

Summer 2011 Steakhouse Grilling Chef's Secret Techniques

OK Every summer grilling season the SAME conversations take place about HOW TO GRILL STEAKS etc...and this morning at the start of the 2011 Memorial Day Weekend I woke up to 20 emails from friends with GRILLING questions. I KNOW I am opening the door for MANY other personal opinions here but...How about I TRY to get as much of the basics as I know them, down here and then we will ALL refine as time goes on....

Anyway, Steaks are easy. .. Moreover, read hard to mess up, unless you overcook them...
although some DO like it that way too.

Look, regardless of what cut of steak you cook, there are some basic tips and techniques that can raise your game, and when you master them, you will have your guests reeling in delirium.

The Cuts: The prime steakhouses specialize in the best cuts, which all come from the rib and loin area, along the back of the cow, the most tender, most flavorful steaks on the steer. **They are also the most expensive:** Ribeye, porterhouses, T-bones, strip steaks, and cuts from the tenderloin.

Yes as chefs we are taught that you can make darn tasty meals from the sirloin, round, flank, and chuck, but seriously, they are just not as tender. Most dedicated steak students agree that the Ribeye is the best all round cut for flavor and tenderness combined. And yes, a lot of folks like meat from the tenderloin like chateaubriand and filet mignon cut because they are the more tender, but, because they are also much leaner than ribeye's, the filet cuts simply do not have the flavor fat brings to the party.

Note: I refer to what I consider the best steakhouses as *prime* steakhouses.

OK Prime is the top grade of meat and you will not usually find it in discount steakhouses in mall parking lots or in your grocery. Prime beef is selected because it has a lot of marbling; thin hairline grains of fat that weave web like through the fibers of protein. You can see it. Most of it goes to restaurants.

Some steakhouses also serve aged meat, another commodity that is not readily available to us peons.

NOTE: For more about prime meat and the other grades of beef that a good backyard cook needs to know, please read my PDF doc on [The Chef Debrina Zen of Buying Beef Grades & Labels](#) also at my website.

You can get prime meat, and aged meat, for cooking at home, just like restaurants. However, you have to look for it. Usually, only specialty butchers have it. So if you can't find it in (most) stores, (although our PUBLIX Greenwise in PBG carries it) then order it online. **NOTE:** I am a BIG fan of the meats sold by **Bush Bros.** in West Palm Beach and the **Allen Brothers** in Chicago. I have toured both of their plants and they are very, very impressive. Both suppliers are top notch, in my book...the meat is fresh, beautiful, it is stored properly, Cut to Order, their plants are highly organized and clean and the trimmers are very skilled ...plus both of their packing and shipping operations are really impressive.

If you cannot get prime, the next grade is choice, and choice is common in grocery stores. **But, TRUST ME...Not all CHOICE grade is the same.**

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Do not just grab any old steak from the meat counter. Ask your butcher for help. Many supermarkets have a butcher in the back. Go in early on a weekday, and ask for the head butcher. Get to know him or her (many of them are women nowadays). Explain you have a special dinner and you want the best-looking cuts they can find. They will often be pleased to look in the back room for a particularly nice piece of meat and custom cut exactly what you want.

NOTE: I always try to give them a week advanced warning so they have more meat to choose from. Tell them you want "bone-in ribeyes, from the center of the roast, with the most marbling they can find, at least 1.5" thick, and please try to make all steaks about the same thickness." and I promise that you will be pleased with what you get. Also, plan on 3/4 to 1 pound per adult for bone-in steak and 1/2 pound per adult for boneless steak.

Special NOTE: Please do not be swayed by the ads for Certified Angus Beef (CAB). I am not convinced it is worth the extra price. There is no doubt that Angus breeds produce superior meat, but the regulations of the CAB association allow the Angus breed to be so genetically diluted beef that it is meaningless in my mind. To me, this label is mostly a marketing ploy and not a brand of quality.

The Thickness: The cuts they sell at prime steakhouses are usually 1.5" to 2" thick. This allows them to sear the exterior as dark as possible, a chemical transformation, called the Maillard reaction, that develops complex flavors and makes steaks crisp while leaving the interior red to pink. **NOTE:** Skinny steaks are well done inside by the time the exterior is seared properly. So, if you have someone who likes his or her steaks medium or well done, use a thinner steak so you don't burn the exterior.

Prep: Trim off excess hunks of fat down to about 1/8" thick. Too much fat can melt and cause flare-ups. Those flames can deposit soot on the meat and char the surface. MUCH **Research has indicated that charred burnt black carbonized meat can be a carcinogen.** Besides, it tastes bad.

