

How to Grill Vegetables



Choosing the vegetables

A wide variety of vegetables lend themselves to grilling. Here are a few: corn (in or out of the husk), asparagus, eggplant, mushrooms, onions, summer squash, tomatoes and bell peppers. Select firm vegetables since they hold up better during grilling.

For grilling whole vegetables, go for smaller vegetables. Baby vegetables are ideal, but other small-sized vegetables will do just fine as well. For kabobs or vegetables on a skewer, choose larger ones and cut them into good-sized chunks or wedges. If cut too small, the vegetables may fall off the skewer during cooking. Aim for chunks about two inches long.

To marinate or not to marinate

Marinating is a great way to add flavor to grilled vegetables. Simple marinades with fresh herbs are nice. Do not use butter because it burns at lower temperatures than olive oil. For plain grilled vegetables, just brush or spray with a little oil so they don't stick to the grill surface.

Tools and equipment

Vegetables can be grilled right on the grill rack, on a grill pan (a sort of metal tray with holes punched in it) or on skewers (either metal or wooden). How to choose? Great vegetables can be grilled using any of these methods, so opt for the most comfortable method for the cook.

The grill pan is probably the easiest to work with since the vegetables won't fall into the fire and are easier to remove from the tray. Just remove the whole pan from the fire and take them off with a spatula.

Skewers are fun and create nice, attractive individual servings (one or two skewers per person) but sometimes the more fragile vegetables, or those that were cut too small, fall off the skewers during grilling.

Using the surface of the grill works well for whole vegetables, but it takes some skill with the tongs to keep food from falling into the charcoal. A long-handled spatula, tongs, fork and knife make life easier for the cook, but in a pinch regular utensils and an oven mitt will do. Just be careful!

The fire

Charcoal and/or wood can be arranged so that different parts of it have different temperatures. This is important for cooking different types of vegetables, or vegetables along with meat or other foods. Tender vegetables (such as those that are commonly eaten raw) including tomatoes, bell peppers and onions need a hot fire, while a medium-hot fire is best for eggplant, mushrooms and zucchini. Long-cooking vegetables — potatoes, beets, carrots or artichokes — should be parboiled, steamed or started in a microwave first and then finished over a hot fire.

To make a fire with two temperatures, such as hot and medium, arrange the coals so that most of them are placed on one side of the grill, tapering the mound of charcoal down toward the other side. The side with the most coals will be the hot side.

Cooking times

Asparagus: pre-cook for 3-4 minutes, grill for 3-5 minutes

Beets: slice 1/2" thick, grill for 25 minutes.

Broccoli/cauliflower florets: grill for 5-10 minutes.

Carrots: sliced 1-1/2" thick or baby, pre-cook for 3-5 minutes, grill for 5-15 minutes.

Corn on cob: (husks removed, in foil), grill for 20-30 minutes.

Eggplant: (1" thick slices), grill for 8 minutes.

Fennel and leeks: pre-cook for 10 minutes, grill for 8 minutes.

Mushrooms: whole: grill 7-10 minutes.

New potatoes: (halved), pre-cook for 10 minutes, grill for 10-12 minutes.

Onions: (sliced 1/2" thick), grill for 8-10 minutes on grill pan, or 3-5 minutes directly on the grill.

Zucchini or summer squash: (1/2" thick), grill for 5-6 minutes.

Planning Your Menu Layout

Plan the Menu with your Guests in Mind

As you plan your menu, be sensitive to those who may have specific food allergies.

If a guest has food preferences that are hard to accommodate, ask them to bring something to share with everyone. This way, your guests have a variety to choose from in a safe and pleasing manner.

How Much is Enough

Estimating the amount of time, money, and actual food it will take to feed a crowd is truly unknown. Keeping a party planning journal is a great way to help you plan a similar party in the future. When making your journal save receipts, take pictures of decorations depicting the theme, and consider any guest comments.

If you are planning back to back parties, consider purchasing enough food for both parties at once. Purchase non-perishable items ahead of time and watch for coupons. Don't be afraid of institutional size cans of chili, beans, and fruits. You can find these items in most grocery stores at reasonable prices. Consider purchasing inexpensive foods in bulk like potato chips, salsa, potato salad, and brownies to make the meal stretch. Start serving these items towards the head of the table where the plates are served. This will allow guests to pack their plates with bulkier, inexpensive items first, before they see the "gold mine" at the end of the table. Strategically place more expensive items throughout the buffet in smaller quantities.

It is also best to remember to lay out appropriate serving utensils for the size and texture of the food. (For example, provide tongs for salads with bulky pieces that are hard to handle.) This way, guests will waste less food due to having too large of a portion.

Let your Guest Eat with their Eyes First

The key to planning a memorable event is to make the intangibles tangible. Make the theme of the party obvious to any onlooker. Use bright colors that represent your theme. Also remember to use different, heights, shapes, textures and forms to bring interest to the room.

