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Your guide to the perfect summer barbeque

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Tips for hosting an outdoor gathering

1. Get organised

Even if it's a casual outdoor gathering, make a list of who you want to invite – this way you have a solid idea of numbers and you'll also know if you need to cater for allergies or vegetarians. A second list for what you need to buy will also help you stay on top of things and makes you less likely to forget something. Don't forget the side dishes and condiments!

2. Keep your neighbours in mind

It's always a nice idea to extend an invite to your next-door neighbours. Even if they don't come, it's a nice gesture and gets them on your good side, making them less likely to complain about any noise coming from your garden.

3. Keep it simple

Don't go overboard with your menu as things are more likely to go wrong if food is overcomplicated. You should also ensure that food can be eaten with one hand or just a fork. Many people will be standing or have their plate in their lap and needing to use a knife and fork will make things awkward.

4. Prep in advance

Prepare whatever you can that morning or even the night before. Meat can be marinated, vegetables chopped and salads prepared in advance. This means less stress for you when guests begin to arrive.

5. Decorate

If the barbeque is for a birthday or special occasion, feel free to get creative with decorating – you can even pick a theme! However, as barbeques in rainy Ireland are usually held with very short notice, it might be easier to host a casual gathering. If you want to add some character, a few fairy lights or Chinese lanterns can really brighten things up.

6. No musical chairs

Don't assume that people are fine with standing. If your party is longer than two hours, you should have seating for at least 80% of the guests. Move indoor seating outside when you can, and borrow folding chairs from friends. The atmosphere will be noticeably more relaxed when people are able to sit down.

7. Don't run out of food

Planning exactly how much you need isn't an exact science, but we do have some approximate guidelines to start you off. If you're making both burgers and hotdogs, allow one of each for every guest, with some extra just in case. For other cuts of meat like steak or chicken wings, ask your butcher for advice – don't try to guess. Ask guests to bring sides with them to take the pressure off and have some salad, coleslaw and potato salad ready just in case.

8. Make a signature drink

If you want to provide something to drink, don't go overboard trying to cater for every preference. Make up a nice summery cocktail and have some beers in the fridge ready to go. People normally turn up with something they can drink whether you ask or not, so it's doubtful you'll run out.

9. Entertainment

If you have kids coming make sure you have some form of entertainment ready to keep them occupied. It doesn't have to be fancy – skipping ropes, indoor crafts or even board games can easily amuse bored kids. Just avoid anything with balls as these can hit your guests or even land on the barbeque if the kids get too excited.

10. Have a cleaning game plan

First of all, save yourself extra work by investing in paper plates, plastic cutlery and disposable cups. Make sure you have at least one large bin bag for every 10 people. Line bins with more than one bag so you can remove and replace full bags in one step if it needs to be done during the party.

The 8 steps to safe barbequing

Step 1: Clean the grill

Before you do anything, make sure your barbeque has been thoroughly cleaned. If it's your first time barbequing since last summer, give it a proper scouring using oven cleaner on the metal rack and rinsing it with warm soapy water.

Step 2: Refrigerate

We know it's easier to cook when all the food is close to hand, but it's best to leave everything in the fridge until it's time to cook. Leaving uncooked meat sitting outdoors while you cook other items is just asking for trouble.

Step 3: Keep your hands clean

Between the social atmosphere of barbequing and the fact the sink is back in the kitchen, cooks often forget to wash their hands. This can lead to serious contamination so be sure to wash your hands before and after handling food.

Step 4: Keep things separate

Keep raw meat away from vegetables, salads and cooked meat. It's also important that you don't put cooked or ready-to-eat food on a dish that's been used for uncooked meat.

Step 5: Keep a lid on it

Insects are the unwanted guests at every outdoor barbeque so be sure you keep food covered whenever you can.

Step 6: Battle the burn

Cooking food properly has always been an issue when barbequing and it is the No.1 way to give your guests food poisoning. Often cooks will char food until it's black, thinking that means it's cooked, when in reality the inside is still raw. When barbequed food is cooked properly it will be piping hot all the way through, juices will run clear and there will be no pink meat remaining.

Step 7: Keep an eye on marinades

Another common mistake is using marinade sauces on cooked food. If you have marinated raw meat in the sauce, it should never be used as a side sauce or poured over cooked meat. If you don't want to waste the marinade, cook it on the hob, ensuring it has been brought to a boil and cooked thoroughly to kill any bacteria transferred from the raw meat.

Step 8: Mind your leftovers

Barbeque leftovers can be amazing the next day, but it's so important to ensure they're safe to eat. Don't leave them sitting outside – instead transfer them into the kitchen where they can cool and cover them, popping them in your fridge within two hours of cooking. Remember to use them within three days.

Great recipes for your summer barbeque

Simple Lamb Koftas

Description:

If you have small children you can skip the skewers and simply make the kofta shape without them.

Ingredients:

2 tsp fresh mint
Wooden or metal skewars (optional)
600g lean lamb mince
120g breadcrumbs
3 cloves garlic
2 eggs
2 tsp fresh thyme

Method:

- In a food processor, pulse the breadcrumbs with the garlic and herbs.
- Add the mince and eggs and pulse again until combined.
- Shape into whatever style kofta you like, perhaps long and thin or a little bit thicker and shorter.
- When shaped place a skewer through each one.
- Place in the fridge for over an hour or even better overnight, to allow the flavours to really develop.
- When you are ready, cook over medium heat either in the grill, in a frying pan or, if it's summer, why not on the barbeque. Just be sure to cook the meat through until it is well browned.
- Enjoy with pitta bread and salad.