Historically, prime steakhouses have a secret mix of herbs and spices they season the meat with, the most famous being Lawry's Seasoned Salt. (YUCK) However, most prime houses today use only salt and pepper, and some use only salt. **None of them marinates. Why?** The seasonings sit on the surface, and at the scorching temps they cook at incinerates expensive seasonings, even pepper. The remnants can have more bitterness than flavor. Marinades mask the steak's natural flavors, **they don't penetrate very far, they don't tenderize much, and if the meat's surface is wet they form steam and prevents crust formation.** For MORE about how Marinades Do, and Do NOT, work: **Pls. See My Zen of Marinades PDF doc also posted at my web site.**

Dry Brining: Unless your doctor forbids you from using salt, use it. It really brings out the flavors. Salt is an amplifier. It is also an annihilator. Adding the right amount will amplify the meat's flavor. Add too much and it will make it inedible. It also holds in the moisture and denatures the proteins making the meat more tender and juicy. Brining is a method of adding moisture and salt by soaking meat in salty water. But, too much water can bloat a steak and dilute its beefiness. So here is a technique popularized by Chef Judy Rodgers of San Francisco's famous Zuni Cafe. I call it **Dry Brining:**

- 1) Take the meat out of the fridge about an hour before cooking and pat it thoroughly dry with a paper towel. Sprinkle salt on the meat and just let it come to room temperature.
- 2) The salt draws out the moisture, which dissolves the salt. Notice how the meat will become shiny with moisture.

3) The meat then reabsorbs the moisture bringing the salt in with it. Take note of how much the color of the fat will have changed where the salt has soaked in.

4) Letting it sit at room temp allows enzymes to activate and they also tenderize the meat. Don't worry, this is safe. Any microbes on the steak will be killed within 10 seconds of hitting the grill.

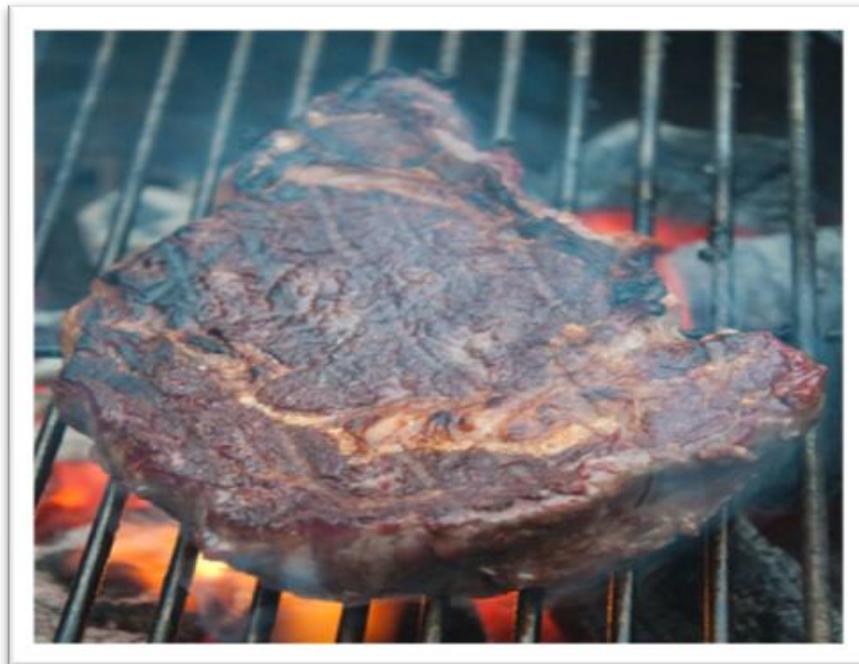
5) Then just before cooking, pat the meat dry with a paper towel. Moisture on the surface just cools the meat, creates steam, and slows searing. Coat it with a thin layer of vegetable oil. **OK, I KNOW, I KNOW but wait...** Oiling the meat is better than oiling the grates. When you oil grates, it vaporizes almost instantly and can create an acrid smell. **When oiled meat hits the grill, the oil will heat up quickly and transmit that heat. It will slightly fry the surface and help create crust...**I'm just say'n.

Cooking Methods: Most prime steakhouses broil their meat with open flames from ABOVE, not below, are fueled by gas, not charcoal or wood, and they can hit temps from 800 to 1000F..

Also at prime steakhouses, meat sits on grates that allow them to raise and lower it if they want it closer or further from the flame. There are a few that use grills with flames from below, and still even fewer that use charcoal. **Most don't like fire from below because flare-ups from dripping fat that can burn the meat.**

NOTE: I want all of you charcoal diehards who swear that you cannot grill with gas to note that almost all prime steakhouses broil from above at very high temperatures with gas, so clearly the secret of searing great steaks is the temperature not the tool. The lesson is, if you can get a gas grill hot enough, you can sear steaks just as well with charcoal. The Problem is, that **most gas grills cannot reach charcoal temperatures. And that's why I cook all my steaks over charcoal** (When I can).

