

January 16, 2011

Grilled Asparagus with Bacon Vinaigrette

If you are cooking bacon for breakfast, fry up enough extra to use in this bacon vinaigrette that night. You can also assemble the vinaigrette and store it, tightly covered in the refrigerator, for up to 4 days. The vinaigrette is versatile, too—toss it with boiled new potatoes or with a butter lettuce and avocado salad.

In a large fry pan over medium heat, cook the bacon until crisp, 7 to 10 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain. Reserve the rendered fat in the pan.

In a small bowl, whisk together the vinegar, shallot, mustard and thyme. Carefully pour the bacon fat through a fine-mesh sieve into a spouted measuring cup. Slowly whisk the bacon fat into the vinegar mixture until smooth and emulsified. Taste the dressing; if it is too strong, whisk in olive oil, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. at a time.

Prepare a hot fire in a charcoal grill, preheat a gas grill to high or heat a stovetop grill pan over high heat.

Pat the asparagus dry with paper towels and place on a platter or in a baking dish. Drizzle with the 2 Tbs. olive oil and roll the asparagus in the oil until well coated. Season with salt. Arrange the asparagus directly over the heat on the grill rack or place in the grill pan and cook, turning as needed, until nicely browned in spots on all sides without burning, 6 to 8 minutes.

Crumble the bacon into small pieces. Arrange the asparagus spears on a platter, pour the dressing over and scatter the bacon over the top. Top with a few grinds of pepper and serve warm. Serves 4 to 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Good Food to Share, by Sara Kate Gillingham-Ryan (Weldon Owen, Inc., 2011).

Grilled Salmon Skewers

For a fresh dinner that's ready in minutes, serve these simple salmon skewers with steamed vegetables tossed with orzo pasta or rice.

Soak 6 wooden skewers in water for 15 minutes. Heat a stovetop grill pan over medium-high heat.

To assemble the salmon skewers, gently bend 1 salmon strip to form a "C," then bend another strip to form a backward "C." Link the 2 strips together by threading a skewer through the ends of each one, where the forward and backward "Cs" come together, forming a round shape. Repeat with the remaining salmon strips.

Brush the salmon on both sides with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

Working in batches, arrange the salmon skewers on the grill pan and cook for 3 minutes. Turn the skewers over and cook for 2 to 3 minutes more. Transfer the skewers to a platter and serve immediately. Serves 6.

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Ingredients for Grilled Asparagus with Bacon Vinaigrette

4 bacon slices
2 Tbs. white wine vinegar
1 shallot, finely minced
1 Tbs. Dijon mustard
1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
Extra-virgin olive oil as needed, plus 2 Tbs.
1 lb. slender asparagus spears, woody ends snapped off
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Ingredients for Grilled Salmon Skewers

2 lb. skinless salmon fillets, cut into 12 strips, each 1 inch wide
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Grilling Vegetables

Grilling is an excellent way to cook most vegetables. The high heat brings out their natural sugars while infusing them with delicious smoky flavor. For optimum flavor and freshness, buy vegetables that are in season, preferably from a farmers' market, and cook them briefly and simply.

The key to grilling vegetables successfully is to get the grill nice and hot, and then to coat both the grill rack and the vegetables with oil to prevent sticking and add flavor.

To test for doneness, pierce a vegetable with a skewer or the tip of a knife. The best way, however, is to cut off a piece and eat it. Some vegetables, such as asparagus and fennel, taste best when crisp-tender. Others, such as eggplant and mushrooms, should be cooked until soft throughout.

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Technique Class: Fresh & Fast: Grilling

Most people associate grilling with warm summer weather, but with the advent of indoor electric grills and stovetop grill pans, cold-weather grilling is easy to accomplish. Indoor grilling allows you to quickly have dinner on the table, incorporating vegetables and meats for a fresh and fast meal.

