

Fire To Fork: A Sodexo Guide To Outdoor Summer Dining



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Foreword

Cooking outdoors is one of life's simplest pleasures - made even more powerful by the benefits it brings to our physical and mental wellbeing. As the summer sun reappears and the days stretch out before us, there's no better time to step outside, light the fire, and reconnect with the act of cooking from scratch.

Spending time in the open air while preparing food has been shown to support better mental health by reducing stress and enhancing mood. Exposure to natural sunlight helps the body synthesise vitamin D, a vital nutrient for immune health, strong bones, and hormone regulation. Cooking outdoors can also serve as a mindful practice - slowing us down, encouraging us to focus on the present moment, and shifting our attention from screens to the rhythm of the fire or grill.

Perhaps most importantly, taking control of our food by cooking it ourselves - especially from scratch - helps us better understand what we're eating. It gives us the freedom to make healthier choices and to prioritise quality ingredients, balance, and nourishment in every meal even if the meal is an indulgent one!

There's also something uniquely restorative about sharing a meal outdoors with others. Whether it's friends, family, or colleagues, eating together fosters connection and strengthens relationships. These shared experiences support not only physical nourishment, but also emotional wellbeing - reminding us that food is about so much more than fuel.

We hope this guide inspires you to fire up the grill, try something new, and make the most of every sunny day. From fire-pit feasts to easy summer salads, we've brought together recipes and techniques to help you enjoy outdoor cooking with confidence and creativity.

Here's to good food, good company, and hopefully a helping of sunshine. From all of us at Sodexo - enjoy the season!

Meet the Team



Niall Hill

Sodexo Ireland Head of Food

Niall has over 30 years' experience working as a chef at the highest levels both nationally and internationally, across a variety of sectors. As head of food at the award-winning food company The Butler's Pantry for 16 years, Niall won numerous awards including the Great Taste Awards, Small Business Award and Blas na hEireann. In addition to having a huge passion for quality local and Irish ingredients, Niall has an MSc in Applied Culinary Nutrition and a BA in Botanical Cuisine and has completed a postgraduate in Sustainability Leadership in Business.

Niall combines knowledge and passion with a highly strategic and practical approach to drive the highest food quality and delivery on an ethos of local, seasonal, nutritious, and sustainable food. Niall joined Sodexo as Head of Food for the Island of Ireland in February of this year and will be actively involved in the development & implementation of food offers & marketing initiatives, while driving a culture of excellence in food service delivery across the Island of Ireland.



John Core

Culinary Nutrition Lead

John Core serves as the Culinary Nutrition Lead for Sodexo, bringing over 25 years of professional culinary experience to the role. John Core holds a Master of Science degree in Applied Culinary Nutrition and utilizes his extensive academic and practical expertise to create dishes that are both delicious and nutritionally balanced for Sodexo's clientele. John delivers promotional pop-up restaurant concepts, culinary based nutrition seminars and one to one clinics for Sodexo client catering program.

Recently, in recognition of his contributions to the field of culinary nutrition, John was honoured with the Paula Mee Applied Culinary Nutrition Award.



Glen Stewart

Mobilisation Catering SME/Regional Development Chef

Glen has nearly 30 years' experience as a chef. Working through the years in Switzerland and Austria as well as in a number of seafood restaurants, hotels and gastro pubs between England and Ireland, he joined Sodexo nearly 13 years ago.

Glen has won several awards in competition and still maintains a passion for French cookery, as well as making novelty and formal celebration cakes in his spare time.



Cathy Adamson

Craft Development Chef

Cathy has been working with Sodexo for 30 years in various sectors of the business and has spent many years being an active member within the UK&I Culinary teams. Cathy has also spent time working with world class chefs & competing at National level to obtain several awards and accolades.

Cathy is committed to developing the culinary talents within our teams and is actively involved with the Northern Ireland Schools Programmes such as 'Future Chef' to encourage young people into the business. Cathy has a real passion for food and loves working with a product or dishes to obtain the best possible flavours, whilst maximising quality.



Stephen Boyle

Craft development chef

Stephen has been in catering for over 30 years. After catering college, he started his career in various London hotels including the Hilton and Savoy where he developed into a seasoned chef.

After a few year he moved to New York and worked in restaurants including seafood restaurants, steak houses and gastro pubs.

He returned to Ireland in 2007 and picked straight up where he left off and became. Executive chef at a Marriott Resort Hotel and later change to corporate catering, he joined Sodexo over 3 years ago.



David Sayce

Regional Development Chef

Chef David Sayce is a seasoned professional with over 25 years of experience in the culinary industry. His career has spanned a wide range of roles, with a significant focus on 5-star hotels and fine dining restaurants.

One of the greatest privileges of his career has been the opportunity to combine his passion for food with travel. His work has taken him across the globe, including stints in Austria, South Africa, Australia, and Hong Kong, where he expanded his culinary repertoire and embraced new cultural influences.

For nearly two years, Chef Sayce has been part of the Sodexo team, initially serving as a hospitality chef for private corporate events, including luncheons and dinners. Over the past eight months, he has taken on the role of Regional Development Chef, a position that has brought new and exciting challenges. He enjoys finding innovative solutions while supporting his district, striving to help and contribute wherever possible.



Gordon Carberry

Regional Development Chef

Gordon Carberry, currently a Craft Development Chef with Sodexo, brings a wealth of experience and passion to his role. Since joining Sodexo as Head Chef in 2022, Gordon has made a significant impact through his dedication to culinary excellence. He is actively involved in the competitive cooking scene, participating in prestigious events such as CATEX, the Culinary Olympics, IFEX in Belfast, and HRC in London.

With a background rooted in the high standards of Michelin-starred kitchens, Gordon's expertise spans fine dining, comfort food, and everything in between. His deep understanding of both refined techniques and hearty, approachable dishes allows him to craft memorable culinary experiences. As a proud member of the Panel of Chefs Ireland, Gordon continually seeks to elevate his craft, blending creativity with the rich traditions of Irish cuisine.

Cathy Adamson- Guide to Fire-Pit and Ember-Based Cooking Techniques



Cooking over a fire-pit offers an immersive and flavourful way to prepare meals outdoors, drawing on ancient techniques that connect us with real, elemental cooking. This guide walks through essential tools, fire preparation, and cooking methods to help you make the most of ember-based cooking.

Essential Tools for Fire Cooking

A successful fire-pit cooking experience depends heavily on using the right equipment. A cooking grate provides a stable surface for pots and pans and keeps food elevated from direct flames, helping to prevent burning. Fire pokers allow you to safely manage wood and coals, while long-handled tongs and spatulas give you control when turning or repositioning food. Heat-resistant gloves are vital, offering protection from radiant heat and stray embers, and should always be worn when handling cookware or fuel near the flames.

Choosing the Right Firewood

The quality of your fire starts with your choice of wood. Hardwoods like oak, birch, hickory, and apple are ideal for cooking. These woods are dense and burn more slowly than softwoods, creating a steady, hot bed of coals. They also contribute aromatic smoke, enhancing flavour without overpowering the food.

Preparing the Fire-Pit

Start by placing a wood grate at the base of the pit to promote airflow. Build your fire using paper, natural firelighters, and kindling—small sticks that catch easily and help ignite larger logs. Once the base fire is established, begin adding hardwood logs and, optionally, charcoal to create consistent heat and glowing coals.

If your goal is to cook directly over embers, build a large, log-heavy fire. It takes around 45 minutes to an hour for the flames to reduce and develop a hot, even layer of coals suitable for cooking. This phase is crucial—rushing it results in uneven heat and excess smoke.

Cooking Techniques Over Fire

Avoid cooking when flames are still high and the fire is smoky. Wait until the fire dies down and a glowing bed of embers appears. At this stage, heat is even and more predictable, making it ideal for cooking. Always keep your utensils close by, along with a spray bottle of water to dampen flare-ups or adjust heat levels.

There are several ways to approach cooking:

- **Direct Grate Cooking:** Ideal for quick-cooking foods like steaks, vegetables, fish, or flatbreads. Use a grill pan to prevent smaller items from falling through the grate.
- **Dutch Oven Cooking:** Great for slow-simmered dishes such as chillies, curries, or stews. Place the Dutch oven directly on the coals or suspended over the pit using a tripod.
- **Ember Roasting:** Wrap root vegetables or corn in foil and bury them in the embers. This slow, smouldering method imparts a deep, smoky flavour.
- **Rotisserie Cooking:** If you have a rotisserie attachment, this is ideal for whole chickens or large cuts, rotating them slowly over the heat.
- **Suspended Plates & Skillets:** Many fire-pit setups now include hanging grills or adjustable stands, giving you flexibility to move food closer or further from the heat depending on the cooking method.

Cooking over fire is about understanding and responding to the heat source, adjusting the position of your food, and embracing the flavours that only wood smoke and glowing embers can provide. With a bit of patience and practice, fire-pit cooking can become a rewarding part of your outdoor food experience.

On Fire Lamb Koftas

Serves: 8

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1kg lamb mince
- 70g breadcrumbs
- 1 small red onion, finely diced or grated
- 50g fresh coriander, chopped (save a little for serving)
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper

Method:

You can prepare the koftas a day ahead and keep them in the fridge until ready to cook. Before you start, soak 16 bamboo skewers in cold water for at least 30 minutes – this helps stop them from burning on the fire.

If you're cooking over a firepit, light it well in advance – it needs about 45 minutes to get going properly. Place a cast iron skillet or heavy pan over the hot coals and give it about 10 minutes to heat up before cooking.

In a large mixing bowl, combine all the ingredients. Use your hands to mix everything thoroughly – it helps to do this with damp hands to avoid the mixture sticking. Divide the mixture into 16 equal portions, then shape each one around a soaked skewer to form sausage-shaped koftas.

Place the koftas directly onto the hot skillet. Let them brown for a few minutes, then gently turn them so they cook evenly on all sides. This should take about 15 minutes in total, or until the meat is cooked through and nicely coloured.

Serving Tip:

Serve the koftas warm on a large platter with soft flatbreads, a spoonful of baba ganoush, fresh coriander, and cherry tomatoes. They go brilliantly with tzatziki, hummus, grilled halloumi or crumbled feta. Let everyone build their own wrap at the table for a relaxed, sociable meal.