**Below is a Ribeye (Bush Bros.) on my good ol' Weber Kettle charcoal grill...
That is the color of a perfect sear with just a little char on the fat.**



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Later, Read my thoughts on Charcoal vs. Gas also posted at my web site.

Ok now here is how to cook your steaks:

FIRST PLS. NEVER USE LIGHTER FUEL!!! EVER!!!

Set up your grill for 2-zone cooking. On a charcoal grill, get a whole chimney, about 100 briquettes, fully hot, covered in white ash, and push them all to one side.

On my Weber Kettle, I have even been known to put bricks in the bottom and raise the grates to within an inch or two of the top grate. I also use the Hovergrill that I got when I bought my Smokenator to hold the coals. **NOTE:** If you cannot raise the coals, use more coals than you usually use.

On a gas grill, use your sear burner (a.k.a. infrared burner) if you have one. If not, you should consider buying GrillGrates. These replace your grates and amplify the heat.

Ok now You will want to get your grill as FREAKING HOT as possible so preheat it longer than usual with the lid down. **NOTE:** You might even be able to remove your grates and lower them to ***sit right on top of the flavor bars or deflectors*** that protect your burners. See heat dissipates rapidly, so the closer you get to the source, the better. Then set up a 2-zone system by turning off at least one burner.

Once the grill is as hot as it can get, scrub the carbon and grease from the grates. Dirty grates can give the meat a funny flavor, and clean grates will transmit more heat to the meat. Use a good wire brush or grate cleaner. In a pinch, a wad of crinkled aluminum foil will do a good job. I KNOW from experience it is NOT enough to leave it hot and burn it off... **you still need to CLEAN the grates with a brush!!!**

Place the steaks over the hottest part of your grill and **stand by your grill!** Do not wander off and chat up your guests or check your email. Things will move quickly and you need to be ready to react.

For steaks 1.5" thick or thicker, close the lid so it will sear from below while heat from above will help roast the center. Closing the lid will also help prevent flareups. But just in case, keep a squirt gun of water on hand to fight flareups, but be careful not to cool off the fire and create a lot of steam.

You want the darkest brown possible but you don't want black meat. If a little of the edge fat blackens, that's OK, **but don't blacken the protein.** You will get optimal flavor when fat is almost, but not quite, charred black. Click here to learn more about two different methods for searing steaks.

FYI: Here is one of my primers for grilling STK: **WEBER'S Way To GRILL:**

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0376020598?ie=UTF8&tag=amazi0a8-20&link_code=as3&camp=211189&creative=373489&creativeASIN=0376020598

Wait about three minutes. The meat may stick at first, but it will release as it browns. You can flip the steak as often as you want. **OK I know you have read not to do this, but flipping is a subject of much debate among steak heads.**

One theory is that the juices migrate to the cool side, and flipping keeps them evenly distributed. Another theory holds that flipping replicates the action of a rotisserie, a system that works well because a side is

hot, then cool, then hot, then cool, etc. Another theory holds that if you flip the top side gets wet from juices and that prevents browning and softens the surface.

Me? OK, I flip once. I wait till one side is perfectly dark mahogany brown, about 5 minutes into the cook on a very hot charcoal Weber Kettle. Then I flip with tongs, **not a fork**. PLEASE do not poke any holes in your steaks and lose valuable juices. **NOTE:** By the way, those juices are myoglobin, a protein liquid found in the muscles, and they **are not blood**. The actual blood is drained out during slaughter.

The second side will take less time. I start checking the interior temperature with a very thin probe very fast thermocouple thermometer. Wear an oven mit and insert the probe into the thickest part **away from the fat and the bone**. Push it most of the way through and slowly back it out and note the lowest temperature.

Why should you keep the probe away from the bone? Muscle and bone are very different composition. Muscle is mostly water. Bone has a hard, dense, outer shell, and the center, can be gelatinous or a honeycomb of mostly air. When you begin to cook meat with bone, the muscle and bone heat at different rates. At first the bone does not heat up as rapidly as the meat, but then, when the bone gets hot, it can get hotter than the muscle. So if you take the temp close to the bone or touching the bone at the beginning of a cook, the temp will be lower than the center of the muscle mass because the bone is acting like an insulator. If you take the temp near or touching the bone, the reading will be higher.

