

FOOD

Vegetables taste great cooked outside

Gonzo Gourmet
• Simple methods can yield sublime results.

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Grillers live for flavor — robust, overwhelming, intense. Meat rules on many grills, but perhaps surprisingly, the flavor of grilled vegetables and fruit can be sublime.

HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A **wide grill topper** to keep small pieces from falling through the grate.
- A **spatula**. Don't use a fork or tongs on most grilled vegetables; they would fall apart or squish.
- **Wood chips** soaked in mild olive oil. A handful spread thinly on a charcoal fire will create a manageable flame that will be enough to cook vegetables in a few minutes. Mesquite chips and Jack Daniels chips hate vegetables; pricey wine barrel chips love vegetables.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF WHAT CAN BE GRILLED

- **Garlic**. Use whole bulbs soaked about 10 minutes in olive oil. Brushing with oil is inadequate. Halve the bulbs crossways. Cook cut-side down until blackened. Flip and blacken part of the papery covering. Serve cut-side down in a pool of mild olive oil or olive oil with ground black pepper and Parmesan. Spread the garlic on bread or meat.
- **Onions**. Buy the largest onions you can find. Slice in half lengthwise, then paint the cut sides with olive oil and sprinkle with a little black pepper. Place cut-side down on a hot grill and cook until blackened. Flip if you'd like, but don't overcook. Before serving, slice into thin strands. If you use sweet onions, you can cut them into chunks.
- **Green bell peppers**. Seed and stem, and slice in half or into quarters but no smaller. Grill them until they're about to wilt. Cut into chunks and serve.
- **Corn**. The secret to good grilled corn is to use corn still in the husks. Slice off a bit of the stalk, then submerge the ears in water for several hours or overnight. Drain and pat dry, then place them right next to each other on the hot grill. As the husks turn black, rotate the ears about one-third. When the husk layers are burnt and you can see some kernels browning, the corn is done.
- **Sweet potatoes**. Microwave a sweet potato for 3 to 5 minutes, until it's soft to the touch. (You'll need to increase the cooking time if you are microwaving more than one.) Throw it on the grill whole or slice lengthwise or into another shape. Grill for about 5 minutes to get the grill flavor and crisp the skin.
- **Bananas**. I slice bananas lengthwise and don't peel them until they're on the table. Younger, firmer bananas are better than older, softer bananas. Paint the cut side with honey, maple syrup or sprinkle on a bit of raw sugar. Grill cut-side down. This method also works with **apples, pears, pineapple, kiwi** and for the pro, **honeydew melon**.
- **Eggplant, summer squash, asparagus, leeks, green onions** and **mushrooms** also are great on the grill. Cooking times vary, so grill one type of vegetable at a time. Serve over rice as a main course or as a side dish.

GRILL • FROM L1

Three 'Grillin' Fools' cook just about anything outdoors, then report the results in their blog.

The ribs smoked on a Char-Broil grill, while the steaks, shrimp and crostini grilled on a classic Weber kettle. The rest cooked on a CharGriller Professional. Several other models of grills were stored underneath the raised deck in Scott's backyard.

Throughout the evening, the grill buddies chided each other's techniques and recipes, philosophized about outdoor cooking, and in the end, enjoyed each other's work. They also enjoyed the wines that each had brought, but only after most of the cooking was complete.

"We have a saying that too much chillin' can mess up your grillin'," Greg said.

They also respectfully — or at least semi-respectfully — disagreed on a variety of topics.

"I like applewood for smoking," Tom said. "I don't know why; maybe it's the sweetness."

"Yeah, but look at those smoke rings," Greg replied as he sliced apart a rack of ribs, revealing the layers of pink meat just below the surface that were a byproduct of slow-smoking over cherrywood.

The trio brushed shrimp skewers with a store-bought raspberry chipotle sauce. To avoid sticking, they rested the ends of the skewers on foil-wrapped bricks that elevated the food over the grill grate.