Recipes

Flatbreads on the Coals

Serves: 6

**Prep Time: 2 hours
(including rising time)**

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Ingredients:

- 250g strong white bread flour
- 250g plain white flour
- 10g dried yeast
- 20g salt
- 175ml warm water
- 175ml natural yogurt (gently warmed)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, plus extra for brushing
- 1 teaspoon black onion seeds (optional)
- A small bunch of fresh oregano or coriander, chopped

Method:

Start by making your dough. Mix the flours, salt, yeast, warm water, yogurt, onion seeds (if using), and chopped herbs in a large bowl until a sticky dough forms. If it feels too dry, add a splash more water. Add the olive oil and knead the dough using a stand mixer with a dough hook for about 5 minutes until smooth and elastic. If kneading by hand, allow a bit more time.

Shape the dough into a ball and place it in a large, lightly oiled bowl. Cover loosely with cling film and leave it in a warm spot until doubled in size – this usually takes about an hour.

Punch the dough down to release air, then let it rise again for a second time. If you've time, a third or even fourth rise will improve the texture, but two rises are plenty.

When you're ready to cook, tear off pieces of dough about the size of an apple. Shape each into a ball, dust your work surface with flour, and roll each one out to around 3–4mm thick. Leave them to rest for 5 minutes.

Make sure your fire is good and hot with glowing red embers. Push the hottest embers to one side so you can cook on one area and feed the fire from the other. Place each flatbread directly onto the embers. They'll start to puff up and blister. Use tongs to flip them over and gently brush off any ash or embers. Cook until both sides are done and you see a few charred spots.

Once cooked, brush each flatbread with a little olive oil and wrap in a clean tea towel to keep warm while you finish the rest.

Serving Tip:

These smoky flatbreads are brilliant with grilled meats, vegetables, or fish. They're also perfect for dipping into hummus, baba ganoush, or tzatziki. Great served warm as part of a relaxed, share-style meal outdoors.

Ember Roasted Baba Ganoush

A smoky North African dip made from aubergines roasted directly in the coals.

Serves: 6

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 25 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 long, slim aubergines (about 500g)
- 6 garlic cloves, peeled and sliced (10g)
- 3 tablespoons tahini paste
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon coarse sea salt (or to taste)
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
- ½ teaspoon hot paprika
- 1 whole lemon, cut into wedges (for serving)

Method:

Light your firepit about an hour before you plan to cook, giving it time to burn down to a steady bed of glowing coals.

Prick the aubergines all over with a fork, then place them directly into the embers. Let them roast for about 20 minutes, turning now and again, until the skins are charred and the flesh feels very soft. Transfer them to a tray to cool slightly.

Once cool enough to handle, carefully peel off most of the blackened skin, but leave a few charred bits on – they'll give the dip a deep, smoky flavour and nice flecks of colour.

Roughly chop the aubergine flesh and place it in a food processor with the sliced garlic, tahini, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Pulse just until combined. Add the chopped parsley and pulse again briefly – don't overmix, it should keep a bit of texture. Taste and adjust the seasoning if needed.

Spoon the baba ganoush into a non-reactive bowl (ceramic or glass is ideal), drizzle with the remaining tablespoon of olive oil, and sprinkle over the hot paprika.

Serving Tip:

Serve with lemon wedges, warm grilled flatbreads, and slices of grilled halloumi. This dip also pairs beautifully with vegetable crudités or as part of a mezze board.



Recipes

Fire-Pit Marinated Halloumi with Honey & Thyme

Serves: 6-8

Prep Time: 15 minutes
(plus 2 hours marinating)

Cook Time: 10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 500g halloumi cheese, drained
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon chilli flakes
- Zest and juice of ½ a lemon
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil (plus extra for grilling)
- 1 tablespoon pine nuts
- 30g wild rocket
- 2 tablespoons clear honey
- Leaves from 4 thyme sprigs
- Black pepper, to taste

Method:

Start by slicing the halloumi into 8 evenly sized 'bricks'. Lightly score the tops of each piece in a criss-cross pattern – this helps the marinade soak in. In a bowl, whisk together the oregano, chilli flakes, lemon zest and juice, garlic, olive oil, and a grind of black pepper. Gently toss the halloumi in this marinade, cover, and chill in the fridge for about 2 hours.

Light your fire pit about an hour before cooking, so it's glowing nicely by the time

you start. Place a grill pan over the firepit grill to preheat, and have a small pan ready for toasting the pine nuts.

When ready to cook, add the pine nuts to the small pan and toast for 1–2 minutes until golden. Tip them into a bowl and set aside. Drizzle a little oil over the hot grill pan and place the halloumi pieces on top, scored side facing up first. Grill for 1–2 minutes until lightly golden, then carefully flip using a spatula and cook the other side until evenly coloured and charred in places.

Serving Tip:

Arrange the grilled halloumi on a board or platter. Scatter with rocket leaves, drizzle generously with honey, and finish with the toasted pine nuts and thyme leaves. Serve with warm flatbreads and smoky baba ganoush for a simple but impressive firepit feast.



Chargrilled Lettuce

Serves: 8

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cook Time: 5 minutes

Ingredients:

- 4 heads of romaine lettuce, halved vertically (you'll have 8 halves)
- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 2 whole lemons, halved
- 120g fresh Parmesan cheese, grated
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Method:

Light your firepit around 45 minutes before you plan to cook, so the heat is steady and the coals are glowing. Make sure the cooking grate is clean and ready.

Cut the romaine lettuce in half lengthways and brush each half generously with olive oil on both the cut and rounded sides. Sprinkle both sides lightly with salt.

Place the lettuce halves cut-side down directly on the hot grill. Press them lightly with tongs to ensure they make good contact with the grate, and grill for about 3 minutes until they have a deep char. Flip them over with a spatula and grill for another 2 minutes.

Once grilled, remove the lettuce from the heat. Sprinkle with a little more salt and grind over some fresh black pepper. Drizzle with any remaining olive oil and squeeze fresh lemon juice over the top.

Finish by shaving or grating plenty of Parmesan cheese over each half.

Serving Tip:

Serve straight away on a large platter while still warm. This dish works beautifully as a side for grilled meats or halloumi, or as a warm starter when topped with toasted nuts or anchovies.

David Sayce - Gas BBQ Cooking



Guide to Gas BBQ Cooking Techniques

Cooking on a gas BBQ offers convenience, speed, and control, making it a favourite choice for home cooks and outdoor hosts alike. With a few practical steps and good preparation, you can achieve restaurant-quality results without the unpredictability of open flame cooking. This guide covers essential tools, BBQ setup, and versatile cooking techniques that mirror the ease and precision of your kitchen, with the added joy of being outdoors.

Essential Tools for Gas BBQ Cooking

For a smooth cooking experience, ensure you're equipped with the right tools. A **gas BBQ** with a lid is essential, giving you the option to grill or roast. **Long-handled tongs** help you handle food without piercing it, retaining natural juices. **Spatulas** are perfect for flipping burgers, fish, and vegetables with care. A **meat thermometer** is strongly recommended for checking internal temperatures without cutting into the food. Keep a **basting brush**, **heat-resistant gloves**, and a **spray bottle of water** nearby for managing flare-ups.

Prepping Your BBQ for Cooking

Start by checking that your gas bottle is full and securely connected. Preheat the BBQ with the lid down for at least 10–15 minutes to allow the grates to heat evenly. Use a wire brush to clean the grates after preheating. Lightly oil the grates with a high smoke point oil to prevent sticking.

Use the **two-zone cooking method** - keep one side of the grill on high and the other on a lower setting or off completely. This gives you flexibility, allowing for direct searing on one side and gentler cooking or holding on the other.

Flavour Boosters

While gas BBQs don't provide natural smoke, you can still add flavour. Use **smoker boxes** with **soaked wood chips**, **herb sprigs** like rosemary or thyme on the grates, or **marinades and dry rubs** to build depth of flavour into your dishes.

The Following Items Can Be Prepared the Day Before

- **Marinated Meats:** Chicken thighs, lamb chops, tofu steaks, or flank steak benefit from overnight marinades, adding both flavour and tenderness.
- **Vegetable Skewers:** Thread peppers, courgettes, red onions, and mushrooms onto skewers and refrigerate.
- **Homemade Burgers or Koftas:** Shape and chill to help them hold their form on the grill.
- **Potato or Grain Salads:** Make ahead to allow flavours to develop and keep chilled until serving.
- **Flatbreads or Buns:** Par-bake or prep dough and store in an airtight container.
- **BBQ Sauces and Relishes:** Homemade ketchup, chimichurri, or yoghurt sauces can all be made in advance and brought out when plating.

How to Cook Successfully on a Gas BBQ

Keep the lid down to trap heat and cook more evenly, especially when roasting larger cuts or cooking thicker pieces. Use direct heat (over the flame) for fast cooking items like steaks, fish fillets, and vegetables. Move to the cooler zone for delicate or slow-cook items, or to rest food before serving.

Invest time in watching the heat. Gas BBQs can flare up quickly—avoid excessive oil on meats or sugary marinades early in the cook. Always allow meat to rest after cooking to retain juices.

Experiment with different cooking vessels- **grill baskets** for small vegetables, **cast iron pans** for flatbreads or eggs, and **plancha-style plates** for seafood or delicate ingredients. With the lid down and thoughtful heat management, you can even bake on a gas BBQ—try pizzas, traybakes, or fruit crumbles for a smoky-sweet finish to your meal.

Gas BBQ cooking is about control, confidence, and creativity. With smart prep and a calm approach, it becomes an easy and enjoyable way to elevate outdoor eating.

Marinated Greek Leg of Lamb

Serves: 8-10

**Prep Time: 20 minutes
(plus overnight marinating)**

**Cook Time: Varies depending on
firepit or oven method**

Ingredients:

- 1.5kg leg of lamb, deboned
(ask your butcher to do this)
- Zest of 2 lemons
- 6-8 garlic cloves, crushed
- 100g fresh herbs (a mix of parsley,
coriander and oregano), finely chopped
- 20g ground cumin
- 150ml virgin olive oil

Method:

Lay a large sheet of baking paper on your work surface. Place the lamb on top, cover it with another sheet of baking paper, and use a meat mallet or the bottom of a saucepan to gently pound and flatten the meat so it's an even thickness. This helps it cook more evenly and quickly the next day.

In a bowl, mix together the lemon zest, crushed garlic, chopped herbs, cumin and olive oil to form a thick marinade. Rub this mixture thoroughly over both sides of the lamb until completely coated.

Place the lamb into a dish or tray, cover tightly with cling film, and refrigerate overnight to allow the flavours to develop.

Cooking Tip:

This lamb is ideal for firepit grilling. Bring it to room temperature before cooking. Grill slowly over medium-hot coals, turning occasionally, until charred on the outside and juicy and pink inside – about 20-25 minutes, depending on thickness. Rest for 10 minutes before slicing.