I typically, try to **remove the meat when the lowest temperature is about 125F** even if the other side is not perfectly seared. The temperature will rise a few degrees after you remove it, a process that I was told is called carryover. However, if the sear is perfect ...and the interior is still too cold, I slide the meat over to the indirect side and just close the lid for a few minutes longer.

For steaks thinner than 1.5" I cook with the lid off. That keeps the top of the meat cool and prevents it from overcooking in the center. I get a good sear on one side, and if the other side isn't seared, well one good sear is better than two mediocre sears. Which brings us to:

Doneness

Prime steakhouses know that beef is most tender, flavorful, and juicy when cooked to rare or medium rare, from red to pink, or from 125 to 135F. (See below for a chart of steak doneness) Any lower and it is almost raw.

It is chewy, stringy, the fats and collagens haven't melted yet, and the flavors haven't begun to develop. Any warmer and the proteins begin to knot up, the juices are squeezed out and evaporate, and things get tough and stringy.

Meat Temperature Guide:

Doneness

Serving Temp

Description

Beef, lamb, veal steaks, chops, roasts & duck breasts*

(USDA recommended minimum: 145°F or 63°C plus 3 minutes rest)

Extra rare (bleu, blue)	110-120°F (43-49°C)	Bright purple-red center, cool, stringy, tender, slippery, slightly juicy
Rare	120-130°F (49-54°C)	Dark red center, warm, tender to mildly firm, juicy
Medium rare	130-135°F (54-57°C)	Light red center, warm, mildly firm, very juicy
Medium	135-145°F (57-63°C)	Pink center, firm, slightly juicy
Medium well	145-155°F (63-68°C)	Tan with slight pink center, firm and slightly fibrous, some juice
Well done	more than 155°F (68°C)	Tan to brown center, no pink, chewy, little juice

Pork & veal steaks, chops, & roasts

(USDA recommended minimum: 145°F or 63°C plus 3 minutes rest)

Raw	Less than 120°F (49°C)	Bright pink center, cool, stringy, slightly juicy
Rare	120-130°F (49-54°C)	Pale pink center, warm, tender, very juicy
Medium rare	130-135°F (54-57°C)	Cream colored with a slight pink tinge, tender, juicy
Medium	135-145°F (57-63°C)	Cream colored, firm, slightly pink juices
Medium well	145-155°F (63-68°C)	Cream colored, firm, clear juices
Well done	more than 155°F (68°C)	Cream colored, tough, clear juices

Ground meats, burgers, meat loaf, & sausages, except poultry (USDA recommended minimum: 160°F or 71°C)

Safe 160°F (71°C) or more Tan-brown (no sign of pink)

Pork ribs, pork shoulders, beef brisket cooked low & slow at 225°F or 107°C **

Tender and juicy 180-190°F (82-88°C) Pale white to tan center, tender, clear juices

Pre-cooked ham & hot dogs (USDA recommended minimum: 140°F or 60°C)

Safe 140°F (60°C) Pink meat, clear juices

Turkey & chicken, whole or ground (USDA recommended minimum: 165°F or 74°C)

Safe and moist 165°F (74°C) Cream colored, tender, clear juices

Fish (USDA recommended minimum: 145°F or 63°C)

Rare 125°F (52°C) Similar to the raw meat in color, just a bit paler

Medium 135°F (57°C) Slightly translucent meat, flakes easily

Well done 145°F (63°C) Opaque, pearly meat

Serve Simple Sides: Prime steakhouses like to let the meat speak for itself. I mean, you do not see prime steakhouses putting A1 on the table, and if you ask for it, listen for cursing in the kitchen. Some steakhouses and chefs (OK myself included, I make my own herbed butter) like to place a daub of butter or an herbed butter on the surface to add unctuousness.

Chef's SECRET: Sometimes I keep a cup of "**Beef Love**", melted beef fat trimmed from aged steaks (remember that I make friends with those butchers... ha-ha) next to my grill station and I paint the steaks with it using a silicone brush before they are served.

So, If you absolutely have to dress up your steaks, try to keep it simple. **My Rich Red Wine Sauce** is a classic, as is **Horseradish Cream Sauce**, but I prefer to save them for leaner cuts like flank steak or sirloin. I have a Japanese friend who served me a great steak with tangy green wasabi paste, the horseradish-like root. I liked it a lot, but it did mask the natural goodness of the meat. In Argentina, **Herbaceous ChimiChurri Sauce** is everywhere. **Caramelized Onions**, grilled onions, grilled mushrooms, grilled red peppers, are also popular, garnishes.

NOTE: See end for all **BLUE Highlighted** items.

Accompaniments: I try to let the steak be the center of the show. Meat and potatoes are unbeatable, although rice is nice and couscous is cool. Try my simple **Warm French Potato Salad** sometime. Keep the veggies simple also, like my **Crunchy French Green Beans**, or, since the grill is primed and ready, go for **Grilled Asparagus**.

