasons.

Beverages

It goes without saying that guests will need refreshing beverages at parties held in early July, but be sure to stock up on a variety of beverages so guests are not forced to consume drinks they don't want. Be sure to have plenty of water available to guests, and provide sodas, iced tea and lemonade as well. Offer alcoholic beverages to adult guests, but don't go overboard stocking up on alcohol, as that might encourage guests to overindulge.

Safety

Though no one wants to think of a 4th of July celebration taking a turn for the worst, hosts must prepare for emergencies. Restock the first-aid kit if necessary and keep a constant eye on guests, especially children, to ensure everyone is having a safe and happy time. Program a list of local taxi companies into your phone so you can easily call for transportation should any guests have too much to drink during the festivities. Hosts should abstain from alcohol so they can serve as designated driver should the need arise at the end of the night.

Backyard barbecues are a staple of July 4th, and there's no reason your summer soiree can't be one to remember for years to come.

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