Grilling Fruits & Vegetables

South Carolinians enjoy grilling outside during the summer months. Many local fruits and vegetables are still plentiful, so throw some on the grill with the meats. They provide color, texture, flavor and nutrition to a meal without adding many calories.

The heat of the grill caramelizes the natural sugars in fruits and vegetables, causing them to taste sweeter with a slight smoky flavor. Here are a few items that can be grilled: tomatoes (thick-sliced or halved), corn, squash, onions, bell peppers, potatoes, eggplants, asparagus, mushrooms, apples, peaches, pears, bananas and pineapple.

Preparation Tips

Let the grill surface get hot (but not flaming) before putting any raw foods on it. Keep food safe by avoiding cross contamination with raw meats. Use separate tongs, plates or platters when grilling fruits and vegetables, toasting breads, or grilling meats, hamburgers, hot dogs, poultry or fish.

Fruits and vegetables can take as little as two to three minutes per side to grill, although the time will vary with the size of the cut items. Slice foods into large, flat pieces of even thickness that won’t slip through a grill grate. Another option is to either buy an inexpensive grill pan or make a homemade version with a double layer of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Turn up the edges of the foil to prevent food from rolling off the grill or into the coals.

Before placing vegetables on the grill, lay the pieces in a single layer on a cookie sheet. Brush them lightly with olive oil (or another type of oil) to enhance their color and prevent sticking. Add seasonings if desired. Turn pieces over and repeat on the other side. You also can marinate vegetables in an oil-based Italian-style dressing for a few minutes for added flavor. If a sugar-based marinade is used, the exterior of the vegetables will blacken.

Tasty Grilling Ideas

Here are some additional ideas for grilling fruits and vegetables from Julie Garden-Robinson, Food and Nutrition Specialist with the North Dakota Extension Service.

- Grill some peaches for a side dish to accompany steak or pork tenderloin. Or, dice the cooked fruit and make salsa or relish by adding fresh herbs, chili peppers and lime juice or vinegar.
- Grill some pineapple rounds to compliment grilled ham or chicken.
- Peel whole bananas and brush with canola or sunflower oil. Grill about five minutes per side, or until the banana turns golden and has grill marks.
- Make banana s’mores by cutting a ¾-inch-deep slit down the length of each unpeeled banana. Pry the slit open and stuff with 2 tablespoons of chopped dark chocolate or your favorite candy bar. Wrap the banana in foil and grill for about 5 minutes per side.
- After cooking vegetables, cut them into smaller pieces, if desired.
- Remove the top, bottom and core from a bell pepper. Cut the pepper in half from top to bottom. This makes two flat rectangles that can be grilled with the skin side down.
- Cook vegetables with both moist and dry heat. Grill the vegetables until they have nice grill marking on both sides, then transfer them from the grill to a bowl or pot. Cover tightly with plastic wrap to prevent the steam from escaping for 5 to 10 minutes. The vegetables will finish cooking without drying out.
Recipes for the Grill

Grilled Vegetables:
2 tablespoons canola oil
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
3 sweet potatoes cut into 1-inch slices
3 cobs of corn cut into 2-inch sections
1 eggplant cut into ½-inch slices
12 green onions, trimmed

Mix oil and garlic in a large bowl. Add vegetables and toss. Place vegetables in a vegetable basket made for the grill or a perforated vegetable grilling pan (available in many stores). Cook 10 minutes, turning twice, until vegetables are tender. Place vegetables on a platter and serve.

Makes six servings. Each serving has 190 calories, 34 g of carbohydrate, 6 g of fat and 8 g of fiber.


Grilled Tomatoes:
4 ripe tomatoes
1 tablespoon fresh oregano or 1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon lemon pepper

Slice tomatoes in half, lengthwise. Prepare coals. Cover grill grid with foil. Place tomatoes on foil and sprinkle with oregano and lemon pepper. Grill tomatoes with cut side down, over hot coals for about four or five minutes.

Makes four servings. Each serving has 30 calories, 6 g of carbohydrate, 0 g of fat and 2 g of fiber.


Roasted Corn: Peel and husk corn on the cob and soak it in cold water for an hour. Wrap the corn in aluminum foil and grill for 20 to 30 minutes, turning every few minutes.

Source: Grilling It Safely, PB1753, the University of Tennessee Extension.

Grilled Red Potatoes: Brush quartered red potatoes with olive oil. Sprinkle with seasonings. Grill wrapped in aluminum foil over medium coals for 20 to 30 minutes.

Source: Grilling It Safely, PB1753, the University of Tennessee Extension.

Grilled Apples:
3 apples, peeled, pared and sliced
¼ cup melted margarine
1 tablespoon lemon juice
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 tablespoons brown sugar

In a small bowl, mix margarine, lemon juice, cinnamon and brown sugar. Place sliced apples on a large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Top with mixture of other ingredients. Fold the edges of the foil to seal. Grill on low to medium heat for 20-30 minutes until tender. Serve warm. Pears also are delicious prepared this way.

Source: Grilling It Safely, PB1753, the University of Tennessee Extension.

Daily Needs for Fruits & Vegetables
Most people should increase the amount of fruits and vegetables they currently eat every day. Daily fruit and vegetable needs depend on a person’s calorie needs, which are determined by age, sex and level of physical activity. For example, an adult should eat 2 cups of fruits and 2½ cups of vegetables daily, based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

Reasons to Eat Fruits & Vegetables
Fruits and vegetables contain essential vitamins, minerals and fiber that may help protect a person from chronic diseases, such as certain cancers, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases. The diets of many adults and children are lacking in fiber. Most women need at least 20 grams of fiber per day, while men need about 30 grams per day. The fiber needs of a child ages three to 18 is their age plus five (in grams). For example, a seven-year-old needs 12 grams of fiber per day.

Other Parts of a Healthful Diet
In addition to fruits and vegetables, a healthful diet includes whole grains, fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products, lean meats, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs and nuts. It also is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt and added sugars.
For more information on a healthful diet, refer to: HGIC 4010, MyPyramid; HGIC 4016, Focus on Fruits; HGIC 4017, Vary Your Veggies; HGIC 4018, Get Your Calcium-Rich Foods; HGIC 4019, Whole Grains and HGIC 4020, Go Lean With Protein.

This information has been reviewed and adapted for use in South Carolina by Janis G. Hunter, HGIC Nutrition Specialist, and Katherine L. Cason, Professor, Food Science and Human Nutrition Department, Clemson University. (New 08/10.)

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