

BUYERS' GUIDE

get the best grill

**Fire it up!
Here's how to
choose the most
badass barbecue
for your budget
and lifestyle.**

by Colleen Rush

COLIN ERICSSON/STOCKFOOD CREATIVE/GETTY IMAGES

gas, charcoal, or electric?

for a convenient crowd-pleaser... go gas

Gas grills are easy to start, they preheat quickly, and you can cook for a group in no time. Cleaning is simple, as is maintaining constant temps for that barbecue chicken.

The big bummer? Durable, high-quality gas grills don't come cheap, and unless your grill is rigged to run on natural gas, you have to refill the propane tank periodically.

for barbecue addicts on a budget...go charcoal

If you want to spend smart, your dollar goes further on a charcoal grill. Plus, the classic, smoky flavor you get from cooking with charcoal is simply incomparable.

Just be prepared: Cooking with charcoal can be time-consuming (it can take up to 30 minutes to get charcoal lit and ready for cooking), and, in most cases, you have to clean out the ash after every use.

for small spaces and indoor grilling...go electric

An electric grill makes sense if outdoor cooking isn't an option for you because of weather or lack of space, or if you want a low-maintenance way to get char lines on burgers, steaks, fish...or even panini.

The drawback? Whatever you grill won't have that fire-kissed flavor or true sear, and these gizmos aren't suited for real barbecue favorites, such as ribs or pulled pork.



tip

carry a refrigerator magnet when you're grill shopping since a magnet won't stick to heavy-gauge stainless steel, one of the best materials for burners and grill grates

our hot picks

6 styles to get you barbecue-ready for summer:

BEST GAS

Weber Spirit Gas Grill E-310 (left)

What this grill lacks in showy features, it makes up for in durability as well as quality, with stainless steel burners and porcelain-coated steel grates. Bonus: It takes 10 minutes to preheat. \$400, acehardware.com

Napoleon Prestige II PT450RB

It's pricey, but you get stainless steel burners and cooking grids, adjustable BTUs for searing and slow-cooking, about 700 square inches of cooking space, plus a cool, high-tech infrared rotisserie burner. From \$1,295, barbecues.com

BEST CHARCOAL

The Big Green Egg (it's that one above)

This jade baby doesn't just look good, it grills good. The airflow through the oval shape and heat-retaining ceramic body make this smoker/grill highly efficient and ideal for long roasts. Leprechaun not included. \$850, biggreenegg.com

Char-Broil CB940X With 540 square inches of cast-iron grill surface, cooking a bunch of steaks in this sturdy, heavy-gauge steel firebox is a cinch. Here's an extra-cool feature: It has a removable ash catcher (that will definitely save your manicure!). \$430, charbroil.com

BEST ELECTRIC

BBQ Guys Stainless Steel Electric Grill

As the BMW of electrics, it can cook up to eight burgers at a time and heat up to more than 550 degrees in just a few minutes. You'll love that the compact box can be built into a nice patio cook surface. \$349, bbqguys.com

George Foreman Next Grilleration G5 Electric Contact Grill (right)

It's got all the lean, mean features of the original George Foreman grill (grrr), plus five nonstick, interchangeable plates for making panini, waffles, steaks, and much more. \$110, jr.com



bbq lingo 101

Get the lowdown on these key terms before you buy.

BTU

what it is It sounds like a fraternity, but it's really the amount of heat energy the burner on a gas grill kicks out. Full-size gas grills typically range from 25,000 to 65,000 BTUs. Smaller grills can run as low as 5,000 BTUs.

INFRARED BURNER

what it is A burner built inside a ceramic brick or tile covered with holes. Because ceramic gets hotter faster and stays hot longer, this premium-feature burner is made for searing foods like steaks and hamburgers at high temperatures to get a browned crust.

CONVECTION

what it is Heat transfer that cooks food by circulating hot air around it. Some high-end grills are equipped with fans that circulate air, but manufacturers also tout it as a "feature" because it sounds good; simply closing the lid of the grill will create convection.

SIDE BURNER

what it is A separate burner set outside of the grill. It holds pots, skillets, and saucepans so you can sauté veggies, whip up a sauce, or boil corn while dinner is on the grill. This feature does add convenience, but it tacks on upward of \$100 to the total price.

done?

125°

rare

135°

medium rare

145°

medium

155°

medium well

160°+

well done

grill q&a

Answers to your most basic barbecue questions:

Can I use cooking spray on a grill?

Yes, you can and should, particularly if you have rusty or nonstick grates. Basic Pam is fine to use (go with the unflavored kind...unless you want your burgers to reek of faux butter).

If you're worried about all of the flames shooting up when you spray, don't. In reality, the flare-up is so minimal that unless you're leaning over the grate with your face two inches away from the grill, you're really not going to have an issue.

You might think those quick-starting briquettes are the best option because they're in such cute, uniform little cubes. But the truth is they contain binders, additives, and chemicals that build up inside your grill and taint the taste of your food.

Instead, invest in natural lump charcoal (cowboycharcoal.com is a great place to start). It's made of real wood chunks and imparts a natural, smoky flavor.

What's the best way to clean a grill?

Carefully. Okay, you knew that already. The best way to clean a grill is about 15 to 20 minutes after you

finish cooking, when the crusted-on food bits have burned and turned crispy (that way, they're easier to scrape off).

Don't use any product to clean; it will eat away at the treated surface of the grill and make it more susceptible to rusting.

Just let the grill brush do its job: Its hard wire is designed to wiggle into all the nooks and crannies while still leaving your grill's seasoned coating intact. Our favorite brush is the Grill Wizard, which is pictured below. [n]

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What kind of charcoal should I buy?

Not all charcoal is created equally.

c'mon baby, light my fire

Load up on these fire-lovin' accessories:

- 1 Rösle 13" perforated spatula, \$27, surlatable.com
- 2 Oxo 16" locking tongs, \$16, bbqgalore.com
- 3 Grill Wizard brush, \$12, bbq-tools.com
- 4 Taylor Classic instant read digital pocket thermometer, \$15, chefcentral.com
- 5 Numbered stainless steel skewers, \$39 for 6, conranusa.com

