

'Cue Tips



For lots of people, cooking in the summer revolves around the barbecue. The stereotypical vision is a guy with a slightly rounded belly standing barbecue ready, favorite beverage in one hand and a long tong in the other. The grill is smoking away behind him.

I propose we go beyond that vision. Here are my quick barbecue tips – I call them 'Cue Tips.

'Cue Tip #1 It's Not Just for Meat Anymore

Go beyond grilling meat. You can cook the whole dinner on the grill! One of my favorite simple summer appetizers is grilled asparagus with sea salt. Take cleaned asparagus, spray it with olive oil and sprinkle with sea salt. Grill on medium until the asparagus has char marks all the way around. The asparagus should still be al dente (slightly stiff). Serve it warm or room temperature on a platter and let your guests eat it with their fingers.

A second idea involves making eggplant chips. If you abhor eggplant my guess is this simple recipe will change your mind. Take a Japanese eggplant (the skinny light purple eggplant) and slice it thinly. Place the slices on paper towels and sprinkle

with sea salt. Let stand for 30 minutes or so. Spray with olive oil and grill on medium high heat until the eggplant is browned on both sides. A few char marks are good. They will be stiff. Sprinkle again with more salt as they come off the grill. The result will taste a lot like a healthy potato chip. Serve as a snack or as a side dish.

'Cue Tip #2 Think International

The grill isn't just for good ole American burgers, steaks and ribs. Consider grilled quesadillas. You can really make them with anything you want inside. Just don't forget the cheese. That's the glue that allows you to flip them on the grill. They can be Mexican ingredients like onions, beans (drained) or refried, peppers, etc. Or you can go International like I do and mix styles.

'Cue Tip #3 Stop Playing With Your Meat

I know it's fun to squish down the burgers with your spatula but it really takes the flavor out of the meat and toughens your burger. Leave your meat alone. A good rule of thumb is 7 minutes per inch to cook meat or even fish to a medium temperature. Turn at the 3 or 4 minute point and leave it alone on a medium high grill. If you want to check for doneness, do it with a sharp paring knife and a fork. Poke the knife in and use the fork to pull the meat apart enough so you can see how pink it is in the middle.

'Cue Tip #4. Think Outdoor Oven

If you think of your grill as an outdoor oven you'll be less likely to burn your food. There are knobs on a gas grill for a reason! Most people turn every burner to high and leave them there. They seem to feel flames indicate cooking is going on. True but not necessary. There's a thermometer on most grills

too. Look at it. Turn the grill on high to pre-heat it.

Sear your meat and then turn it down. Keep the temperature around 375 – 400 and things will “roast” in your grill. Your food will stay moister and tastier. And you won’t have to stand around with the spritzer bottle putting out flames. If you are a charcoal griller use the indirect method.

‘Cue Tip #5. Think Ahead

My friend Pete displayed this brilliant idea. He cooked the meat ahead of time! Early in the day it’s not so hot and you can grill at your leisure. This leaves more time to talk to guests instead of standing around a very hot grill. Take chicken, for example. You want to make sure chicken is thoroughly grilled so you don’t pass out food poisoning to your guests. If you grill it on medium high earlier in the day, check it with your paring knife in the fattest portion of the meat to make sure it’s done, then you can store it in the refrigerator until guests arrive. Take it out and let it warm up to something closer to room temperature and just re-heat the meat on the grill. Takes less time and is less risky. Which leads me to ‘Cue Tip #6.

‘Cue Tip #6. Leave the Sticky Stuff to Last

Most often the grill starts to flame up because something on the meat has sugar in it. Think barbecue sauce. If you follow Tip #5 and then when you are re-heating your meat add the barbecue sauce then and just on top you are less likely to have charred mess on your grill rack at the end of the night. Then again, some people LIKE to have to scrape that stuff off of the grill.

‘Cue Tip #7. Dessert

On a clean grill there’s a beautiful treat called grilled pineapple. Take large chunks from a ripe pineapple and grill

them or when desperate you can even use slices from the can. Spray with canola oil and grill gently until soft and slightly browned. Serve on vanilla ice cream. You can do this with peach halves too. If they are not sweet enough for you, add a drizzle of maple syrup to the pineapple (careful not to let it burn) or a drizzle of caramel on the peaches.

Hey, I'm no grilling champion and I know some people get pretty testy when folks question their grilling methods. If you fancy your grilling techniques stick with them. If you're looking for more from your grill get out the 'Cue Tips.

Enjoy! Cheers,