In theory, indoor electric grills and grill pans can be used in the same manner as outdoor gas grills, but because they don't include a cover, their use is limited to direct-heat cooking. Most recipes for direct-heat grilling can be prepared on indoor equipment, although the cooking times may be longer, as these grills generally do not get as hot as outdoor gas and charcoal grills. Watch for visual clues that indicate the food is done. Be sure your kitchen has adequate ventilation to whisk away smoke and odors. Trim and remove excess fat from meat and poultry, as you do when grilling outdoors, to alleviate fires and excess smoke.

Foods Most Commonly Grilled Indoors

These foods work best when grilling indoors over direct heat: steaks, chops, burgers, lamb racks, butterflied meats and poultry, pork tenderloin, sausages, boneless poultry pieces, fish fillets and steaks, small whole fish, shellfish, kabobs and most vegetables.

Grilling Steaks

Most steaks are tender enough to grill over direct heat, which produces a caramelized crust and juicy interior. Less tender steaks like skirt, flank and hanger benefit from a marinade before grilling to increase their tenderness. When buying steaks, seek out bright red meat with light marbling (internal fat), a fine texture and nearly white outer fat. The more marbling, the more tender and juicy the beef will be. The exterior fat should be minimal, although you can always trim it later.

One of the keys to successful grilling is to add flavor by seasoning the meat with salt, pepper, herbs and spices. These seasonings not only contribute flavor but also form a savory caramelized crust that keeps the steaks juicy and tender.

Grilling Fish

Grilling is one of the simplest and best ways to cook fish. A few guidelines will guarantee the best results.

When grilling indoors with a grill pan, make sure the pan is hot before adding the fish. This sometimes takes up to 10 minutes over high heat. Reduce the heat if the pan starts to smoke. Oil the food rather than the pan. If desired, you can sear crisscross grill marks on the fish by turning it 90 degrees after a few minutes. Plan on cooking fish for 2 to 10 minutes, depending on the thickness.

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Ingredients for Spice-Rubbed Grilled Chicken

1½ to 1¾ lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs, excess fat trimmed

1 Tbs. olive oil

1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice

Coarse kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1½ tsp. ground cumin

¾ tsp. ground coriander

¾ tsp. ground cinnamon

½ to ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper

1½ tsp. grated lemon zest

Minced fresh cilantro for garnish

Spice-Rubbed Grilled Chicken

Cumin, coriander, cinnamon and cayenne perk up everyday chicken thighs in this easy Moroccan-inspired recipe. Serve it with boiled garden beans and whole-grain couscous flavored with lemon zest and cilantro.

Place the chicken on a small baking sheet. Brush on both sides with the olive oil and lemon juice, and season with salt and black pepper. In a small bowl, stir together the cumin, coriander, cinnamon and cayenne and sprinkle over both sides of the chicken. Sprinkle with the lemon zest.

Preheat an indoor electric grill or stovetop grill pan over medium-high heat.

Place the chicken on the grill or grill pan. Cover the grill if possible and cook, turning once, until the chicken is springy to the touch and cooked through, about 6 minutes per side. Transfer the chicken to a warmed platter and garnish with cilantro. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Quick Tips: Boneless chicken thighs take only minutes to grill. If you are cooking for two, make the entire recipe, then cut up leftover chicken and vegetables and mix them into the remaining couscous; season the mixture with olive oil and vinegar for an easy dinner salad the next night. Cut-up cucumber, tomato and radishes would be delicious additions. Toasted almonds or pine nuts would add a pleasant crunch.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Weeknight Fresh & Fast, by Kristine Kidd (Weldon Owen, Inc., 2011).

Lamb Kabobs with Pomegranate Glaze

Pomegranate molasses and fresh mint lend exotic flavors to the lamb. Colorful vegetable skewers cook alongside. Serve with quick-cooking couscous; for extra flavor, cook it in chicken broth with sautéed onions, turmeric and cumin. If you prefer an alternative to red meat, replace the lamb with boneless, skinless chicken thighs.

Soak 12 bamboo skewers in water to cover for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a bowl, stir together the pomegranate molasses, shallot, 1 Tbs. of the olive oil and 1 tsp. of the cumin seeds. Add the lamb and stir to coat. In a large bowl, combine the zucchini, bell pepper, onion, the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil and the remaining 1 tsp. cumin seeds. Season with salt and pepper and stir to coat.

