

HOW TO COOK THE PERFECT STEAK

You've selected your favorite cut of steak; now you have to cook it. Broiling or grilling is the leanest way, as excess fat will drip off. Here are a few things to remember:

- Beef cooks more evenly and stays juicier if allowed to come to room temperature prior to cooking.
- Placing the refrigerated meat on a thick aluminum or copper pan or cookie sheet will help warm it up by conducting the cold away more swiftly. Cover lightly with plastic wrap, but do not make an airtight seal.
- Grill the meat hot. A good way to test the grill is with water. Sprinkle a few drops on the surface; if it sizzles, you're set.
- Be sure to cook the meat at the correct temperature. This is often the difference between a good steak and an inedible slab of shoe leather. Too high a temperature can char the outside before the inside is done properly, or can overcook the whole thing.
- For best results, sear the meat over high heat before cooking it over reduced heat. Searing seals the juices in and allows the meat to cook more evenly.
- To check the temperature of your barbecue or gas grill, cautiously hold the palm of your hand about four inches above the grate. Count the number of seconds you can hold your hand in that position before the heat forces you to pull away. Four seconds means medium coals, five seconds indicates medium-low.
- Always use tongs to turn your steak; a fork will pierce the meat and allow the natural juices to escape.
- Take the steak off the grill just short of the desired doneness (see *"How to Know When Your Steak's Done Right,"* page 71). A thick steak will continue to cook after it's been removed from the heat. **DON'T OVERCOOK IT.** You can always put it back on the grill, but you can't undo what's been done.
- Allow the meat to rest 10 minutes before carving so the juices can settle and be redistributed throughout the meat.
- Prepare your side dishes first. In most cases, your steak will be done in a few minutes, and you don't want it to get cold while you're waiting for your baked potato or steamed vegetables. □