Serving Suggestion:

Serve carved with flatbreads, grilled vegetables, baba ganoush or a simple Greek salad. A spoonful of tzatziki or lemon-dressed yoghurt on the side works beautifully too.



Recipes

Baked Sweet Potato Paprika Wedges

Serves: 6-8

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 40 minutes

Ingredients:

- 4 large sweet potatoes, washed
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin (optional)
- Sea salt, to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Method:

Preheat your oven to 200°C (fan 180°C). Place the washed sweet potatoes onto a tray and bake whole for around 25 minutes until they're about three-quarters cooked – they should be just starting to soften but still hold their shape when cut.

Remove from the oven and let them cool slightly. Cut each sweet potato lengthwise into thick wedges.

In a large bowl, toss the wedges with olive oil, smoked paprika, a pinch of sea salt, black pepper, and cumin if using. Make sure each wedge is well coated.

Spread the wedges out on a baking tray in a single layer. Return them to the oven and roast for another 15–20 minutes until golden, crisp at the edges, and soft in the centre.

Serving Tip:

These wedges are perfect served alongside grilled meats, halloumi or falafel. They also work beautifully with dips like tzatziki or a spicy harissa yoghurt.



Chicken Yakitori Starter with Pickled Red Onions

Serves: 8

Prep Time: 20 minutes (plus overnight marinating and pickling)

Cook Time: 10–15 minutes

Ingredients (Yakitori):

- 16 chicken thighs, boneless and skinless
- 6 spring onions, cut into 3cm batons
- 100g fresh coriander
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- 12–16 wooden skewers (6-inch), soaked in water for 1 hour

For the Teriyaki Sauce:

- 4 tablespoons light soy sauce
- 110g caster sugar
- 1 tablespoon dark soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons sake

Ingredients (Pickled Red Onions):

- 2 red onions, peeled and finely sliced (a mandolin gives best results)
- 200ml boiling water
- 100ml apple cider vinegar
- 75g light brown sugar
- 1 star anise
- ¼ teaspoon mustard seeds

Method (Yakitori):

Start by preparing the teriyaki sauce. In a small saucepan, combine the light soy sauce, sugar, dark soy sauce, and sake. Gently warm until the sugar has fully dissolved, then set aside to cool. Divide the sauce in half – half for marinating, half for brushing during cooking.

Cut each chicken thigh in half and season with salt and pepper. Toss the chicken in half of the teriyaki sauce, cover, and leave to marinate in the fridge overnight.

Thread the marinated chicken pieces onto the soaked skewers, alternating with spring onion batons. You should get about 1–2 skewers per person depending on size.

Grill the skewers over a medium-hot fire or on a grill pan, turning occasionally and brushing with the reserved teriyaki sauce. Cook for 10–15 minutes until the chicken is caramelised and cooked through.

Method (Pickled Red Onions):

In a small pan, bring the boiling water, cider vinegar, and brown sugar to a boil. Add the star anise and mustard seeds and simmer for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the finely sliced red onions. Leave to cool completely, then refrigerate until ready to serve.

Serving Tip:

Serve the chicken skewers hot off the grill, scattered with fresh coriander and a generous spoonful of the sweet pickled red onions on the side. Ideal as a small starter or finger food while your lamb is resting.

Recipes

Whipped Greek Feta & Honey Dip

Serves: 6-8

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: Overnight (optional but recommended)

Ingredients:

- 200g feta cheese
- 100g sour cream
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 50ml pouring honey
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1 small garlic clove
- ¼ teaspoon each of dried dill, dried oregano, and dried thyme
- Salt and cracked black pepper, to taste
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- ½ teaspoon sesame seeds
- 20ml virgin olive oil, for drizzling
- Extra honey, for drizzling

Method:

Place the feta cheese, sour cream, mayonnaise, honey, lemon zest, garlic, herbs, salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes into a food processor or blender. Pulse until smooth and creamy, aiming for a consistency like hummus. Taste and adjust seasoning if needed.

Transfer the whipped feta to a bowl, cover, and refrigerate overnight to allow the flavours to meld and the dip to firm up slightly.

Serving Tip:

Before serving, drizzle with a little virgin olive oil, a swirl of honey, and sprinkle over the sesame seeds. Serve with warm flatbreads, grilled vegetables, or crackers. It also makes a fantastic spread for lamb wraps or burgers.



Charred Corn on the Cob with Minted Broad Beans & Pickled Red Onion

Serves: 6

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 4–6 large corn on the cobs
- 300g fresh or frozen broad beans
- Pickled red onions (see recipe above)
- 100g Greek olives, roughly chopped
- 100g fresh mint leaves, roughly torn
- Olive oil, for brushing
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

Method:

Start by boiling the corn cobs in a large pot of salted water for about 10 minutes or until just tender. Drain and allow them to cool slightly.

At the same time, boil the broad beans for 2 minutes in lightly salted water. Drain, cool under cold water, and peel off the outer skins to reveal the bright green centres.

Light your firepit or preheat a grill. Once hot, brush the corn with a little olive oil and place directly on the grill. Char the corn, turning every couple of minutes, until golden and lightly blackened in spots.

Once the corn is nicely charred, remove and let it cool just enough to handle. Slice the kernels off the cob using a sharp knife and place them in a large mixing bowl.

Add the peeled broad beans, chopped olives, fresh mint, and a generous spoonful of pickled red onion. Season with salt and black pepper, and gently toss everything together.

Serving Tip:

Serve warm or at room temperature as a vibrant side dish with grilled meats or halloumi. For extra flavour, drizzle with a little olive oil and a squeeze of lemon juice just before serving.



Recipes

Tzatziki Dip

Serves: 6-8

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

- 500ml Greek-style yoghurt
- 2 cucumbers, peeled and de-seeded
- 4 tablespoons lemon juice
- 4 garlic cloves, finely grated
- A dash of extra virgin olive oil
- Paprika, for sprinkling
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

Method:

Grate the cucumbers and place them in a clean tea towel or muslin cloth. Squeeze out as much liquid as you can to avoid a watery dip.

In a large bowl, combine the Greek yoghurt, grated cucumber, lemon juice, garlic, a small dash of olive oil, and a good pinch of salt and black pepper. Stir well to combine and taste to adjust seasoning.

Cover and refrigerate for about 30 minutes to allow the flavours to come together.

Serving Tip:

Spoon the tzatziki into a serving bowl, drizzle with a little more olive oil, and finish with a light sprinkle of paprika. Serve chilled with flatbreads, grilled meats, or vegetable crudités.



Garlic Butter Brushed Flatbreads

Serves: Flexible (depending on number of flatbreads)

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cook Time: 2-3 minutes

Ingredients:

- 100g unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 50g crushed garlic (about 6–8 cloves)
- 50g fresh parsley, finely chopped
- Flatbreads (store-bought or homemade, quantity as needed)

Method:

In a small bowl, mix together the softened butter, crushed garlic, and chopped parsley until well combined. This can be made in advance and stored in the fridge, then softened before use.

Brush the garlic butter generously over each flatbread, making sure to cover the edges.

Place the flatbreads directly onto a hot BBQ grill or flat plate for 1–2 minutes on each side until warmed through and lightly charred. Brush with a little more garlic butter just before serving if you like.

Serving Tip:

Serve warm with dips like baba ganoush or tzatziki, or use as a base for grilled meats, salad, and sauces.



Gordon Carberry - Charcoal Cooking



Guide to Charcoal BBQ Cooking Techniques

Charcoal BBQ cooking brings unmistakable flavour and atmosphere to any outdoor setting. While it takes more attention than gas, it offers a deeper, more complex result thanks to smoke and intense heat. This guide walks you through lighting, preparation, and cooking techniques, along with practical advice on what to prepare the day before for a stress-free BBQ.

Essential Tools for Charcoal BBQ Cooking

Start with the right kit. **A charcoal BBQ with adjustable vents** is key for airflow control. Use a **chimney starter** for quick, even lighting, and wear **heat-resistant gloves** for safety. **Long-handled tongs, a spatula, and a grill brush** make handling food and cleaning easy. A **meat thermometer** is useful for checking doneness without cutting into food. Always keep a **spray bottle of water** nearby for flare-up control.

How to Light a Chargrill BBQ

What You'll Need:

Charcoal, firelighters or newspaper, a chimney starter (recommended), long matches or a BBQ lighter, heat-resistant gloves.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Prepare the BBQ

Remove the cooking grate and clean out any old ash. Open all vents at the bottom and on the lid to allow good airflow.

2. Arrange the Charcoal

If you're using a chimney starter, fill it with charcoal and place a firelighter or crumpled newspaper underneath.

If lighting directly in the BBQ, arrange the charcoal in a pyramid shape in the centre of the grill for better airflow and ignition.

3. Light the Fire

Light the firelighter or newspaper underneath the chimney starter and let it burn until the coals turn white-hot—this takes about 15–20 minutes.

If you're lighting the BBQ directly, place firelighters or twisted newspaper under the pyramid of coals and light with a long match or BBQ lighter.

4. Wait for the Coals to Heat

When the charcoal is fully lit and covered in white ash, it's ready to cook. Spread it evenly across the base for direct heat cooking, or bank it to one side if you're using the two-zone method.

5. Start Grilling

Place the cooking grate back on the BBQ and allow it to preheat for several minutes with the lid on. Lightly oil the grate to prevent sticking, then begin cooking.

Tip: Always keep a spray bottle or bucket of water nearby as a safety precaution.

Choosing the Right Charcoal

Lumpwood charcoal gives you a clean burn and an authentic flavour, ideal for quick grills or high-heat searing. For longer cooks, use **briquettes**, which burn more evenly and last longer. Adding **soaked wood chips or chunks** can layer in additional smoky aromas—oak, apple, or hickory work beautifully.

The Following Items Can Be Prepared the Day Before

- **Marinated proteins** such as chicken thighs, lamb cutlets, tofu steaks, or beef ribs can be refrigerated overnight for full flavour penetration.
- **Vegetable skewers** (peppers, mushrooms, onions, courgettes) can be threaded and chilled, ready to go.
- **Hand-formed burgers or koftas** benefit from being shaped ahead and rested in the fridge to firm up.

- **Grain salads, bean mixes, or potato salads** can be made in advance and served cold or at room temperature.
- **Flatbread dough** or par-baked breads can be made ahead for quick reheating or finishing on the grill.
- **BBQ dips and sauces**, such as yoghurt dressings, relishes, and chutneys, can be jarred and chilled the day before.

