

Grilled Beef Satay

From America's Test Kitchen episode: *Skewered and Wrapped*.

Serves 4 as a main dish, or 6 as an appetizer

See below for tips on prepping lemon grass. Bamboo skewers soaked in water for 30 minutes can be substituted for metal skewers. The aluminum pan used for charcoal grilling should be at least 2 3/4 inches deep; you will not need the pan for a gas grill. Note: unless you have a very high-powered gas grill, these skewers will not be as well seared as they would be with charcoal.

INGREDIENTS

BASTING SAUCE

- 3/4** cup light or regular coconut milk
- 3** tablespoons packed dark brown sugar
- 3** tablespoons fish sauce
- 2** tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3** shallots, minced
- 2** stalks lemon grass, trimmed to bottom 6 inches and minced
- 2** tablespoons grated fresh ginger
- 1 1/2** teaspoons ground coriander
- 3/4** teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1/2** teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2** teaspoon salt

BEEF

- 2** tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2** tablespoons packed dark brown sugar
- 1** tablespoon fish sauce

1 (1 1/2- to 1 3/4-pound) flank steak, halved lengthwise, then sliced on slight angle against grain into 1/4- inch thick slices

Disposable aluminum roasting pan

INSTRUCTIONS

1. FOR THE BASTING SAUCE: Whisk all ingredients together in bowl. Reserve one-third of sauce in separate bowl. (Use reserved sauce to apply to raw beef.)

2. FOR THE BEEF: Whisk oil, sugar, and fish sauce together in medium bowl. Toss beef with marinade and let stand at room temperature for 30 minutes. Weave beef onto 12-inch metal skewers, 2 pieces per skewer, leaving 1 1/2 inches at top and bottom of skewer exposed. You should have 10 to 12 skewers.

3a. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Poke twelve 1/2-inch holes in bottom of roasting pan. Open bottom vent completely and place roasting pan in center of grill. Light large chimney starter mounded with charcoal briquettes (7 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour into roasting pan. Set cooking grate over coals with grates parallel to long side of roasting pan, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

3b. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until very hot, about 15 minutes. Leave all burners on high.

4. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place beef skewers on grill (directly over coals if using charcoal) perpendicular to grate. Brush meat with one-third basting sauce (portion reserved for raw meat) and cook (covered if using gas) until browned, about 3 minutes. Flip skewers, brush with half of remaining basting sauce, and cook until browned on second side, about 3 minutes. Brush meat with remaining basting sauce and cook 1 minute longer. Transfer to large platter and serve with peanut sauce.

TECHNIQUE

HOW TO PREP LEMON GRASS

The tender heart of the lemon grass stalk is used to flavor many Southeast Asian dishes, including our Grilled Beef Satay. While lemon grass is often steeped in soups and stews and removed before serving, it can also be minced and left in the dish. When buying lemon grass, look for green (not brown) stalks that are firm and fragrant.

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- 1.** Trim dry leafy top (this part is usually green) and tough bottom of each stalk.



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- 2.** Peel and discard dry outer layer until moist, tender inner stalk is exposed.



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- 3.** Smash peeled stalk with bottom of heavy saucepan to release maximum flavor from fibrous stalk.



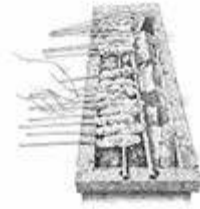
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- 4.** Cut smashed stalk into long, thin strips; cut crosswise to mince.



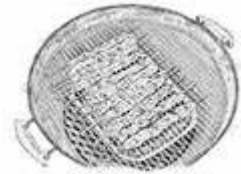
TECHNIQUE

GRILL SETUP FOR SATAY: EAST MEETS WEST

THAI WAY The trough-shaped grills used by Thai street-food vendors concentrate the firepower but require flipping the skewered meat constantly so it doesn't burn.



OUR WAY We corralled the coals in an aluminium pan in the center of the grill to bring them closer to the meat, but not so close that we needed to flip it more than once.

**TECHNIQUE****ROOTING OUT MEALINESS**

We find that acidic ingredients and certain juices, like papaya and pineapple, often added to marinades to tenderize meat, actually turn the exterior mushy. We avoided these in our marinades- but the meat still turned mealy. Could fresh ginger be the culprit?

EXPERIMENT

We soaked beef in three different marinades for 30 minutes and then grilled each sample. The first marinade contained 2 tablespoons of ginger (per our recipe), the second contained 4 tablespoons, and the third contained no ginger.

RESULTS

The beef marinated in 2 tablespoons of ginger was markedly mealy, 4 tablespoons was even worse. Only the beef without ginger in its marinade had the proper tender- but not mushy- texture.

EXPLANATION

Fresh ginger contains an enzyme known as zingibain that, if left too long on meat, breaks down collagen on the meat's surface, producing the same mealy effect as acids and some juices. We expunged ginger from the marinade, saving it for the basting sauce instead.

DON'T MARINATE WITH GINGER



America's Test Kitchen is a 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside of Boston. It is the home of *Cook's Country* and *Cook's Illustrated* magazines and is the workday destination for more than three dozen test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand how and why they work and arrive at the best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of brands that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to *America's Test Kitchen* (www.americastestkitchen.com) on public television.