

GRILL TIPS FROM A LOCAL

As the owner and chef at downtown Northampton's Local Burger, Jeff Igneri knows his way around a grill. We asked the Valley's reigning burger king for a few tips to bring more local flavor to your backyard. Here's his quick take on steak (and more).

CHOOSE QUALITY MEAT

Know what you are getting—from the fat content to the cut of meat and even the type of aging. My favorite beef is a dry-aged beef. Dry aging adds moisture, richness and produces a more tender cut. The

aging is done in a climate-controlled room for 2 to 3 weeks, making the meat a bit beefier and producing an almost nutty taste. River Rock Farm in Brimfield sells dry-aged beef at the farm, as well as at the Northampton Saturday farmers' market and at Serio's and River Valley Market in Northampton.

Grass-fed beef is also a great option. It is the healthiest option, providing more vitamin A and E and it's also rich in Omega-3 fatty acids. Because grass-fed beef is lower in fat, I would only serve it rare to medium rare. At

Local Burger, we use

Chicoine Family Farm grass-fed beef. If you don't like dry aged or grass-fed, then still make sure the beef you use is high quality. Black Angus, all natural, antibiotic-free is the way to go.

DON'T PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD

Avoid flipping and pressing, and definitely do not stab anything you are grilling. This will help keep the moisture in the meat. At Local Burger, we put our burgers on the grill, let them cook and flip only once. We all like perfect grill marks, so if you must, just turn the meat half way through cooking to give the perfect slash marks.

TAKE THE TEMPERATURE

When it comes to grilling meat, knowing when it's done is obviously

very important. Once you start grilling on a regular basis, you will be able to tell if the meat is done just by the feel of it. A good way to test doneness is the "palm test." Hold your hand out palm side up. With your finger from the other hand press down on the fleshy area at the base of your thumb. It feels pretty soft. That is rare. Now on the same hand that is held out, touch your thumb to your forefinger. Now touch the same area below your thumb. It is still a bit soft but not as much. That is how a medium steak feels. Finally, put your thumb, forefinger and pinky together. Now feel the same area below your thumb. That is how well done feels. This test really does work.

If you don't trust yourself with that method, internal temperature is a safe way to go. Using a meat thermometer, the internal temps you are looking for when cooking beef roasts and steaks are 145 degrees for medium rare, 160 for medium and 170 for well done. Some people may want to know how long to cook a steak on each side for a medium center. That's a tricky question because there are so many factors to consider, such as thickness of the steak and temperature of the grill. A 3/4" thick steak should be cooked for approximately 7 minutes on each side at 300-350 degrees. Again, it's tricky because each grill will have its own "hot spots." This is where the palm test would come in very handy. Remember, everything will continue to cook when removed from the heat. This leads me to my next tip...

LET STEAKS REST

Let meat sit for a few minutes after cooking. This will allow the juices to redistribute.

MAINTAIN YOUR EQUIPMENT

Make sure your grill is kept clean, along with all of your tools. Make sure you have a good grill brush and use it when your grill is empty. The char flavor from a grill is great, but it can easily be ruined by burnt residue that sticks to the grill.

However you do it, the best way to enjoy grill season is to experiment and try everything. All chefs taste everything they make and then adjust if necessary. And if the weather is not cooperating, you, of course, are always welcome to stop in for a burger. 🍴

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