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[HOME](#) > [OUTDOOR LIFE](#) > [RECREATION](#) > 15 GRILLING HACKS AND TIPS FROM CULINARY PROS



# **15 Grilling Hacks and Tips from Culinary Pros**

Easy ways to light up your next grilling feast

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Are you ready to achieve the next level in grill master status?

Perhaps you've already gotten the basics of marinating and cooking temps down and you're ready to make restaurant-grade steak. Or maybe you're ready try a new project like making dessert on the grill.

To help you up your grilling game, we tapped the hard-earned smarts and experience of professional chefs and other culinary pros from around the country. Here are 15 of their tricks, hacks, and tips for making the most of your grill, **whether it's charcoal or gas**. Go on out and fire it up!

## 1. Try Mixing Wood

Different combinations of wood chips can season dishes with a distinct smoky flavor, according to Daniel Bojorquez, owner and executive chef at Somerville, Massachusetts, restaurant La Brasa, which uses a wood-burning oven and grill.

"You can start to play with different ratios, such as 50% hickory and oak chips," he says.

## 2. Choose Fresh Wood Carefully—and Let Dry Out

If you chop your own firewood, certain types like pinewood may not be great for grilling chips, says Keith Schmidt, owner of **KREUZ Market**, a Lockhart, Texas barbecue institution.

"The oils can definitely give a bitterness to meat if it's too green of a wood," Keith says.

More reliable varieties include certain fruitwoods like apple and cherry, mesquite, hickory, pecan, and oak.

"Regardless of what it is, you want to give it a few months to dry out, [or] you'll get a heavy, thick smoke."

## 3. Get Seasoning Inspiration from Your Morning Beverage

Mike O'Donnell, CEO of online barbecue course provider **Grill Master University**, enjoys a coffee rub on his steak. "Fresh ground coffee beans with black pepper, paprika, and a little bit of brown sugar for caramelization," he says.

For herbal undertones, Daniel suggests seasoning what you're cooking with chamomile, earl gray, or mint tea.

## 4. Mist Meat as It Cooks

To keep meat from drying as it cooks, put apple cider vinegar in a clean spray bottle and mist the meat periodically, Daniel says.

## 5. Section Off Grilling Space

For a charcoal grill, instead of heating up the entire grill, light just one side, and move some of the hot charcoal to the other side to create a cooler zone, suggests Saffron Hodgson, founder of [BushCooking.com](https://www.bushcooking.com) and former executive director of the National Barbecue and Grilling Association.

"If a steak, sausage, or burger is cooking too fast on the outside, you can move it to the cooler side and focus on cooking the inside," she says.

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## 6. Toss a Whole Onion in the Charcoal

Mike says the onion will grill as you make your meal.

"At the end, it's charred black," he says. "You peel off two to three layers and inside, it's a tender, delicious onion you can serve as a side."

## 7. Use a Cooler to Keep Grilled Foods Warm

Saffron heats a [cooler](#) using boiling water, then dumps the water, and puts items inside with a towel as they come off the grill. "It's the same thermodynamics that keep food cool," she says. "You can keep adding to it so everything is served at once."

## 8. Tenderize Brisket on Low Heat

Few things beat an extra-tender brisket. "Brisket comes from an area that's got a lot of connective tissue, and the tenderizing actually happens after the meat itself is done," Keith says.

After the brisket is cooked through, lower the heat and leave it on the grill for a bit to let it tenderize.

## 9. Precook Dense Veggies to Maintain Textures

Saffron precooks potatoes, either in the oven or by boiling them on the stove, until they're just starting to soften, and then finishes them off on the grill.

"Otherwise you end up with that overcooked outside and crunchy inside," she says.

Other veggies to precook include corn, carrots, and larger asparagus stalks.

## **10. Protect Delicate Foods with a Plank**

Soak an untreated piece of wood in water, then use it as a grilling plank for fragile foods like fruit and cheese. "It's creating a barrier between the harsh heat," Saffron says. "[And] you get flavor transfer from the wood planks."

## **11. Get Creative with Pizza Crust**

Have you ever tried grilling pizza instead of baking it? When Saffron uses regular pizza dough, she likes to put it on a stone or other solid base placed on the grates to cook it evenly.

"If you're cooking directly on the grill, use a tortilla or pita bread [instead of dough] so the heat can pass through," she says.

## **12. Make Desserts in a Pot**

From crumbles and crisps to cheesecakes, a variety of desserts can be made in a Dutch oven placed on a charcoal grill. Along with putting charcoal under the pot, you can place some on top too, Saffron says.

## **13. Liven Up Your Lemonade**

Grilling lemons makes them easier to juice, says Saffron.

"There's a smoky flavor, and the caramelization of the sugar in the lemons makes it sweeter without having to add additional sugar," she says.

## **14. Add Smokiness to Chocolate Desserts**

Try taking cake icing to smoky new heights: "You mash up dark chocolate and put in a metal serving bowl in the **smoker** for about 20 to 30 minutes," Mike says.

## **15. Don't Sweat Clean-Up**

Grillers, rejoice! You should sanitize your grill grate at the beginning of the season, but you don't have to do it after every use.

"You can just brush it and get the debris off," Keith says. "When you turn on the gas or light the charcoal next time, that heat is going to help keep it clean."

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