

Grilling a Great Steak

a steak primer from Tony's Meats & Specialty Foods



Steak Cuts

The best beefsteaks come from the *loin* and the *rib*. From the loin we get *sirloins*, *T-bones*, *tenderloins* and *strip steaks*. From the *rib* we get bone-in *rib steaks* or boneless *rib eye steaks*. All these cuts have slightly different textures, tastes and levels of marbling (the white lines of fat that streak the flesh.) They also vary in size, price and tenderness.

Sirloin is one of beef's leanest cuts, it's lack of marbling makes this a good choice for the fat conscious cook; though slightly less juicy, tender and flavorful than other loin cuts. From 1-2 pounds, moderately priced and usually boneless; they're a tasty, budget minded choice.

Tenderloin or *filet mignon* is beef's most tender cut, and most expensive. With its smaller size (6-10 oz.) and good marbling, it's perfect for small eaters and special occasions.

Strip Steaks are medium in size (8-14 oz.), boneless, well marbled, and easy to carve. Juicy, flavorful and tender, strip steaks are one of beef's most popular cuts.

T-bone On one side of the T-shaped bone is the tenderloin, and on the other the strip steak, but this steak is more than simply the sum of its parts! Large in size (usually over 1 pound), tender and juicy; the T-bone is a first-class steak.

Rib Steak with its abundant marbling, the rib steak is a juicy, tender and flavorful steak lover's dream! Rib steaks are medium in size (8-14 oz.) and available bone-in or boneless. Steaks from the 'large end' have the greatest marbling and are beef's most juicy and flavorful offering.

Extended Aging

Butchers and chefs have long known that the extended aging of beef sides or large primal cuts for periods of 14-28 days can dramatically improve both tenderness and flavor.

Aging beef is an expensive proposition for the butcher. There is valuable weight lost to evaporation as well as additional trimming loss. In today's price conscious market, extended aging is rare.

Aged beef exhibits visual clues that the savvy buyer can identify. While fresh cuts of beef are a very bright red, shiny and wet looking, aged cuts are the opposite - duller in color and lacking that moist, wet shine on the surface. Some cuts will even have a dark edge, another visual indication of aging. Once cut into steaks, beneficial aging stops and darkening begins.

At Tony's Meats and Specialty Foods we age our Top of Choice grade beef for 21 to 28 days.

Beef Grades

The USDA inspects every beef carcass four different times for safety and good health. The *Grading Inspection* is designed to assess potential quality. Inspectors evaluate size, animal age, color and most importantly, internal fat marbling, and assign the appropriate *USDA Grade*. The higher the grade, the higher the potential quality and thus the higher the price.

USDA Prime has abundant marbling and the greatest potential to yield juicy and tender steaks. The most expensive grade and relatively rare, *USDA Prime* beefsteaks are excellent for grilling.

USDA Choice is also of high quality, but has less marbling than Prime. *USDA Choice* represents a wide range of marbling levels from slight to abundant and are usually tender, juicy and flavorful.

Top of Choice is a sub category representing the top few percent of USDA Choice beef with the most abundant marbling. Very close to Prime grade, *Top of Choice* beef is of very high quality and commands a premium price.

USDA Select has the lowest level of internal marbling and lacks the juiciness and flavor of higher graded beef. Only the most tender of *USDA Select* cuts should be cooked with dry heat. This is the least expensive grade of quality beef.

Standard & Commercial grades are frequently sold as *non-graded* or as *store brand* meats.

Utility, Cutter, & Canner are seldom, if ever, sold at retail but are used instead to make ground and processed products.

Note: *Terms such as natural and organic are not a measurement of quality and have no bearing on taste, juiciness or tenderness.*

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The Perfect Steak

Use the following as a guideline. With observation, adjustment and practice, you'll get consistently good results.

1. Season or marinate steak, cover and rest at room temperature for up to one hour.
2. Light gas grill or start a charcoal fire, allowing coals to cook until hot and covered with ash. Carefully spread coals to create a fire that is hotter on one side of the grill than the other.
3. Place cooking grid over fire, heat well to sanitize, and then clean cooking grate with a wire brush. For a smokier flavor, add soaked wood chips directly into coals. On a gas grill, wrap soaked wood chips in a bundle of pierced aluminum foil and place below cooking grate directly over the hottest burner.
4. Immediately before placing meat on the grill, moisten the cooking grate with vegetable oil from a mister or oiled cloth.
5. Place steaks over direct heat and leave undisturbed until well browned on one side – from three to six minutes. If a cross-hatch pattern is desired, rotate steaks one quarter turn halfway through time.
6. Once nicely browned on the first side, turn steaks over and reduce grill heat to medium. (For a charcoal grill move to the side of your grill with lower heat or use the lid and reduce air vents to lower temperature.) Cook steaks for approximately 6 to 10 minutes longer. Residual high heat will brown the second side, and lower temperatures will allow the cook more flexibility in judging doneness.
7. If grill flares up, move the steak to another part of the grill. It's best to let these fats burn off rather than snuffing them out.
8. Remove the steak from the grill slightly undercooked, place on a plate and cover with foil or a clean towel and allow to rest for 5 to 10 minutes. This 'resting' will allow the steak time to finish cooking and help maintain juices.

Use 'Dry' Heat

Dry heat from a grill is clearly the best way to cook quality beefsteaks. Even high quality beefsteaks don't turn out as well when cooked with moist heat; so braising, and pan sautéing is not recommended.

Hot, dry heat from a grill has a searing effect, browning the surface while evaporating excess liquids. While this doesn't "seal in the juices" as commonly (and inaccurately) thought, the tasty brown crust adds wonderful flavor while the dry heat protects the steak's texture.

Allow Steaks to Rest

Once removed from the grill, a steak continues to cook, rising in internal temperature from 10 to 20 degrees in a matter of minutes.

Since we know meats continue to cook once removed from the grill, we can use this to our advantage. To serve a steak at medium-rare to medium, remove it from the grill at approximately rare. Place on a plate, cover with foil or a clean towel and rest for five to ten minutes before slicing. Resting also helps the juices stay within the steak, draining less when sliced.

Meat Thermometers

Quick read thermometers are great for testing internal temperatures, but since a steak is thin and grills are hot, special care is suggested. Before testing temperature, move the steak away from high, direct heat and test with the probe's tip directly in the center of the steak.

Since steaks continue to cook after grilling, they should be removed from the grill at a lower temperature and rested. Here are our suggestions.

Rare	remove at	115-125° F.
Med/Rare	remove at	125-135° F.
Medium +	remove at	140° F. +

Finger Poking to Perfection

Chefs usually rely on a practiced sense of feel to judge a steak's doneness. Try it, with practice you'll be able to judge a steak quickly and accurately. Poke the steak with your finger while it cooks; the more done it is, the firmer it will become.

-Chef Mick Rosacci, Tony's

More cooking tips at www.TonysMarket.com