How to Cook Successfully on a Charcoal BBQ

Cooking begins once the flames have settled and the coals are glowing and evenly coated in white ash. This is when the grill delivers steady, intense heat. Use direct heat for fast-cooking items - steaks, halloumi, prawns, or vegetable skewers- and indirect heat for larger cuts or items needing longer, slower cooking.

Close the lid when roasting, baking, or cooking thicker cuts, and use the air vents to regulate temperature: open to increase heat, slightly closed to slow it down.

Charcoal BBQs are highly versatile—**try foil-wrapped vegetables, cast iron pans** for flatbreads or pancakes, or even **indirect pizza cooking** on a preheated stone. Mastering this kind of cooking is about understanding how to manage your fire, move food between heat zones, and trust your senses.

With a bit of planning and patience, charcoal BBQ cooking can deliver exceptional results and a deeply satisfying outdoor cooking experience.



Recipes

Buffalo Chicken Wings

Serves: 4

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 30–40 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1kg chicken wings
- 5 tablespoons oil
- 3 tablespoons chicken seasoning
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 2 tablespoons onion powder
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 500ml Frank's Hot Sauce
- 500g salted butter
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 50ml white wine vinegar

Method:

Start by removing the chicken wings from their packaging and patting them dry with kitchen paper. Place them in a large bowl and add the chicken seasoning, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, brown sugar, and salt. Toss well to coat evenly, then pop them back in the fridge for about 20 minutes while your BBQ heats up.

Set up your grill for indirect cooking – you want a hot side and a cooler side. Once the grill is ready, arrange the wings on the cooler (indirect) side, making sure they're spaced out with a little room between each one. Cook for 30 minutes, then spray or brush lightly with oil and flip the wings over.

Continue cooking for another 30 minutes, again spraying with oil midway through. The wings should be golden and crispy, with an internal temperature of 75°C for fully cooked, tender results. For extra crispiness, move them over to the hot side of the grill for 30–60 seconds just before serving to get a little char on the skin.

While the wings are finishing up, make the buffalo sauce. In a bowl, whisk together Frank's Hot Sauce, melted butter, white wine vinegar, and a pinch of salt until smooth.

Toss the hot wings in the sauce just before serving.

Serving Tip:

Serve straight away with celery sticks, carrot batons, and a cooling dip like blue cheese or ranch. Great as a starter or finger food for BBQ gatherings.

Chargrilled Rib Eye with Chimichurri

Serves: 4

**Prep Time: 20 minutes
(plus marinating)**

Cook Time: 10–15 minutes

Ingredients (Steak & Rub):

- 4 rib eye steaks (6–8 oz each)
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- ½ tablespoon garlic powder
- ½ tablespoon chilli powder
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar

Ingredients (Chimichurri Dressing):

- 20g fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons dried oregano
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 red chilli
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons Maldon salt
- 125ml olive oil

Method:

Begin by mixing all the dry rub ingredients in a bowl. Rub this mixture generously over the rib eye steaks. Cover and marinate in the fridge for at least 1 hour, or ideally overnight for deeper flavour.

Preheat your BBQ with a hot zone and a cooler zone. Start by placing the steaks on the hottest part of the grill to get a good sear – around 2 minutes per side for a deep crust. Then move them to the cooler side of the grill to finish cooking. Depending on thickness, this will take another 6–10 minutes for medium doneness. Use a meat thermometer if needed – aim for 55–57°C for medium rare or 60°C for medium.

While the steaks are cooking, make the chimichurri. Place the parsley, oregano, garlic, red chilli, red wine vinegar, black pepper, Maldon salt, and olive oil into a blender. Blitz until smooth but still textured.

Serving Tip:

Rest the steaks for at least 5 minutes after cooking. Slice against the grain to reveal the juicy pink centre. Arrange on a wooden board or platter and drizzle generously with chimichurri. Finish with a pinch more Maldon sea salt before serving.

Recipes

Smoky Buttered Corn on the Cob

Serves: 4

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 15-20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 4 large corn on the cob
- 250g salted butter
- 1 tsp garlic purée
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp chilli flakes (optional)
- 5 tbsp sunflower oil
- 10g fresh parsley

Method:

Begin by coating the corn cobs with sunflower oil and setting them aside. In a bowl, mix the butter with the garlic purée, smoked paprika, and chilli flakes, then leave the mixture at room temperature so it softens and becomes easy to spread.

Place the corn directly on the barbecue grill and cook over a medium-high heat, turning regularly to ensure even charring on all sides. This should take around 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the heat of the grill.

When the corn is nearly cooked through and well charred, begin brushing it with the smoky butter mixture, allowing it to melt slightly and coat the kernels.

Remove the corn from the grill and place onto a serving dish. Add generous dollops of the remaining butter over the hot cobs so it melts down, and finish by scattering with finely chopped fresh parsley just before serving.

Tip:

This works beautifully over both charcoal and gas BBQs. To intensify the smoky flavour, consider adding soaked wood chips to the grill just before cooking.

Chargrilled Mediterranean Vegetable Salad

Serves: 6

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cook Time: 15-20 minutes

Ingredients (Steak & Rub):

- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 2 large courgettes
- 2 large aubergines
- 3 large red onions
- 3 large yellow peppers
- 3 large red peppers
- 500g rocket leaves
- 50g fresh basil leaves
- 200g sun-dried tomatoes (in oil)
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Method:

Begin by preparing the vegetables. Cut the red onions into large chunks, keeping the root end intact to hold the layers together. Slice the courgettes and aubergines lengthways into thin ribbons. Cut the peppers into large chunks, removing seeds and membranes. Toss all prepared vegetables in olive oil and season well with salt and pepper.

Wash the rocket leaves thoroughly and drain well. Pick the basil leaves from their stalks. Drain the sun-dried tomatoes, reserving the oil to use later as a dressing.

Preheat your BBQ or chargrill to medium-high. Start by placing the courgette and aubergine ribbons directly on the grill. These cook quickly- just a couple of minutes each side- so turn them as soon as they show grill marks. Once cooked, transfer to a large bowl. Next, grill the onions and peppers, turning regularly until they are softened and lightly charred.

Once all the vegetables are cooked, place them in a serving bowl with the rocket leaves and sun-dried tomatoes. Drizzle over the reserved tomato oil and toss everything gently until well combined.

Finishing Touches

To serve, arrange the salad in a large dish or platter, using your fingertips to lift and layer the vegetables for height and texture. Scatter over the fresh basil leaves just before serving for a burst of aroma and colour.

Tip:

This salad can be served warm or at room temperature and works beautifully as a side to grilled meats, fish, or as a vibrant centrepiece for a vegetarian spread.

John Core - Pizza



Pizza Oven Cooking Guide – Wood & Gas Powered Ovens

Whether you're firing up a traditional wood-burning oven or using a modern gas-powered version, both offer incredible results when handled with the right care and preparation. Here's how to get the best from either type on BBQ day.

Before You Begin

- **Prep your dough early:** For best results, dough should be made the day before and allowed to ferment slowly in the fridge. Take it out at least 2 hours before cooking so it reaches room temperature and becomes easy to stretch.
- **Organise your toppings:** Keep them simple, balanced, and ready to go. Think passata, fresh mozzarella, torn basil, olive oil, and a few quality additions like prosciutto, mushrooms, or anchovies.
- **Keep tools close:** You'll need a pizza peel (with a bit of semolina or flour for easy sliding), tongs, a turning peel if you have one, and a board or rack for serving.

Wood-Fired Pizza Oven Tips

Lighting & Temperature Management

- Light your fire using kindling and hardwood logs (ash, beech, or oak work well).
- Allow 45–60 minutes for the oven to heat up properly. You're aiming for around **400–450°C** on the oven floor – hot enough to cook a pizza in 90 seconds.
- Push the fire to one side once it's burning strongly, maintaining a steady flame to keep the temperature up. Add small logs as needed during cooking.

Cooking Technique

- Use a lightly floured pizza peel and launch your pizza onto the hot oven floor near the flame.
- After about 30–40 seconds, rotate the pizza using a turning peel or tongs to ensure even charring.

- Cook for 90 seconds to 2 minutes max – the base should be crisp, and the crust puffed and charred in places.

Top Tips

- Don't overload the toppings – less is more at high heat.
- If you're cooking multiple pizzas, keep the fire fed regularly to maintain consistent heat.
- Brush the oven floor between pizzas to avoid burnt flour affecting flavour.

Gas-Powered Pizza Oven Tips

Getting Started

- Preheat your gas oven on full power for **15–20 minutes** – aim for a floor temperature of around **400°C**.
- Keep the flame steady and strong to mimic wood-fired heat, especially if the oven is smaller.

Cooking Technique

- Launch the pizza quickly and confidently onto the centre of the stone.
- Turn the pizza every 20–30 seconds to avoid over-charring on one side – a turning peel is especially helpful here.
- Expect similar cook times to wood-fired – around **90 seconds to 2 minutes**.

Top Tips

- Use an infrared thermometer to check stone temperature before launching.
- Keep your dough slightly drier if using gas, as it won't pick up quite the same smokiness as wood.
- For extra char, finish the pizza with a quick burst of flame at the end if your oven allows flame adjustment.

Serving Suggestions Pair freshly cooked pizzas with bowls of marinated olives, dressed rocket, and small pots of garlic oil or chilli honey. Let guests mix, match, and slice their own favourites straight off the peel.

Pizza Dough

Here's a clear and straightforward recipe to make delicious handmade pizza dough. This will yield approximately 8 individual pizza dough balls, ideal for personal-sized pizzas:

Ingredients:

- 1 kg strong white bread flour
- 2 x 7g sachets fast-action dried yeast
- 650 ml lukewarm water
- 1½ teaspoons fine sea salt
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for oiling

Method:

Begin by mixing the yeast into the lukewarm water until dissolved. Set aside for a few minutes until slightly foamy. In a large bowl or on a clean work surface, combine the bread flour and salt, forming a well in the centre. Pour the yeast mixture and olive oil into the well. Gradually incorporate the flour from the sides into the liquid using a fork until a rough dough forms.

Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead vigorously for about 8-10 minutes, or until the dough is smooth, elastic, and springs back when gently pressed with your finger.

Lightly oil a large bowl and place the dough inside, turning it to coat all sides with oil. Cover with a clean tea towel or cling film and allow it to rise in a warm, draught-free place for about 1 hour, or until doubled in size.

Once risen, punch down the dough gently to remove air bubbles. Divide the dough into eight equal portions and shape each into a tight, smooth ball. Place the dough balls onto a lightly oiled tray, spacing them apart to allow for expansion. Cover loosely and leave to rest at room temperature for another 30 minutes, allowing them to relax before shaping.