Scott marinated the strip steaks in a mixture of Andria's sauce (from the steak houses of the same name, sold in supermarkets), red wine, garlic and Coca-Cola. Greg's discovery of a similar marinade called for Diet Coke. "I used regular Coke because I wanted the sugar," Scott



PHOTOS BY CHRISTIAN GOODEN • cgooden@post-dispatch.com
Scott Thomas carefully pours a stream of olive oil over live coals, kicking up flames that sear the steak on his grill.

said. Scott fire-seared the steaks by pouring olive oil on the coals to achieve a soaring flame.

All the while, Scott switched between tongs and a digital camera, documenting the finished dishes for an upcoming installment of the blog.

The evening's version of the "fatty" was bulk sage sausage stuffed with white Cheddar cheese. Even before the food had disappeared, the trio was discuss-

ing alternatives and innovations. Greg thought the fatty cooked too quickly and was slightly dry; he said the best recipe he'd found uses maple sausage stuffed with chopped Honeycrisp apple and onion and coated with a slightly sweet dry rub.

"We're always thinking about what we can do better," Greg said.

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See more of Scott Thomas' grilling suggestions on **STLtoday.com/eatatjoes**. Scott posts under the screen name **TheFanatic**.

GRILLED LETTUCE > THE GRILLIN' FOOLS

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

- 1 head romaine lettuce**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- Sea or kosher salt**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- 1/2 teaspoon granulated garlic**
- 1/2 cup freshly grated hard cheese (Romano, Parmesan or Asiago, for example)**

1. Prepare a medium-hot grill for direct cooking with a hot and a cool zone. Rinse and dry the lettuce and cut in half lengthwise. Spread out the lettuce leaves.
2. Brush romaine with olive oil. Season each side with salt and pepper to taste and with granulated garlic.
3. Place the lettuce on the hot zone of the grill. Grill each side for 2 to 3 minutes or until lightly charred. If one half begins to char too quickly, remove it to the cool side of the grill until each half is equally cooked.
4. Transfer the lettuce to a platter or glass dish. Sprinkle with grated cheese, then chop into bite-size pieces and serve.

Per serving (based on 6): 90 calories; 7g fat (70 percent calories from fat); 2.5g saturated fat; 6mg cholesterol; 3.5g protein; 3g carbohydrate; 2g sugar; 1g fiber; 157mg sodium; 57mg calcium; 1mg potassium.



Scott Thomas tends a head of romaine lettuce that he's cooking on the grill. The resulting salad was slightly wilted and mildly charred, similar to roasted vegetables.

SAGE SAUSAGE "FATTY" > THE GRILLIN' FOOLS

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

- 1 pound bulk sage breakfast sausage**
- 2 heaping tablespoons minced garlic**
- 1/2 cup loosely packed Asiago cheese**
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**
- 1/3 pound white Cheddar cheese, cubed or grated**
- 1 to 2 teaspoons granulated garlic**

1. Thoroughly combine sausage, minced garlic, Asiago and black pepper in a mixing bowl. Transfer the mixture to a piece of waxed paper and flatten it into a rectangle about 1/2-inch thick.
2. Place cubed cheese down the center of the rectangle. Roll the sausage into a loaf, enclosing the cheese. Dust the exterior of the loaf with granulated garlic. Chill for 30 minutes in the freezer or overnight in the refrigerator to firm the loaf.
3. While the loaf is chilling, prepare a smoker grill for indirect heat at about 300 degrees. Cook the loaf for 2 hours or until the meat reaches an internal temperature of 160 degrees. If the cheese begins to ooze out while cooking, place the loaf on a sheet of aluminum foil for the rest of the cooking time. If grease builds up, poke a few holes in the aluminum foil to allow it to drain.
4. Let stand for 5 to 10 minutes, then slice and serve.

Per serving (based on 6): 276 calories; 22g fat (72 percent calories from fat); 10.5g saturated fat; 57mg cholesterol; 16g protein; 3.5g carbohydrate; 0.5g sugar; 0.5g fiber; 711mg sodium; 262mg calcium; 157mg potassium.