Otherwise...

Two things I insist on with my steaks: A big red wine and lots of good friends.

Recipes:

OK when you put a piece of meat dunked in this red wine sauce, your life will change. You will understand why the French are masters of cuisine. Similar to the classic French Bordelaise sauce, this velvety rich sauce makes a classic topping for beef and lamb. I love it on beef tenderloin or filets mignon. I like to serve boiled baby potatoes on the side, and I douse them with this sauce too. Makes 1 cup.

Change Your Life Rich Red Wine Sauce:

- 5 tablespoons butter
- 1 large onion, coarsely chopped
- 1 carrot, skinned and coarsely chopped
- 1 stalk celery, coarsely chopped or crushed
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed or pressed
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary leaves
- 1 teaspoon dried sage leaves, crushed
- 1 whole bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 (750 ml bottle or 3 cups) dry red wine
- 2 cups or a 14 ounce can beef stock or use 3 tablespoons of demi-glace
- 3 tablespoons grape jelly
- 1 pinch of salt

In a large frying pan melt 3 of the 5 tablespoons of the butter and add the onion, carrot, celery, rosemary, sage, bay leaf, and peppercorns. Cook over a high heat, stirring occasionally, for about 15 minutes or

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until the onions begin to brown. That is why we use a non-stick pan, when you reduce liquid this much, it can really make a mess of other pans. By the way, the mix of 2 parts onion, to 1 part carrot, and 1 part celery is called a **Mirepoix (MEER-a-pwah)**, and is a foundation of French cooking and is common in soups, stuffing's, and, of course, sauces.

Add the garlic and cook for about 2 minutes. Add the tomato paste and cook for about 3 minutes until it begins to darken. Add the wine and the beef stock. Boil for 15-20 minutes. Pour everything through a strainer into a saucepan, and squeeze the juices through the strainer with a ladle, wooden spoon or whatever you used to stir the veggies.

Boil over high heat until it is reduced to about 1 cup and keep an eye on things so it doesn't burn. Now add the grape jelly and stir until it is thoroughly dissolved. Turn off the heat, taste and add salt if necessary. It will not be thick and goopy like ketchup, it will be more like egg nog in thickness. If you are not planning on using the sauce immediately or don't plan to use it all, you can store it in the fridge or freezer. When you need the sauce again, warm it and add the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter, and when it is thoroughly melted, swirl it around with a spoon and serve immediately.

NOTE: Do not whisk in the butter, just swirl it. This is called "mounting it" with butter (yes, that's the correct technical term). If you feel decadent, add another tablespoon. **Optional:** Taste and add a dash of balsamic vinegar and splash hot sauce just for the fun of it...Ok so I had been drinking, but it tastes great!

Ok, About the butter... Yes, there is a lot, and PLEASE don't use margarine and don't leave any out. Butter is better. There is something special about the chemistry of butter that helps enrich and thicken this sauce. That is why we do not use flour or corn starch to thicken it and it does not matter if it is salted or unsalted. If it is salted you may just want to skip the pinch of salt at the end.

Ok, About the wine... Look for a wine that is not high in tannin. That is the component of young reds, especially Cabernet Sauvignon, so that it makes your tongue feel as though you've been licking a dusty window sill... Also, try for a wine that is low in acid. That component makes the wine very tart, typical of Pinot Noir and Beaujolais. Steer away from the cheap jug wines that often have preservatives and rubbery flavors. **Merlot is a good choice, as is Australian Syrah.** You can even use a ruby port (HEAVEN!!!), but if you do, just skip the jelly because the wine is sweet. But, seriously, you don't need to spend more than \$10 per 750 ml bottle.

Ok, About the tomato paste... There is just a little bit in this recipe, but don't hesitate to open a can. You can freeze the rest. I scoop the leftover into 1-tablespoon dollops, freeze them on a sheet pan, and then dump them into a zipper bag in the freezer. Then, whenever I need a little bit of paste, it's right there in pre-measured amounts.

Ok, About the jelly... The French recipe from school called for red currant jelly, and I KNOW purists will lapse into apoplexy when they see the use of Concord grape jelly, but it really does a great job of rounding out the middle and adding complexity. Concord grape jelly is my first choice because it is so bright and fruity, but you can use other dark fruits like cherry or raspberry (seedless, please). In a pinch, you can use sugar, just use 1/2 the quantity of jelly.

On charter, we run out of things and have to be really great at improvising all the time,
Thus, the grape jelly when red currant was unattainable.