When ready to use, flatten each dough ball by hand or roll it out into a thin round, and top with your favourite pizza toppings. Bake pizzas on a hot pizza stone or oven tray at 220°C (200°C fan) for 10-12 minutes, until the crust is crisp and golden.

Unused dough balls can be individually wrapped in cling film and frozen for future use. To use from frozen, thaw overnight in the refrigerator, then bring to room temperature before shaping and cooking.

Recipes

Sourdough Pizza Dough

Here's a delicious, naturally fermented sourdough pizza dough recipe using your sourdough starter. This recipe yields approximately 8 dough balls, perfect for individual pizzas with enhanced flavour and improved digestibility.

Ingredients:

- 1 kg strong white bread flour
- 200 g active, bubbly sourdough starter (100% hydration)
- 600 ml lukewarm water
- 20 g fine sea salt
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for greasing

Method:

In a large mixing bowl, add the sourdough starter to the lukewarm water, stirring gently until well combined. Gradually add the bread flour, mixing continuously to form a shaggy dough. Cover and let this mixture rest for about 30 minutes (autolyse), which helps hydrate the flour fully.

After the resting period, sprinkle the salt evenly over the dough and drizzle in the olive oil. Incorporate the salt and oil into the dough by kneading gently in the bowl. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead firmly but gently for around 8–10 minutes until the dough becomes smooth, elastic, and supple.

Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, turning to coat. Cover the bowl with a damp cloth or cling film and let it ferment at room temperature (18–22°C) for about 4 hours, performing one set of gentle stretch-and-fold movements every hour to develop gluten structure and strength.

After fermentation, turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface. Divide it evenly into 8 portions (approximately 225g each), shaping each into a neat, round ball. Arrange the dough balls on an oiled tray, spacing them evenly apart, cover loosely, and refrigerate overnight (approximately 12–24 hours) to allow slow fermentation, enhancing flavour and texture.

When ready to cook, remove the dough balls from the fridge and allow them to rest at room temperature for about 1 hour before shaping. Gently stretch or roll the dough balls into pizza bases, add your desired toppings, and bake in a preheated oven at 230°C (210°C fan) on a hot pizza stone or baking tray for 10–12 minutes, until crisp and golden at the edges.

Unused dough balls can be individually wrapped and frozen. To use frozen dough, thaw slowly in the fridge overnight, then bring to room temperature before shaping and baking.

Sourdough Starter

Creating a Sourdough Starter (5–7 days)

Ingredients (for the entire process)

- 400 g strong white bread flour
- 400 ml lukewarm water (filtered or bottled is best, to avoid chlorine)

Day 1

In a clean glass jar, mix 50 g bread flour and 50 ml lukewarm water until thoroughly combined into a smooth paste. Cover loosely with a tea towel or lid, and leave at room temperature (around 20–24°C) for 24 hours.

Days 2–5 (or longer)

Each day, remove and discard half of the starter mixture. Then feed the starter by adding another 50 g bread flour and 50 ml lukewarm water, stirring vigorously to incorporate air. Continue to leave covered at room temperature.

From day 3 onward, you should start noticing bubbles and a pleasant, slightly tangy aroma developing, showing fermentation is active. Continue this daily feeding schedule for at least 5 days, or until your starter consistently doubles in size within 6–8 hours after feeding. This indicates a healthy, active starter ready to use.

Maintaining your Starter

To maintain your starter, store it in the refrigerator in an airtight container or jar, feeding it at least once a week with equal amounts (50 g flour and 50 ml water). Before using for baking, remove your starter from the fridge, feed it again, and let it ferment at room temperature until active and bubbly (typically 4–6 hours).



Recipes

Mediterranean Vegetable & Feta Pizza

Ingredients (for one pizza)

- 1 prepared dough ball (handmade or sourdough, approximately 225 g)
- 2 tablespoons tomato passata or rich tomato sauce
- 1 small courgette, thinly sliced
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- ½ red bell pepper, thinly sliced
- ½ yellow bell pepper, thinly sliced
- A small handful of cherry tomatoes, halved
- 50 g feta cheese, crumbled
- 1 tablespoon Kalamata olives, halved and pitted
- 1 tablespoon capers, drained
- 1 garlic clove, thinly sliced
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon dried basil
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- A generous pinch of chilli flakes (optional)
- A handful of fresh rocket (arugula) or fresh basil leaves, to finish
- Extra-virgin olive oil, to drizzle
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Method:

Preheat your oven to 230°C (210°C fan). If using a pizza stone, heat it in the oven for at least 20 minutes.

Roll out or hand-stretch the pizza dough to about 25–30 cm diameter. Place on a lightly floured pizza peel or baking sheet lined with parchment.

Spread the tomato passata evenly over the pizza base, leaving about a 2 cm border. Arrange the courgette slices, red onion, bell peppers, cherry tomatoes, garlic slices, and olives evenly over the passata. Scatter capers and crumbled feta cheese on top.

Sprinkle generously with dried oregano, basil, smoked paprika, and a pinch of chilli flakes if using. Finish with freshly ground black pepper and a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil.

Slide the pizza into the hot oven onto the pizza stone or baking tray and bake for 10–12 minutes, until the crust is golden brown and crisp, and vegetables are lightly caramelised.

Remove from the oven, scatter fresh rocket or basil leaves over the pizza, and drizzle with a final touch of extra-virgin olive oil before slicing and serving immediately.

Nutritional notes:

This pizza is abundant in polyphenol-rich ingredients such as colourful peppers, tomatoes, courgette, red onion, olives, herbs, spices, and high-quality olive oil, all of which support optimal health, gut microbiota diversity, and anti-inflammatory benefits.

Parma Ham, Brie, Walnut & Honey Pizza

Ingredients (for one pizza)

- 1 prepared dough ball (handmade or sourdough, approx. 225 g)
- 2 tablespoons tomato passata or quality tomato sauce
- 80 g Brie cheese, thinly sliced
- 3 slices Parma ham (prosciutto), torn into bite-sized pieces
- 1 small red onion, finely sliced
- A handful of rocket (arugula), fresh
- 2 tablespoons walnuts, lightly toasted and roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon runny honey
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon chilli flakes (optional)
- 1 garlic clove, thinly sliced
- Extra-virgin olive oil, to drizzle
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Method:

Preheat your oven to 230°C (210°C fan). If using a pizza stone, ensure it's preheated in the oven for at least 20 minutes.

Roll out or gently stretch your pizza dough ball into a circle of about 25–30 cm. Place onto a lightly floured pizza peel or a baking tray lined with parchment paper.

Spread tomato passata evenly across the dough base, leaving a 2 cm border around the edge. Scatter thin slices of Brie evenly

over the passata, then add sliced red onion and garlic. Sprinkle evenly with dried oregano, thyme, and chilli flakes if using.

Bake pizza for approximately 8–10 minutes until the cheese begins to bubble and the crust is turning golden.

Remove pizza briefly from the oven and quickly arrange torn Parma ham pieces and chopped walnuts over the top. Return to the oven for a further 1–2 minutes, just enough to gently warm the ham without crisping it.

Remove pizza from the oven, drizzle generously with honey, and finish with a handful of fresh rocket, a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil, and freshly ground black pepper.

Slice and serve immediately, enjoying the rich blend of sweet honey, savoury Parma ham, creamy Brie, aromatic herbs, and crunchy walnuts.

Nutritional notes:

This pizza offers beneficial nutrients and antioxidants from walnuts, rocket, garlic, herbs, and quality olive oil. Walnuts provide omega-3 fatty acids, supporting brain and cardiovascular health, while rocket and garlic add valuable polyphenols and anti-inflammatory benefits, complementing the flavour profile of the dish.

Recipes

Salads - Mediterranean Rainbow Slaw

Serves: 4-6

Ingredients:

- ¼ small red cabbage, thinly shredded
- 2 medium carrots, grated or julienned
- ½ fennel bulb, finely sliced
- 1 red bell pepper, thinly sliced
- A large handful of fresh flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped
- 2 tablespoons pumpkin seeds, lightly toasted
- 2 tablespoons dried cranberries or pomegranate seeds

Dressing:

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon honey
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Method:

In a large bowl, combine red cabbage, carrot, fennel, red pepper, parsley, pumpkin seeds, and dried cranberries or pomegranate seeds. Whisk together olive oil, lemon juice, mustard, honey, cumin, salt, and pepper until emulsified. Pour dressing over vegetables, toss well, and allow flavours to meld for at least 10 minutes before serving.



Salads - Rocket, Orange & Spiced Chickpea Salad

A refreshing, colourful salad loaded with citrus, spices, and leafy greens, ideal to balance your pizza meal.

Serves: 4-6

Ingredients:

- 100 g fresh rocket (arugula)
- 2 oranges, peeled and segmented, juices reserved
- 1 tin (400 g) chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- ½ red onion, finely sliced
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds, lightly toasted
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander
- ¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
- A generous pinch of ground cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

Dressing:

- Reserved orange juice (about 2 tablespoons)
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Method:

Heat olive oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Add chickpeas and sprinkle over smoked paprika, coriander, turmeric, cinnamon, salt, and pepper. Sauté gently for 4-5 minutes until fragrant and lightly toasted. Allow chickpeas to cool slightly.

Arrange rocket, orange segments, red onion, spiced chickpeas, and toasted sesame seeds in a serving bowl. Whisk together reserved orange juice, extra-virgin olive oil, apple cider vinegar, salt, and pepper, then drizzle over salad just before serving. Toss gently and enjoy immediately.

Nutritional notes:

Both salads are high in dietary fibre, antioxidants, and polyphenols. They offer diverse textures, flavours, and vibrant colours, supporting digestive health, gut microbiome diversity, and overall wellbeing.

Niall Hill - Cedar Plank Cookery



Cooking on Cedar Planks – A Home Cook's Guide.

A Brief History

Cooking on wood planks has deep roots in Indigenous culinary traditions, especially along the Pacific Northwest coast of North America. Native peoples such as the Coast Salish would pin wild salmon to large cedar boards and slow-roast it over open fires. This method allowed the fish to gently steam while absorbing the aromatic oils released by the smouldering wood, resulting in beautifully moist, fragrant flesh.

Today, cedar plank cooking is a favourite among outdoor cooks because it blends smoking, roasting, and gentle steaming into one simple method – ideal for infusing subtle, woody character into fish, meat, cheese or vegetables.

Why Use a Cedar Plank?

- **Flavour:** The heat gently toasts the wood, releasing sweet, smoky, resinous aromas that complement seafood, poultry, pork, and even cheese or root vegetables.
- **Texture:** Foods cook gently on a plank without direct flame contact, helping retain moisture and tenderness.
- **Presentation:** Serving straight off the plank adds rustic charm and keeps food warm longer at the table.