Preheat an indoor electric grill or stovetop grill pan over medium-high heat.

Drain the skewers. Divide the lamb among 4 skewers; reserve the glaze remaining in the bowl. Season the lamb with salt and pepper. Divide the vegetables among 8 skewers, arranging them as you like. Brush the vegetables with the remaining glaze. Place the skewers on the grill or grill pan. Cover the grill if possible and cook the lamb for about 5 minutes per side for medium-rare, or until done to your liking; cook the vegetables until they begin to brown and soften, about 6 minutes per side.

Transfer the skewers to a platter and sprinkle with mint. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Quick Tips: Pomegranate molasses is a thick syrup made from pomegranate juice. It can be found at many supermarkets, in Middle Eastern stores or ordered from mail-order sources. The marinade can be made 1 day ahead of time; store in the refrigerator.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Weeknight Fresh & Fast, by Kristine Kidd (Weldon Owen, Inc., 2011).

Grilled Steak with Sweet Peppers

Assorted peppers, quickly sautéed, make a garden-fresh base for grilled steak. A soy-based marinade elevates the flavor of the steak in the time it takes to cut the vegetables. For a complete dinner, grill slices of rustic bread with the meat.

In a shallow glass baking dish, stir together the soy sauce, the ¼ cup olive oil, the honey, shallots, 1½ Tbs. of the rosemary, the ½ tsp. salt and black pepper, to taste. Pat the steak dry with paper towels. Add the steak to the dish and turn to coat with the marinade. Let stand at room temperature while you prepare the peppers.

In a large nonstick fry pan over medium-high heat, warm the 1 Tbs. olive oil. Add the bell peppers, poblano chili and onion, and season with salt and black pepper. Sauté until the vegetables are tender, about 8 minutes. Add the remaining 1 Tbs. rosemary and the red pepper flakes and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add the vinegar and stir until absorbed. Remove the pan from the heat.

Preheat an indoor electric grill or stovetop grill pan over medium-high heat.

Remove the steak from the marinade. Place the steak on the grill or grill pan and cook for about 4 minutes per side for medium-rare, or until done to your liking. Transfer the steak to a carving board and let rest for 5 minutes.

Warm the pepper mixture and divide among 4 plates. Slice the steak thinly on an angle. Arrange the steak on top of the peppers and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Quick Tips: Flank steak and top sirloin are flavorful cuts for weeknight cooking. For a splurge, use a tender rib-eye or New York strip for this recipe. The peppers can be cooked 1 day ahead of time and refrigerated. Bring them to room temperature or warm in a fry pan over medium heat before serving. Leftovers make great steak sandwiches, or can be served as a salad the next night with a simple vinaigrette made with sherry vinegar.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Weeknight Fresh & Fast, by Kristine Kidd (Weldon Owen, Inc., 2011).

Ingredients for Grilled Steak with Sweet Peppers

¼ cup low-sodium soy sauce

¼ cup plus 1 Tbs. olive oil

2 Tbs. honey

2 large shallots, minced

2½ Tbs. minced fresh rosemary

½ tsp. coarse kosher salt, plus more, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1¼ lb. flank steak or top sirloin steak, about 1 inch thick

1 large red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced

1 large yellow bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced

1 large poblano chili, thinly sliced

1 large red onion, thinly sliced

½ tsp. red pepper flakes

2 Tbs. sherry vinegar or balsamic vinegar

Ingredients for Lamb Kabobs with Pomegranate Glaze

¼ cup pomegranate molasses

1 shallot, minced

3 Tbs. olive oil

2 tsp. cumin seeds, crushed in a mortar with a pestle

1½ lb. boneless leg of lamb, well trimmed and cut into 1-inch cubes

2 zucchini, halved lengthwise and cut into 1-inch pieces

1 large red bell pepper, seeded and cut into 1-inch squares

1 red onion, cut into 1-inch squares

Coarse kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Slivered fresh mint for garnish