“Secretariat” Horseradish Cream Sauce for the Triple Crown: Beef, Fish, & Veggies:

Secretariat was the greatest horse that ever lived winning 16 of his 21 races. From my living room back in the day, I watched him win the first Triple Crown in 25 years in 1973 (the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont Stakes. It was breathtaking. He was last coming out of the gate at the Derby and won by 2 1/2 lengths and set the track record of 1:59 2/5 that stands as of this writing.

At the Preakness he again broke last from the gate, won again by 2 1/2 lengths. The clock malfunctioned, so we can never know for sure how fast he went. The Belmont was breathtaking. It was close at the start, with Sham, second place finisher to Secretariat in both previous races running together. And then the big chestnut colt kicked in the afterburners and won by an astonishing 31 lengths, running the fastest 1 1/2 miles in history at 2:24, despite not being challenged. The record still stands.

Ok, Horseradish has nothing to do with horses, gladly, but it is a real “giddy-up” (sorry) in other dishes. It is a white root that looks like a crooked white carrot and has lovely white flowers in spring that smell like, you guessed it, horseradish! Farmers dig it up, clean off the dirt, peel it, and grate it. It has a raw kick, and my ex-husbands Uncle Giuliano, whose family is from Capri, in Southern Italy, was known to grate it raw on pasta with tomato sauce instead of using hot pepper flakes. **NOTE:** It is not at its full strength raw. However, mix it with a little distilled white vinegar and a pinch of salt and you have the same sinus opening stuff that you buy in the chill chest of the grocery store with all three alarms ringing.

Anyway, this creamy mild horsey sauce starts with the grocery store stuff, but you can make it from scratch. It works like a champion on the “Triple Crown of Roast Beef” sandwiches I make, as well as on smoked salmon, and baked potatoes. You can also use it on corned beef and its cousin, New England Boiled Dinner and I love it as a dip for carrots, celery, and potato chips.

Recipe for Secretariat Horseradish Cream Sauce:

1/4 cup sour cream
2 tablespoons prepared horseradish in vinegar
2 tablespoon milk
1 tablespoon mayonnaise
2 pinches table salt
2 pinches ground black pepper

Mix all the ingredients and taste. Add more of whatever you want. Try to refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to allow them to mingle properly. Makes: Enough for a 2-4 pound roast

About the Horseradish... If you grow your own like we did last summer on Nantucket, dig out a root or three, wash it well, peel it, grate it fine with a box grater, and mix in distilled white vinegar enough to make it slushy. Add a pinch or three of salt, and let it age in the fridge for a few hours to activate all the flavors.

About the Sour Cream... You can substitute Crème Fraiche, heavy cream, or mayo for part of the sour cream...or try the Plain FAGE Greek Yogurt to cut calories.

Some other Optional Mix-ins... Roasted garlic. For serving with fish, add 2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill. For serving with beef, add 4 tablespoons chopped chives or green onions.

My Caramelized Onions Recipe:

Mahogany colored caramelized onions are a wonderful sweet savory ingredient in French Onion Soup, and for topping for ribs, brisket, caramelized onion pizza, chops, steaks, burgers, hotdogs, and baked potatoes, or whatever... As amazing as it seems, onions can be very sweet if cooked slowly. The process converts the natural sugars to caramel. Naturally, the sweeter the onion, the better the outcome.

If they are in season, try to use Vidalia's from Georgia (May and June), Walla Walla from Washington State (June through August), Texas Sweets (April through June), Maui's from Hawaii (summer through November), Sweet Imperials from California, and OsoSweet from Chile (January through March). These breeds are usually 3-6% sweet and can even get up to 10% sweet. As a bonus, they are also lower in pyruvic acid, the stuff that gives onions bite and makes you cry when cutting them.

But, if you are just using regular onions, you can sweeten them with a pinch of sugar, brown sugar, honey, or even molasses. **NOTE:** When onions are cheap or I go to COSTCO or the local farmers market, I freeze baggies of caramelized ones; they defrost fine and they are great for moistening sandwiches and also for a gazillion other things."

Caramelized Onions Recipe:

2 cups of sliced onions
3 tablespoons butter
2 pinches of salt

Peel the onions and cut them into 1/8 - 1/4" slices (I wear swim goggles to keep from crying). melt the butter, stir in the onions, and add the salt. Let them cook until they are brown all over but not burned, stirring every 5 minutes or so. The idea is to slowly extract most of the moisture, burn off the acrid stuff that makes you cry, and turn the copious natural sugars to caramel.

Option #1: Add a pinch or two of hot pepper flakes when you add the onions to the pan. Just because you can.

Option #2: When the onions are mostly brown, add 1/2 teaspoon of inexpensive balsamic vinegar. This really amps up the sweetness, and balances it with some tartness. Cook another 10 minutes until the vinegar is fully absorbed.