How to Use a Cedar Plank (Any Grill Type)

- 1. Soak the Plank** Soak your cedar plank in cold water for at least 1 hour before cooking (up to 4 hours for more intense smouldering). You can add herbs, lemon slices, cider or wine to the water for extra flavour infusion.
- 2. Preheat the BBQ or Fire Pit**
 - **Gas BBQ:** Preheat to medium-high. Place the soaked plank on the grates, lid down, for 2 minutes to start it smoking.
 - **Charcoal BBQ:** Build a medium fire and push coals to one side. Place the plank over indirect heat.

- **Fire Pit:** Create a bed of glowing embers. Rest the plank on a grill rack just above the coals, or wedge it upright beside the fire for a more traditional method.
- 3. Prepare the Food** Lay your seasoned fish fillet (such as salmon or sea bass), marinated chicken breast, halloumi, or even wedges of beetroot or squash directly on the damp plank. Avoid flipping the food – it cooks best undisturbed.
- 4. Cook Gently**
 - Close the lid if using a BBQ.
 - Let the plank smoulder rather than flame – this slow release of smoke is where the flavour comes from.
 - Cooking time varies: fish takes about 20–25 minutes, chicken around 30–35 minutes depending on thickness.
- 5. Serve Directly on the Plank** Remove the plank carefully using tongs and heatproof gloves. Rest briefly, then serve straight off the board for maximum effect.

Top Tips

- Always keep a spray bottle of water nearby in case the edges of the plank catch fire.
- Cedar pairs especially well with oily fish, like salmon or trout, and bright citrus or herb marinades.
- Reuse planks once or twice if they're not too scorched – just rinse and air-dry fully.
- Don't confuse untreated cedar cooking planks with building timber – always buy food-safe wood.

Flavour Pairings by Protein:

Salmon – honey, lemon zest, dill, mustard

Chicken – thyme, smoked paprika, garlic

Pork – maple syrup, rosemary, black pepper

Vegetables – olive oil, cumin, fennel seed

Cheese (e.g. feta or halloumi) – oregano, chilli flakes, a touch of honey

Planked Cooleeney Farm Brie with Blueberries, Honey & Thyme

Serves: 6

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 cedar plank, soaked in water for at least 1 hour
- 1kg Cooleeney Farm Brie (or other soft Irish brie-style cheese)
- 200g fresh blueberries
- 2 tablespoons Irish organic honey
- 1 teaspoon thyme leaves
- 1 sourdough baguette
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Method:

Begin by preparing your BBQ – charcoal or wood-fired – with a medium-sized fire on one side. Aim for a grill temperature of around 180°C (350°F). Soak the cedar plank in water for at least an hour beforehand so it doesn't burn during cooking.

Place the whole wheel of Brie on the soaked plank. In a small bowl, mix the blueberries, honey, and thyme leaves, then spoon the mixture generously over the top of the cheese. Season lightly with sea salt and a few cracks of black pepper.

Position the plank on the cooler side of the BBQ, close enough to the heat to cook but

not directly over the flames. Close the lid and grill for 10–15 minutes, or until the Brie softens and begins to ooze gently from the rind.

While the Brie is cooking, slice the sourdough baguette and brush each piece with olive oil. Season lightly and grill on the hot side of the BBQ until crisp and golden on both sides – this only takes a minute or two.

Serving Tip:

Serve the soft, bubbling Brie straight on the cedar plank, surrounded by the grilled sourdough crostini for scooping. The smoky wood aroma, warm honey, and burst blueberries create a show-stopping combination that's ideal for sharing at the table.

Recipes

Planked Carrot & Goat's Cheese Salad with Mustard Dressing

Serves: 6

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 50 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil (for roasting)
- 6 medium carrots, washed
- 1 onion, peeled and sliced into rounds
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon tarragon vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 60ml olive oil (for dressing)
- 60ml maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon chopped thyme
- Sea salt, to taste
- Ground black pepper, to taste
- 125g goat's cheese, crumbled
- 100g rocket leaves
- 1 cedar plank, soaked in water for at least 1 hour

Method:

Start by soaking your cedar plank in water for at least an hour. Preheat your grill to medium heat and set it up for indirect cooking.

Rub the carrots with a tablespoon of olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Place them directly on the grill over indirect heat,

close the lid, and roast for 20–30 minutes until they're almost fork-tender. Remove from the grill and allow to cool completely.

While the carrots are cooling, whisk together the 60ml olive oil, tarragon vinegar, Dijon mustard, and a pinch of salt and pepper to make the dressing. Set aside.

Slice the cooled carrots into thick diagonal rounds. Toss them together with the onion slices, maple syrup, thyme, and a touch more salt and pepper.

Preheat the grill again to medium-high. Arrange the carrot and onion slices evenly across the soaked plank. Place the plank on the grill, close the lid, and roast for 15–20 minutes until caramelised and lightly smoky. Remove the plank and allow everything to cool slightly.

On a large serving board or platter, lay out the rocket leaves and scatter over the warm carrot and onion mix. Drizzle generously with the mustard dressing and finish with crumbled goat's cheese.

Serving Tip:

This salad works well as a starter or a warm side dish with grilled meats. You can also add toasted nuts or seeds for crunch, or swap in beetroot for a colourful variation.

Planked Goatsbridge Trout with Shaved Vegetable-Barley Salad, Roasted Almonds, Mint & Rapeseed Oil

Serves: 6

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Ingredients:

- 6 x 150g trout fillets (skin on)
- 1 cedar plank, soaked for at least 1 hour
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 600g cooked barley (cooled)
- 1 fennel bulb
- 1 carrot
- 1 small beetroot
- 50g whole almonds
- 1 teaspoon fresh mint leaves, torn
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 100ml cold-pressed rapeseed oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Method:

Start by preparing your BBQ – wood or charcoal – with a medium fire on one side. Aim for an internal grill temperature of around 180°C (350°F). Soak your cedar plank in cold water for at least 1 hour beforehand.

Lightly roast the almonds in a dry pan or over the grill until golden. Set aside to cool, then crush roughly.

Place the trout fillets skin-side up onto the soaked plank. Brush with a little olive oil and season generously with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Position the plank on the cooler side of the grill, away from direct flames. Close the lid and cook for 10–15 minutes until the fish is firm to the touch and sizzling, but still moist inside.

While the trout is cooking, prepare the salad. Finely slice the fennel, carrot, and beetroot using a sharp knife or a vegetable peeler for a ribbon effect. Combine with the cooked barley in a large bowl.

Add the crushed roasted almonds and torn mint. Season with lemon juice, salt, pepper, and drizzle over the rapeseed oil. Toss gently to combine.

Serving Tip:

Present the trout straight on the cedar plank for a dramatic smoky aroma. Serve the salad alongside in a large bowl or family-style platter. This dish pairs beautifully with grilled flatbreads or simply dressed rocket leaves.



Recipes

Planked Peaches with Mascarpone Cream and Shortbread Crumble

Serves: 6

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

For the peaches:

- 6 ripe peaches, halved and stones removed
- 50g brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 cedar plank, soaked for at least 1 hour

For the mascarpone cream:

- 150g mascarpone
- 200ml cream
- 25g icing sugar
- Zest of 1 lemon

For the shortbread crumble:

- 200g butter
- 150g sugar
- 300g plain flour
- 1 egg yolk

Method:

Start by preparing your BBQ with a medium fire on one side and aim for a temperature of around 180°C (350°F). Soak your cedar plank in cold water for at least an hour beforehand.

Mix together the brown sugar and cinnamon in a small bowl. Cut the peaches in half and sprinkle the cut sides with the cinnamon sugar mixture.

Place the peach halves cavity side up on the soaked plank. Position the plank on the cooler side of the grill, away from direct flames. Close the lid and grill for 15–20 minutes, or until the peaches are soft, slightly caramelised, and the juices are bubbling.

To make the crumble, rub the butter, sugar, and flour together with your fingers or in a mixer until it forms a breadcrumb-like texture. Stir in the egg yolk to bind slightly, then spread the mixture out on a baking tray. Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C for around 15 minutes, or until golden brown. Let cool and store in an airtight container until serving.

For the mascarpone cream, whisk the mascarpone, cream, icing sugar, and lemon zest together until soft peaks form. Chill until ready to serve.

Serving Tip:

Serve the warm peaches directly from the plank, topped with a spoonful of mascarpone cream and a generous sprinkle of the shortbread crumble. A beautiful end to any BBQ meal that's sure to impress guests.

Stephen Boyle - Guide to Camping Cookery



Practical Cooking Techniques for the Great Outdoors

Cooking outdoors while camping can be both deeply satisfying and surprisingly efficient, especially with a little planning and the right approach. Whether you're preparing hearty one-pot meals, cooking over an open flame, or working with limited gear, this guide will help you make the most of your outdoor kitchen—whatever the setting.

1. Mastering the Basics: Cooking Setups

Camping cookery typically involves three main setups—gas stoves, open fires, and minimal-equipment arrangements. Each has its strengths and challenges:

Gas Stoves

Compact and reliable, gas stoves are ideal for consistent, controlled heat. They're perfect for boiling, sautéing, simmering, or frying and can support a wide range of cookware. Wind protection is essential, so set up in a sheltered area or use a windscreen. Always bring spare fuel canisters to avoid running out mid-meal.

Open Fires

Campfires offer that authentic outdoor feel and rich, smoky flavour. Use a sturdy grate over the flames or cook directly in the embers with heavy-duty cookware. Let the fire burn down to glowing coals before you start cooking, as this provides a more stable and even heat. Manage heat zones by arranging coals and logs accordingly—hotter directly over coals, cooler off to the side.

Minimal Equipment Cooking

When travelling light, make every piece of gear count. A single pot or pan can go a long way if you plan well. Think about layering flavours, reusing cooking water, or using ingredients that can serve more than one function. Foil-wrapped parcels, collapsible utensils, and nesting pots help reduce bulk and increase efficiency.

2. Cooking Techniques for the Campsite

One-Pot Cooking

Ideal for low-fuss meals and minimal clean-up. One-pot dishes allow you to combine ingredients sequentially, making use of layering and resting times. Stir regularly and monitor the heat to avoid burning the base—especially on high-output camp stoves.

Skillet Cooking

A cast iron or heavy-duty skillet is perfect for high-heat methods such as searing, frying, and shallow baking. It retains heat well and can be used directly on an open fire, grill, or stove. Preheat evenly and adjust positioning to prevent hotspots. Always oil lightly to avoid sticking.

