



ASK THE EXPERT

How to Grill a Perfect Burger

MICHAEL SCHLOW | CHEF/PARTNER, PINE RESTAURANT

“A hamburger is one of the hardest things to cook well,” says Schlow, the Boston-based celebrity chef who launched Pine Restaurant at the Hanover Inn in 2013. Schlow’s quest for the perfect patty began in his own backyard. When he found himself disappointed with what was coming off the grill, he decided to experiment with low-temperature cooking techniques. “We took a very intellectual approach to the perfect burger,” he says—and his kitchen research soon paid off: The “Schlow Burger” won the prestigious People’s Choice Award at the 2008 South Beach Wine & Food Festival. Follow these steps the next time you fire up the grill and, Schlow says, “you will not only have a better burger, but you’ll have a better barbecue, you’ll keep your friends longer and people will just love you more.” (For Schlow’s recipe, go to dartgo.org/burger.)

—James Napoli

GO JUICY

“The first step is buying the right quality of meat with the right fat content. Unless it’s for dietary or health purposes, I strongly suggest meat that’s at least an 80-20 grind—80-percent lean to 20-percent fat. That ratio is necessary to have a juicy hamburger. If you don’t want all the fat you could add a little bit of extra virgin olive oil to the meat. The oil grabs on to the protein a little bit as it’s mixed in with the meat, and it usually does not get cooked out.”

MIND THE HEAT

“First, grill the burger over high heat for about 90 seconds on each side—that gets the flavor of the grill on the meat. Then, remove it from the intense heat. If you have a gas grill, turn the heat down. If you have a charcoal grill, make half the grill super-hot and don’t put charcoals under the other half so there’s a cooler spot for the burger. To retain its moisture the burger needs to be allowed to do its thing at a lower temperature—it’ll take between eight and 12 minutes for an eight-ounce patty.”

LET IT REST

“Let the burger rest for two to three minutes after it comes off the grill. If you take a bite out of a hamburger and all the juice comes out onto the plate, it’s not because that’s the juiciest meat you’ve ever bought, it’s because the burger hasn’t had an opportunity to rest. The interesting part about cooking at a lower temperature is that you don’t need to let the burger rest as long. There will also be less loss of volume, because you aren’t cooking away all the moisture and all the fats.”

CHECK YOUR BUNS

“Bun-to-burger ratio is everything. There will be some shrinkage during cooking, so make sure that the burger starts out a little bit bigger than the bun. I cannot handle a burger that takes two bites of bread before I hit the meat. If you have a bun that is too much bread, it makes it difficult to eat. However, if the bun doesn’t have enough structure, it falls apart easily. It has to carry the weight of the burger. Lightly toasting a bun is advisable so it has a better chance of holding up to the burger and all the accompaniments.”