GRILLED CROSTINI > THE GRILLIN' FOOLS

Yield: 6 servings

- 1/4 cup olive oil or more as needed**
- 6 (1-inch-thick) slices soft sour-dough or French-style bread, cut slightly on the bias (long oval slices)**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 tablespoon dried basil or about 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh basil**
- 1/4 cup minced garlic**
- 6 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan, Asiago or similar hard cheese**

1. Prepare a grill for direct heating with a separate cool area. Pour the olive oil into a lipped plate or a small bowl. Dip each side of the bread slices in oil. Add more oil if necessary.
2. Sprinkle one side of each slice of bread with pepper to taste. Evenly sprinkle the basil over the pepper. Spread 2 teaspoons of minced garlic evenly on the same side of each slice. Press the garlic lightly into the bread so that it will adhere as much as possible when flipped.
3. Place the bread directly over the coals, garlic side up. Toast to desired darkness, checking every 10 seconds or so for even cooking and rotating 90 degrees if desired to get a square pattern of grill marks. If some slices toast more quickly than others, move to a cool area of grill.
4. Flip the slices so that the topping faces down. (Some of the garlic will fall off.) Cook until the garlic and the edges of the crust brown, 1 to 2 minutes.
5. Flip again so the garlic side is up, moving the slices to the cool area of the grill. Sprinkle each slice with 1 tablespoon of cheese, spreading it close to the edges of the slice. Cover the grill and cook until cheese is melted, 2 to 5 minutes. Serve.

Per serving: 310 calories; 12.5g fat (36 percent calories from fat); 2.5g saturated fat; 5mg cholesterol; 11g protein; 38.5g carbohydrate; 2g sugar; 2g fiber; 551mg sodium; 145mg calcium; 117mg potassium.

COCA-COLA STEAK MARINADE > THE GRILLIN' FOOLS

Yield: About 1/2 cup (enough for 4 large strip steaks)

- 1/4 cup Andria's sauce (see note)**
- 2 tablespoons red wine**
- 2 tablespoons Coca-Cola**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- 3 tablespoons minced garlic**
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste**

1. Combine all ingredients, mixing well.
2. To use marinade: Marinate your choice of meat in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for at least 12 hours or overnight. Season meat with coarse salt to taste, then sear on a very hot grill. Cook to desired doneness. **Note:** Andria's sauce is sold in supermarkets near the steak sauce and barbecue sauce.

Per tablespoon of marinade: 48 calories; 3.5g fat (66 percent calories from fat); 0.5g saturated fat; no cholesterol; no protein; 3.5g carbohydrate; 0.5g sugar; no fiber; 183mg sodium; 6mg calcium; 17mg potassium.

DRY RUB > THE GRILLIN' FOOLS

Yield: 3 1/3 cups; enough for about 6 racks of pork ribs

- 2/3 cup packed light brown sugar**
- 2/3 cup granulated sugar**
- 1/3 cup paprika**
- 1/4 cup seasoned salt**
- 1/4 cup smoked salt or hickory-smoked salt**
- 1/4 cup onion salt**
- 1/4 cup celery salt**
- 2 tablespoons freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 tablespoons chili powder**
- 2 tablespoons dry mustard**
- 1 teaspoon poultry seasoning**
- 1 teaspoon freshly grated ginger**
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger**
- 1/2 teaspoon ground red (cayenne) pepper**

1. Combine all ingredients and blend thoroughly.
2. For pork ribs, remove membrane, dust with granulated garlic to taste, then rub in the dry rub. Place rubbed ribs in plastic bag overnight in the refrigerator.

Per tablespoon: 24 calories; no fat; no protein; 6g carbohydrate; 5.5g sugar; 0.5g fiber; 1,107mg sodium; 6mg calcium; 25mg potassium



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TAKE ANOTHER LOOK

See the Grillin' Fools make more dishes. Photo gallery at **STLtoday.com/multimedia**