Dutch Oven Cooking

The ultimate tool for campfire cuisine. Dutch ovens are versatile, allowing you to roast, stew, bake, or braise with confidence. Bury in embers or place coals on the lid and base for even heat distribution. Keep the lid tight to retain moisture and check periodically to manage cooking time. A trivet or tripod can help keep it level when cooking over flames.



3. Prep-Ahead Ideas for Ease and Efficiency

Good planning is half the battle when cooking outdoors. With limited space and tools, a few clever prep steps can save time and reduce hassle.

- **Pre-chop and portion ingredients** into resealable bags or containers.
- **Mix dry ingredients** (spice blends, pancake mixes, baking mixes) before leaving home.
- **Vacuum-seal or freeze meals** for longer trips—these can double as cool packs in your cooler box.
- **Pack shelf-stable staples** like tinned beans, grains, and pouches of ready-cooked rice or lentils.
- **Bring small containers** of oil, salt, and condiments to avoid bulky bottles.

4. Practical Tips for Outdoor Cooking Success

- Always cook on a **level surface** and ensure your equipment is stable.
- Keep **cleaning supplies** handy—wipes, biodegradable soap, a small scrubbing brush, and a cloth for drying.
- Consider **waste management**: bring a bag for rubbish and compostables.
- Use **insulated containers** to keep cooked food warm if serving in stages.
- Plan meals around **energy use**: start with dishes requiring the most fuel and save lighter meals for later.
- **Stay safe**: never leave flames unattended and ensure coals are fully extinguished before sleeping or leaving camp.

Camping cookery is about more than just feeding yourself—it's a chance to slow down, connect with nature, and enjoy the process. With a little prep and the right gear, outdoor cooking can become one of the most enjoyable parts of your adventure.



Skillet-Roasted Chicken & Chorizo Orzo Paella with Salsa Verde

Serves: 4–6

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 25–35 minutes

Ingredients:

For the paella:

- 3–4 chicken breasts, sliced into strips
- 200g diced chorizo
- 2 medium onions, diced
- 300g spinach
- 10g chopped garlic
- 300ml vegetable stock
- 150g tinned chopped tomatoes
- 400g orzo pasta, rinsed
- 200g garden peas (defrosted if frozen)
- 1g black pepper
- Olive oil, for cooking

For the salsa verde:

- 100g fresh tarragon
- 150g fresh parsley
- 30g garlic
- 3 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 40g small capers
- 200ml olive oil
- 2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Method:

Start by preparing all your ingredients: slice the chicken, dice the onions, chop the garlic, rinse the orzo, and defrost the peas. Blend all the salsa verde ingredients together until smooth. Taste and adjust seasoning, then set aside.

Heat a large cast iron skillet over medium-high heat. Add a little oil and sauté the chicken strips for 3–4 minutes until lightly golden, then remove and set aside.

In the same skillet, add more oil if needed, and cook down the garlic and onion until soft and fragrant. Season with a little pepper.

Add the rinsed orzo to the skillet along with the chopped tomatoes and enough vegetable stock to just cover the pasta. Stir well and bring to a simmer.

Once the orzo is about 80% cooked (check after 10–12 minutes), return the chicken to the pan along with the diced chorizo. Stir gently and continue cooking until the orzo is tender and the liquid has mostly absorbed.

Stir through the garden peas and spinach, then turn off the heat and cover the skillet with a lid or foil. Let it rest for 5 minutes so the flavours can settle and the steam finishes the cooking.

Serving Tip:

Bring the whole skillet to the table on a heatproof coaster. Drizzle with the salsa verde and garnish with fresh sliced red chilli for a little kick. Serve directly from the pan for a rustic, warming dish full of colour and flavour.

Kitchen Tip:

Always dry your cast iron skillet thoroughly after washing to prevent rust. A quick wipe with a bit of oil before storing keeps it in perfect condition.

Recipes

Sesame Glazed Pork Ribs with Korean Dipping Sauce

Serves: 4–6

**Prep Time: 15 minutes
(plus 10–12 hours marinating)**

Cook Time: 5–6 hours

Ingredients:

For the ribs:

- 3.2kg baby back pork ribs (8–10 ribs per rack, approx. 4 racks)
- 700ml chicken stock
- 15g fresh parsley, chopped
- 1g black pepper

Rub Mix (makes enough for multiple racks, use 10–20g per 500g of ribs):

- 100g each: smoked paprika, ground cumin, dark brown sugar, ground coriander, onion powder
- 50g each: fennel seed, ground white pepper, ground cinnamon, cayenne pepper
- 50g fresh oregano
- 50g fresh thyme

For the Korean dipping sauce:

- 7g peeled garlic
- 1g fresh mint
- 2g coriander leaf
- 3g fresh ginger
- 30ml rice vinegar
- 5ml lime juice
- 10ml soy sauce
- 50g sesame oil (blended or toasted)
- 100g mix of chopped scallions and red chilli
- 150ml reduced rib cooking stock (from above)

Method:

1. Marinate the Ribs

Blend all the rub ingredients into a dry seasoning mix. Massage generously over the ribs and place them in a large zip-lock bag or container. Refrigerate for at least 10–12 hours or overnight for best flavour.

2. Cook the Ribs Low and Slow

Preheat your oven (or BBQ setup) to 80°C. Arrange the ribs in a large deep Dutch oven or roasting tray. Pour in the chicken stock, cover tightly with foil, and slow-cook for 5–6 hours (or overnight if preferred) until the ribs are tender and the meat is pulling from the bone.

3. Reduce the Stock & Glaze

Carefully remove the ribs and set aside. Pour the cooking stock into a saucepan and reduce over medium heat until syrupy. Reserve 150ml of the reduced liquid for your dipping sauce. Use the rest to brush over the ribs as a glaze. Sprinkle with sesame seeds just before serving.

4. Make the Korean Dipping Sauce

In a blender, combine the garlic, mint, coriander, ginger, vinegar, lime juice, soy sauce, sesame oil, chopped scallions, red chilli, and the 150ml reserved glaze stock. Blend until smooth and pour into small bowls for dipping. Garnish with extra chillies and spring onions.

Serving Tip:

Cut the ribs into individual or 3–4 rib portions before serving for easier handling. Serve on a large platter with dipping bowls of sauce and some lime wedges on the side.

Kitchen Tips:

- Zip-lock bags are ideal for marinating – they save space and make it easier to coat the meat evenly.
- Resting the ribs for 10 minutes before slicing helps keep the meat juicy.
- Ribs can be finished on a hot grill for 1–2 minutes per side for added char and smokiness.

Baked Sweet Potato with Charred Onion, Cranberry & Chipotle Ricotta

Serves: 4-6

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 55-60 minutes

Ingredients:

- 6 medium sweet potatoes
- 25ml olive oil
- 2g chipotle pepper (dried or flakes)
- 80g dried cranberries
- 3g sea salt
- 150g red onion, chopped into large dice
- 250g ricotta cheese
- 15g fresh parsley, chopped
- 1g black pepper

Method:

Start by chopping the red onion into large chunks. Toss in a little olive oil, sea salt, and black pepper and set aside. Lightly score each sweet potato lengthways – this helps them open easily once baked.

Place the sweet potatoes into a Dutch oven or roasting tray and bake at 180°C for about 50-55 minutes, or until tender and the skins start to crisp.

While the potatoes are baking, heat a dry pan and quickly sear the red onions over high heat for 1-2 minutes. You want a good char but still some bite. Set aside to cool.

In a small bowl, mix the ricotta with the cranberries and chipotle pepper. Season to taste with a little more salt and black pepper.

Once the potatoes are soft and ready, remove from the oven and slice open along the scored lines. Spoon the ricotta-cranberry mixture generously into each potato. Return them to the oven for 5 more minutes to gently warm through.

Top with the charred onions and finish with a sprinkle of the remaining cranberries and chopped parsley.

Serving Tip:

Serve these warm on a platter, either as a standout vegetarian main or a vibrant side dish alongside grilled meats.

Kitchen Tips:

- You can par-bake the sweet potatoes earlier in the day and finish them in the Dutch oven for the final 20 minutes before serving.
- The onions can be seared the day before and added during the final roast to save time during service.

Recipes

Seared Watermelon and Cucumber with Feta, Red Onion & Mint

A cool, refreshing dish that balances savoury, sweet, and sharp flavours – perfect for summer BBQs

Serves: 4-6

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 5 minutes

Ingredients (serves 4-6):

- 500g watermelon, cut into large dice (reserve one half for serving bowl if desired)
- 500g cucumber, diced
- 150g lime juice (about 3-4 limes)
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 40g fresh mint leaves, picked
- 1g cayenne pepper
- 3g sea salt
- 100g red onion, chopped into large dice
- 350g feta cheese, diced
- 1g black pepper
- Olive oil, for searing

Method:

Start by chopping the red onion into large chunks and tossing it in a little oil with sea salt and black pepper. Set aside. Dice the watermelon and allow it to drain briefly on kitchen paper. Dice the cucumber and feta, and pick the mint leaves ready for garnish. Cut the limes in half and juice them.

Preheat a skillet or grill pan over high heat. Quickly sear the red onions for 1-2 minutes – you want some char but still a bit of crunch. Set aside to cool. Reheat the skillet and sear the watermelon cubes just long enough to give them a bit of colour and smoky edge – around 30-60 seconds per side. Set aside to cool.

In a large bowl, gently toss together the watermelon, cucumber, seared onions, and cayenne pepper. Add the lime juice and scatter over the diced feta.

Finishing Touches:

Just before serving, drizzle the salad with honey and finish with the picked mint leaves. For extra flair, serve the salad inside a hollowed-out half of the watermelon to bring colour and visual impact to your BBQ table.

Kitchen Tips:

- The melon can be prepped and stored in the fridge a day ahead – it holds up very well.
- Always dry your skillet completely after use to prevent rusting, especially with cast iron.

Glen Stewart – Low and Slow Smoking



Guide to Setting Up Your Smoker for Hot Smoking – Low ‘n’ Slow

Hot smoking over low heat is a slow and rewarding cooking method, designed especially for tougher, larger cuts such as brisket, pork shoulder, or ribs. This guide walks through the smoker setup, fuel choice, temperature control, and wood selection—giving you everything you need for a successful long cook.

Smoker Setup: The Basics

Whether you're smoking brisket, ribs, or pork shoulder, the setup remains largely the same. The only variable is your choice of wood, which can be adjusted based on the desired flavour or what's available.