Option #3: When the onions are ready, add 2 teaspoons of fresh rosemary, thyme, or oregano and cook for 5 minutes. If you use dried herbs, add them before the onions turn brown so the herbs can absorb some moisture and give up more of their flavor.

Separate them thoroughly. Get a large frying pan. It is important that you spread the onions out over a large surface, so don't do this in a saucepan or a small frying pan. And non-stick is best. Over a medium to low heat, **Makes:** About 1 cup or enough for topping a 12" pizza, for topping 6 sandwiches, or for topping 6 baked potatoes

NOTE: I seriously thought about giving up my [ChimiChurri Sauce](#) recipe but mine is an authentic Argentine one passed on to me by someone who would probably not appreciate my sharing it...Sooooo go ahead and Google it and find your own.



This Warm French Potato Salad is also The World's Easiest Potato Salad Recipe:

This may be the world's easiest potato salad, but it also may be the world's best. Served warm, it is a sure-fire hit.

2 pounds new potatoes or other waxy potatoes
1/2 teaspoon table salt
2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves
1/3 cup of your best extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 teaspoon large-grain salt such as sea salt

Note. Fresh Thyme is my favorite herb to use for this recipe, but it works great with other green herbs such as oregano, chives, green onions, and basil.

Optional: Put a heaping teaspoon of fresh creamy goat cheese on top of each serving.

Wash the potato skins thoroughly. If they come good and clean, you can leave them on, otherwise peel them off. Cut the potatoes into 1" chunks and put them in a large pot. Cover them with cold water so they are at least 1" below the surface. Bring to a boil with the cover off, add the salt, and then reduce to a simmer for about 15 minutes until they are tender. Drain.

Put the oil and thyme into a large bowl and mix. Add the warm potatoes to the bowl and coat them with the oil. If you are not going to serve them right away you can chill them, but the oil will clump, so bring them to room temp before serving. Just before serving, sprinkle on the sea salt. You can add the salt earlier, but it will dissolve. The taste will be just fine, but if you salt just before serving you'll have some crunch and bursts of salt flavor, sort of like pretzels. Now where's my beer?

Crunchy French-Style Green Beans recipe:

You have heard of French fries right, well here is a recipe for Crunchy French Beans, and they're just as good and I use them as a substitute for FF addicts when I can get away with it. I learned this quick recipe in France at a fancy dinner at a winery in Sauternes.

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Nothing fancy about this great recipe other than the taste. In France they use a variety of bean called **Haicots Vert** that is longer and thinner than the typical string bean grown in the US, but they are appearing in more stores over here so try to find them as I think they work best.

1 pound of fresh green beans

2 tablespoons of fresh duck fat or bacon drippings **NOTE:** Butter will work if you don't have duck fat or bacon drippings, but it's not the same.

1/4 cup unseasoned bread crumbs **NOTE:** You can use seasoned breadcrumbs, but unseasoned is better.

2 tablespoons grated hard cheese (such as parmesan)

Fresh ground salt and fresh ground pepper to taste

Snap off the stem ends of the beans. Boil a large pot of water, about 4 quarts. Fill a bowl about the same time with ice water and set it aside.

When the water is boiling briskly, boil the beans for about 3 minutes. Do not cook them all the way through. This is called *blanching*. Drain them in a colander and plunge them into the ice water. This is called *shocking* and it helps preserve the bright green color. Drain and pat as dry as possible with paper towels. You can do this a day or two in advance.

Heat the oil over a medium medium-high flame in a frying pan. Add the beans and toss them around so they brown a bit on all sides, but don't let them scorch. This should take about 5 minutes max. Then turn the heat down to medium and add the bread crumbs. Toss until they coat the beans and let them toast.

Turn the heat down to low. Salt and pepper to taste. Don't waste any of the bread crumbs that fell off the beans into the pan; sprinkle them over the beans. Sprinkle with the cheese after you plate it, or serve the cheese on the side and let your guests sprinkle it on their plates. **FREAKING YUMMO Baby!!!**

Grilled Asparagus Spears to the Heart:

Grilled asparagus develops rich flavors you just can't get by boiling or steaming. Seasoned, grilled, drizzled with good olive oil and balsamic vinegar, and topped with curls of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, this is by far my favorite preparation.

Asparagus is freshest, sweetest, and crispiest in spring. Look for spears with firm closed tips and select bunches that are about the same diameter so they cook uniformly. Watch out for soft mushy tips.

Some folks think that skinny spears are best, but I've had fabulous fat asparagus. The Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board says "Larger diameter spears are more tender." So there. Just make sure to cut off the woody part of the bottom of the stalk.