Great recipes for your summer barbeque

Inverted cashel blue burger with roasted tomatoes and red onion salad

Description:

If you want something a little different and more exciting than the usual bbq then this is one recipe you must try.

Ingredients:

50g (2 oz) cashel blue or roquefort cheese
50g (2 oz) unsalted butter
1 tbsp snipped fresh chives
675g (1 1/2lb) minced beef
12 baby tomatoes, vines still attached
3 tbsp olive oil
Juice of ½ lemon
2 tsp sweet chilli sauce
Handful of fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 small red onion, peeled and very thinly sliced
2 breakfast muffins, halved
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Method:

- Mash together the cheese and butter in a small bowl. Season with peppers and stir in the chives. Shape into a short cylinder, no more than 5cm (2in) in length, and wrap in clingfilm. Chill for at least an hour to firm up.
- Divide the beef into four portions. Using wet hands shape into round patties 2.5cm (1 in) thick, remove the blue cheese butter from the fridge and cut into four even-sized pieces. Make a deep indentation in the middle of each patty and insert a piece of butter, pushing the beef around it until it is completely enclosed. Chill for at least an hour or up to 24 hours until ready to cook.
- Preheat the grill to its highest setting or, if using a charcoal barbeque to cook the burgers, light it 30 minutes before you want to start cooking. If using a gas barbeque, light it 10 minutes beforehand. Also preheat the oven to 200c/400F/ gas mark 6. Snip the tomatoes into four portions of three and arrange in a small roasting tin. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Roast in the oven for 12-15 minutes until lightly charred and just beginning to soften.
- Sprinkle a teaspoon of pepper all over the chilled burgers. Put on the grill rack and cook for 4 minutes on each side for rare, 6 minutes for medium and 8-9 minutes for well done.
- To make a dressing, mix the remaining olive oil with the lemon juice and sweet chilli sauce. Place the parsley and red onion in a separate bowl and then fold in two-thirds of the dressing.
- To serve, toast the muffin halves on the grill rack and place on warmed plates. Put a burger on each muffin half and then add a bunch of roasted tomatoes. Pile the red onion salad on top and drizzle with the remaining dressing.



Great recipes for your summer barbeque

Griddled glazed vegetable kebabs

Description:

If you have small children you can skip the skewers and simply make the kofta shape without them.

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp clear honey
- 1 tsp grainy mustard
- 2 tbsp oil
- 1 courgette, thickly sliced
- 1 small aubergine, cut into chunks
- 1 small red onion, cut into wedges
- 8 cherry tomatoes
- 1 orange pepper, cut into chunks.

Method:

- Soak 4 wooden skewers in water for 30 mins, this will stop them from burning.
- Heat the bbq or the oven to 180°C/ gas 6.
- Combine the honey, mustard and oil with the seasoning.
- Thread the veg onto the skewers and brush with glaze.
- Cook for 25-30 minutes or on the bbq and brush with the remaining glaze before serving.



Great recipes for your summer barbeque

Chakchouka

Description:

Translating Arabic to English can be tricky. That is why, in the world of food, you often see the names of Middle Eastern dishes spelt in different ways, as with this fabulously flavoursome dish from North Africa.

Ingredients:

60 ml rice bran oil
6 ripe tomatoes, cut in half
1 small yellow capsicum, cut into strips
1 small green capsicum, cut into strips
1 small red capsicum, cut into strips
1 red onion, cut into rings
1 large red chilli, finely chopped
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp sweet paprika
1 tsp sea salt
8 eggs
3 tbsp finely chopped flat-leaf (Italian) parsley
Chargrilled bread, to serve



Method:

- Preheat the barbecue grill to high. Put the oil in a large bowl.
- Add the tomatoes, capsicums and onion and toss the veggies around to coat them in the oil.
- Working in batches, tumble some of the veggies over the grill and spread them around so they don't overlap.
- Cook the vegetables for 8–10 minutes, turning them often using metal tongs until they are tender and scored with grill marks, then transfer to a bowl.
- Cook the remaining vegetables in the same way.
- Sprinkle the cooked vegetables with the chilli, cumin, paprika and salt and toss together.
- Lightly mash using a potato masher, so the tomatoes especially are well crushed.
- Spoon the mixture onto a heavy-based baking tray.
- Put the tray on the barbecue grill and allow to heat up and sizzle.
- Form eight evenly spaced little wells in the mixture, then crack an egg into each one.
- Close the barbecue lid, if your barbecue has one, or place another baking tray over the top.
- Cook for 8–10 minutes, just until the egg whites are firm. Sprinkle with the parsley and serve hot, with chargrilled bread.

Great recipes for your summer barbeque

Fennel apple slaw

Ingredients:

½ head white cabbage

1 bulb fennel

2 Granny Smith apples

1 carrot

Dressing:

3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

3 tbsp cider vinegar

1 tbsp honey

½ tsp dijon mustard

Salt & freshly ground black pepper

Method:

- Shred the cabbage and fennel bulb and place in a large bowl.
- Grate the carrot and the apples (leaving the skin on) and add to the bowl.
- Combine the olive oil, vinegar, honey, dijon mustard, and mix thoroughly.
- Pour the dressing over the shredded vegetables and toss well.
- Enjoy!



Mojito mocktails

Description:

These non alcoholic mojitos taste fabulous!

Method:

- Mash together the sugar and mint using a pestle and mortar if you have one, if not use a rolling pin and a bowl.
- Add a handful of crushed ice into 2 tall glasses.
- Divide the lime juice evenly between the glasses and add the mint mixture.
- Top up with soda water and add a straw.