If your smoker is new, it's worth seasoning it before the first use. Run a four-hour smoke without food, using a generous amount of wood. This coats the interior walls, improving temperature stability and imparting a consistent smoky character over time. Only clean the cooking racks, drip tray, and fire bowl – never scrub the inside walls or lid unless food has spilled directly onto them. The more you use your smoker, the better it will perform.

Top Tip:

This is a long, slow process. Most smokes will last 8–12 hours, so plan ahead to avoid finishing in the early hours. You can smoke a day in advance and reheat over the smoker or BBQ when needed.

Choosing the Right Wood

The wood you use will subtly influence the smoke intensity and flavour.

Do not use:

- Softwoods or evergreens like pine, spruce, fir, or holly—their resins cause a bitter flavour and dirty burn.
- Manmade or construction wood such as MDF, plywood, painted or laminated timber—these release toxic fumes.

- Fresh, green, or rotting wood. Always use seasoned, dry hardwood free from bark and moss.

Reliable choices:

- Native woods: alder, ash, beech
- Occasional use: apple, cherry, oak
- Fruit woods: mild and sweet (apple, pear, cherry)
- Nut woods: intense and bold (beech, pecan, hickory)
- Other hardwoods: robust and savoury (oak, alder, ash)

Wood should be seasoned for at least 12–18 months. Logs should be split and stored under cover with good airflow.

Use chunks about the size of an apple—approximately 12–15 per smoke. If using smaller pieces, adjust the quantity accordingly.

What You'll Need

- Charcoal, plus spare for top-ups
- 10–15 apple-sized chunks of hardwood
- Firelighter cubes or crumpled newspaper
- Chimney starter (optional but helpful)
- Long matches or BBQ lighter
- Heat-resistant gloves

Step-by-Step Setup Guide

1. Prepare the Smoker and Light the Charcoal

Remove the fire grate and clean out any ash. Open all air vents to maximise airflow.

Inside the fire ring, create a doughnut-shaped ring of charcoal around the edge, leaving the centre empty. Arrange your wood chunks over the charcoal, placing one piece in the centre space.

- **If using a chimney starter:** Fill halfway with charcoal, light underneath with a firelighter or newspaper, and wait until coals are white-hot. Tip carefully into the centre of your charcoal ring.
- **If lighting directly in the smoker:** Place a firelighter in the centre space, light it, and place 10 pieces of charcoal on top. Position one wood chunk above the flames.

Avoid mixing the hot coals into the surrounding charcoal. This centre-lighting method promotes a slow, even burn from the inside out—ideal for 10+ hours of consistent heat.

2. Bring the Smoker to Temperature

Once the charcoal is lit, reassemble the smoker and fit the cooking grates. Close the lid but leave all vents fully open.

After 15–20 minutes, when the internal thermometer reads over 100°C and the smoke is clean and white, you're ready to begin.

Control the temperature by adjusting **only the bottom vents**. Keep the **top vent fully open** at all times to allow smoke to escape.

Expect a brief temperature spike around the one-hour mark as more charcoal ignites. This typically stabilises within 30–60 minutes. Maintain a temperature range between 100°C and 140°C for optimal low 'n' slow cooking.

3. Managing the Water Tray

Many smokers come with a water tray to help regulate temperature. However, refilling it mid-cook can disturb the fire and release ash onto your food. A practical alternative is to line it with foil and use it purely as a drip tray- this simplifies cleaning and avoids disruptions during cooking.

Smoking meat low and slow takes time, patience, and attention to detail. But with a solid setup, the right wood, and steady heat, it's one of the most flavourful ways to cook.



Beer Can Smoked Chicken

Serves: 2-4 per chicken

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cook Time: 2.5-3 hours

Ingredients:

- 1 whole chicken
- 1 x 330ml can of stout beer
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp sea salt flakes
- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 tbsp sweet paprika
- 1 tsp finely chopped thyme
- Honey, for drizzling

Method:

Preparation

Begin by basting the whole chicken with olive oil. In a small bowl, mix the sea salt, pepper, paprika, and thyme together, then rub this dry seasoning blend evenly over all sides of the chicken.

Open the can of stout and drink about one third. Carefully place the open can inside the cavity of the chicken so that the bird is sitting upright, balanced on the can. This vertical position allows for even cooking and maximum flavour infusion.

Cooking

If starting from a fresh smoker setup, ignite two chimneys of charcoal and pour them into the fire ring once fully lit. Add four chunks of fruit wood directly on top of the hot coals and allow the smoker to come to temperature - this usually takes around 20 minutes. Aim to stabilise the internal temperature at 120°C.

Ensure your water tray is filled with warm water before you begin. This will help maintain a moist cooking environment throughout the cook.

Place the beer-can chicken onto the grill rack inside the smoker, keeping it upright and ensuring there is space between multiple birds if cooking more than one. Replace the smoker lid and open all vents fully to start.

Regulate the temperature by adjusting the bottom vents only. Avoid fully closing them, as this will reduce oxygen and extinguish the fire. Keep the top vent fully open at all times.

Maintain a temperature of 120°C. If it begins to rise above 150°C for more than 10 minutes, remove the lid briefly and add cold water to the tray to cool things down.

At the 1-hour and 2-hour marks, open the smoker briefly and add an additional chunk of wood to keep the smoke flowing.

After approximately 3 hours, check doneness with a meat thermometer. The chicken should read at least 75°C in the thickest part of the breast and at the thigh joint. While the chicken may be technically cooked before the 3-hour mark, allow the full time for the smoke and beer to fully infuse the meat, resulting in a tender, flavourful finish.

Finishing Touches

Carefully remove the chicken from the smoker and take it off the beer can. Lay it breast-side up on a chopping board. Use a sharp chef's knife to split it in half lengthwise through the breastbone and spine. Then divide each half into two portions: one with the wing and breast, and one with the leg and thigh.

Arrange the portions skin-side up on a serving board with a handful of rocket leaves, and finish with a generous drizzle of honey just before serving.

Tip:

If you are smoking a larger cut like brisket at the same time, add the chicken to the smoker during the final two hours of that cook, using fruit wood and fresh charcoal. This way, both meats are ready to rest and serve at the same time.

Recipes

Dry-Rubbed Low 'n' Slow Smoked Brisket

Serves: 10 for a 3kg brisket | A whole brisket will feed 20+

Prep Time: 40 minutes

Cook Time: 12 hours

Ingredients:

For the Brisket

- 3kg beef brisket

For the Cure

- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 2 tbsp sea salt flakes
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tbsp ground black pepper
- 4 bay leaves, ground
- 1 tsp ground cloves

For the Rub

- 1 tbsp onion powder
- 1 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp mustard powder
- 2 tbsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp pink peppercorns
- 1 tbsp salt
- 1 tbsp finely chopped thyme

Method:

Preparation

Mix all the cure ingredients together and rub thoroughly over every surface of the brisket. Place the brisket into a large sealable food bag and refrigerate for three days, turning it over morning and evening to distribute the cure evenly.

The day before you plan to smoke, remove the brisket from the bag and rinse it under cold running water to remove the curing mix. Then soak it in a large container of cold water for 1–2 hours, changing the water every 15 minutes to draw out any excess salt.

After soaking, remove the brisket and pat it dry using paper towel or a clean tea towel. Mix the rub ingredients together and massage them into the brisket, ensuring it is evenly coated on all sides.

Cooking

Once your smoker is fully lit and has come up to temperature, place the brisket directly on the lower cooking rack, fat side up. Close the lid.

Start with all the vents fully open. As the smoker begins to stabilise and the coals catch, begin to regulate the heat by partially closing the bottom vents. Keep the top vent fully open throughout the entire cooking process.

Maintain a steady smoker temperature between 120°C and 150°C. If the temperature rises too high and adjusting the vents doesn't bring it down, add a few litres of water to the drip tray to cool the environment slightly and create a more humid cook.

After 6 hours, remove the brisket from the smoker and wrap it tightly—first in baking paper, then in foil—to preserve moisture. Return it to the smoker and continue to cook for another 4 to 6 hours. During this time, monitor your firebox and top up with around 12 pieces of charcoal if needed to maintain consistent heat.

Once the internal temperature of the brisket reaches at least 82°C, it's ready. Remove it from the smoker and rest it in a tray, still wrapped, for at least 30 minutes. Do not unwrap it until just before serving.

Finishing Touches

When ready to serve, slice the brisket across the grain and arrange on a serving board. Drizzle lightly with your favourite BBQ sauce and scatter over a little chopped thyme.

This brisket is ideal served in warm sour-dough rolls with a handful of rocket leaves and a spoonful of sweet pickled red onion. Perfect for feeding a crowd.

Recipes

Charred Cabbage Wedges with Lemon & Mustard Dressing

Serves: 4

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 45–60 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 large green cabbage
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp sea salt
- ½ tsp cracked black pepper
- Juice of ½ lemon
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil (for dressing)
- Optional: pinch of chilli flakes

Method:

Remove any tough outer leaves from the cabbage and cut it into quarters through the core so that each wedge holds together. Brush each wedge with olive oil and season generously with sea salt and cracked black pepper.

Place the wedges directly on the smoker rack or in a grill basket over indirect heat. Smoke at 130–150°C for 45–60 minutes, turning once or twice to ensure even charring. The outer leaves should darken and caramelise, while the core becomes tender.

Meanwhile, mix the lemon juice, Dijon mustard, and extra virgin olive oil to make a quick dressing. Add a pinch of chilli flakes if you'd like a little heat.

Once cooked, transfer the wedges to a serving dish and drizzle with the dressing just before serving. Serve warm or at room temperature alongside smoked meats.

Smoked Mixed Beans in Tomato & Brown Sugar Sauce

Serves: 6

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 1.5–2 hours

Ingredients:

- 2 x 400g tins mixed beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 small red onion, finely diced
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 150g tomato purée
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Optional: a dash of hot sauce or pinch of cayenne

Method:

In a cast iron pan or deep foil tray, heat the olive oil and sauté the diced onion and garlic until softened. Stir in the tomato purée and cook for a minute or two to reduce the sharpness.

Add the drained beans, brown sugar, vinegar, smoked paprika, and a splash of water (around 50ml). Season with salt and black pepper and stir well to combine. If you like a bit of kick, add a dash of hot sauce or a pinch of cayenne.

Place the pan on the smoker, uncovered, and cook at 120–140°C for 1.5 to 2 hours. Stir occasionally to prevent sticking and allow the top to caramelize slightly. The smoke will infuse the beans and thicken the sauce beautifully.

Serve hot as a rich, savoury side to brisket, ribs, or smoked chicken. Leftovers keep well and reheat easily.