Some fun facts about asparagus:

Asparagus is a Lily and it is grown from a root ball called a crown.

After planting it takes about three years before the farmer will harvest them.

The roots will produce for up to 15 years.

Under ideal conditions it can grow 10" in one day.

White asparagus is just asparagus that has had dirt mounded over it as it grows so it doesn't turn green.

If they aren't harvested, the spear heads sprout into ferns and produce red berries.

If you can't use asparagus in a few days after purchase, cut about 1/2" off the bottoms and stand them up in a glass with about 1/2" of water in the bottom.

Grilled Asparagus Recipe:

16 stalks fresh asparagus
3 tablespoons regular olive oil
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon each total of some or all of the following fresh chopped herbs : Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme
1 small block of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, enough to get 20-30 slivers of shaved cheese
1 tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon good quality balsamic vinegar

About the cooking oil... You can also use melted butter, nut oils, or mix in 1/2 teaspoon toasted sesame oil.

About the spices...lemon zest, sieved hard-boiled egg yolks, a hollandaise sauce etc are nice accompaniments.

About the finishing oil... Most of the cooking oil drips off, so adding a little fresh oil at the table rally perks things up. At the table you can substitute butter for the olive oil if you wish, especially if you cooked with butter. If I cook with olive oil, I finish with olive oil.

About the balsamic... I recommend a "tradizionale" or a reduction of an inexpensive balsamic. If you don't have balsamic (and just why don't you?), then use a splash of fresh lemon or lime juice.

Optional: Sometimes I like to throw some rustic chopped macadamia nuts, pistachios, hazelnuts, cashews, slivered almonds or peanuts in a pan and heat them on medium high for a few minutes until they toast but don't burn, and then I sprinkle them on the asparagus just before serving. 1/4 cup is more than enough for this recipe.

Pour the olive oil in a glass mixing cup and add the spices. Let the mix sit for about 5 minutes. Chop off the woody part of the spears near the bottoms. Lay the asparagus on a platter or in a pan and pour the flavored oil over them and roll them around until they are well-covered. Let them marinate for about 5 minutes.

Preheat the grill to medium hot. Place the asparagus at a right angle to the grid of the grill grates so they don't fall through. If one commits suicide, just leave it alone. Don't try to retrieve it now. Grill the asparagus, lid on, until they brown slightly on one side, about 5 minutes, roll them and grill for only 2-3 minutes on the second side. A few char marks are OK, but don't incinerate them. Stand by your grill. Bite into one near the base to make sure the doneness is the way you like it (I like it with a bit of crunch).

Arrange on a platter when they are done so they are all pointing in the same direction. Let them cool for about 5 minutes. They do not have to be red hot when served. Now sprinkle with the cheese, the oil, and the vinegar. You can substitute lemon or lime juice for the vinegar if you wish.

And here is One Final Chef's Grilling Secret: That I call **The Vineyard Method**

When visiting wineries in Bordeaux, back in the day...Bordeaux is the French region that makes wine perfectly designed for steaks, I saw a cooking method that blew me away. Every winter vineyard owners prune most of the new branches, called canes, off the vines. They then have huge piles of grapevine wood, rarely thicker than a pencil... and then during the fall harvest season they will take a big stack of dried canes, and set them on fire. They quickly burn down to a glowing mound, and the workers will grill meats over the embers. The flavor is exquisite. The French call this method **sarment** (pronounced sar-MO), and the Spanish call it **sarmiento**.

Up in the Hampton's a few summers back, grapevines abounded wild in the woods and grow on fences along the roadside. I even planted a few Himrod table grapes (the best I have ever tasted) and I saved the prunings. By the end of the year, I had enough wood for four to five cooks.

NOTE: Certainly, if you have vineyards nearby where you live you could get some pruning's from them...I had always meant to ask but there were just so many growing wild by us I never had to.

Anyway, here is how to do it:

I crumple two sheets of newspaper and put it in the bottom of my Weber Kettle. Then I stuff as many dried vine prunings as I can fit on top of the paper, all the way to the top of the kettle.

On goes the top grate. I light the paper from below, and the whole thing goes poof in a few minutes with 5' foot flames baby. **VERY Impressive...** and within a few minutes, I have glowing white hot embers. I wait until I can no longer see yellow flame.

Then I scrape the top grate, on goes the meat, usually about 3/4" thick, lid is off, turn in 3 to 4 minutes, and it's done in another 3 to 4 minutes. The burning fruitwood creates temperatures in the 1000F range and gives it a fine flavor. I have also done this successfully with cherry tree twigs.

Happy Memorial Day 2011 ...
and I hope this is a Super Glorious Summer for us all!