

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Who Needs Meat for a Cookout?

How to have an all-veggie BBQ



Meredith Haaz, executive chef of The Ranch 4.0 luxury fitness retreat at the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village, grills at least once a week in her Los Angeles home and often finds herself focusing on vegetables. PHOTO: EMILY BERL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Summer cookouts don't have to just mean tossing hot dogs and burgers on the grill. A vegetarian barbecue can do just as well.

"It feels very fresh and it can come together very quickly," says Meredith Haaz, executive chef of The Ranch 4.0 luxury fitness retreat at the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village.

FIVE TIPS



Watermelon is an unusual grill choice. Cut the fruit up into 'big planks' and grill them for a few minutes. PHOTO: EMILY BERL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

- Grilled pizzas topped with summer vegetables and cheese can be an oomphy barbecue entree option.
- Cauliflower steaks, marinated in a chimichurri of fresh herbs and pistachios, can be an alternative to regular steaks.
- Some vegetables need more prep than others before grilling. Artichokes and brussels sprouts, for example, should be parcooked ahead of time.
- Use grilling to up the game of basic cookout dishes. Grilling potatoes for a potato salad, for example, adds some char to the salad.
- Try grilled watermelon topped with lime juice and mint as a barbecue dessert.

During the summer, she grills at least once a week in her Los Angeles home. “It’s just about using what’s in season. It can be grilling anything from watermelon or romaine or corn and tomatoes. They don’t need a lot of work, like seasoning and sauces. They taste great on their own.”

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When planning a vegetarian cookout, Ms. Haaz likes to plan for one or two substantive dishes. “Pizza is one of my favorite things to grill,” she says. “You can use a store-bought dough. Just roll out your dough, drizzle it with oil and put it on the grill, then take some seasonal things like tomatoes and zucchini,

chop them up in bigger pieces, grill them and put them on your dough once you’ve flipped it over.”

With these grilled pizzas, which should be on the grill no more than two to three minutes per side, Ms. Haaz brushes pesto onto the pizza crust before adding the grilled vegetables. Either way, she’ll add chunks of fresh burrata or ricotta cheese just after she takes the pizza off the grill.



Grilled vegetarian items clockwise from top left: grilled lentil barbecue burgers with cabbage slaw, grilled cauliflower steaks with cilantro chimichurri, grilled romaine with corn, caesar dressing and grilled lemon, grilled watermelon with mint and lime and grilled vegetable kebabs. PHOTO: EMILY BERL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Cauliflower steaks are a good alternative to regular steaks as an entree.

“Take a head of cauliflower, cut it down the middle and you get two steaks out of it,” Ms. Haaz says, noting that she often likes to make a chimichurri or pesto out of fresh herbs and pistachios that she rubs onto the cauliflower. “Marinate that for 10 minutes then grill it. Make sure to reserve some of that sauce to serve with it.”

Instead of turning to store-bought veggie burgers, Ms. Haaz prefers making her own using lentils, which she boils and combines with chopped zucchini, carrot, garlic and ginger that she’s sauteed. Then, she forms all into patties. “Those flavors really come to life when it’s cooked,” she says, noting that the key is to have the vegetables cooked well enough so they won’t have to be on the grill too long.

“Black beans are wonderful” as a substitute for lentils, adds Ms. Haaz, who often likes to go “a more Mexican route” if using black beans, adding some corn and bell peppers to the patty and serving the burger with guacamole.

Tofu can make for a good barbecue entree, says Ms. Haaz, who likes to cut tofu into cubes and thread them onto skewers with mushrooms onions and peppers. “You want all your vegetables and tofu to be the same size so they cook at the same time on the grill,” she says. “Just brush them with a little bit of oil and lemon juice and grill it for no more than five to 10 minutes.”

Sometimes, to spice the skewers, Ms. Haaz will mix cumin, paprika and cayenne pepper with “just a little bit of oil and some garlic” and marinate the tofu in that mixture 10 minutes before grilling. “You don’t need a lot of time with (marinating) tofu,” she says. “It doesn’t have to be an all-day event.”

When grilling vegetables, it’s important to understand how long they generally need to be cooked, Ms. Haaz says. “Some need a little more prep,” she says, singling out artichokes and brussels sprouts in particular. “I would blanch them or parcook them before hand so they’re soft” when you put them on the grill and won’t have to cook too long. “If you leave them on the grill too long, they’ll shrivel up and become a cloud of dust,” she says, adding that she likes to serve them with a dipping sauce made with “lemon, garlic, oil and fresh herbs. That’s all you need.”

Grilling can up the game of basic dishes, says Ms. Haaz, who likes to grill quartered red potatoes and make potato salad with them as the grilling adds a lovely char to the salad.

To round things out, Ms. Haaz likes to grill half heads of romaine for just “a few minutes just to get that nice charred flavor and then dress that with a light dressing and serve it with some tomatoes.”

Watermelon, an unusual grill choice, is another favorite of hers. Ms. Haaz likes to cut the fruit up into “big planks” and grill them for a few minutes. “After you take that off, just top them off with some lime juice and fresh mint,” she says, noting that this can work as a side dish or a dessert.

Ms. Haaz counsels cooks to be open to experimenting when it comes to vegetarian barbecues. “I think people often want to just use the same vegetables over and over again and they get into a rut,” she says. “If you’ve never grilled romaine before, why not try it? Don’t be afraid to try new vegetables on the grill. Making mistakes is part of cooking. It’s how you learn; it’s how you get better.”



Grilled cauliflower steaks with cilantro chimichurri. Cauliflower steaks are a good alternative to regular steaks as an entree, Ms. Haaz says, noting that she often likes to make a chimichurri or pesto out of fresh herbs and pistachios that she rubs onto the cauliflower. *PHOTO: EMILY BERL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*