



Become the ultimate grill master by following these BBQ safety tips

Smoke or flame? Charcoal or gas? Oak or mesquite? No matter what you choose, summertime in Texas means cooking outdoors! But remember, where there's smoke, there's fire, and where there's fire, there should always be fire safety. We'll help you perfect your grill skills this summer with our 12 essential bbq safety tips for outdoor cooking!

The facts about grilling accidents

In Texas, grilling, smoking, and BBQ are outdoor staples any time the weather permits! However, whenever fire is involved, there are risks.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, the majority of of grilling-related fires (18%) take place in July.

Between the years 2014-2018, 19,700 patients per year were sent to the ER with grill-related burns or injuries.

Gas grills cause an average of 8,900 home fires a year and charcoal or wood grills cause another 1300.

Fortunately, there are plenty of precautions you can take to ensure that your next BBQ is filled with good memories and emergency-free.

1. Keep the grill away from buildings

When you wheel out the grill or smoker, it's important to be mindful of your surroundings. While it may seem obvious, there are plenty of cases of home fires that started because of indoor grilling, grilling in garages, or grilling too close to a house or structure.

Keep your grill away from awnings, deck railings, rooves, trees, and shrubs. Make sure it's set on a stable surface, free of dry grass, leaves, or any other combustible material.

2. Dress the part

While a good apron will leave no doubt as to who the grill master is, it's important to protect your skin as well as your clothes! Whenever operating a grill or smoker, use hot pads or heat-resistant gloves to protect your hands. Avoid wearing loose clothing that could inadvertently catch fire.

3. Keep it clean

Dirty grills and smokers are among the top causes for grilling-related accidents. The byproducts of grilling, such as grease and fat, can build up and cause your flames to flare up. Make sure to use a steel brush, or other cleaning instrument, to scrub down the grill before and after each use. When cool, properly remove excess or unburnt bits of wood and charcoal.

4. Keep children and pets away from the grill or smoker

Children under the age of 5 are especially prone to grill-related burns and injuries. Up to 2000 a year are taken to the ER with what are known as "contact" burns - in other words, burns resulting from accidentally bumping into or grabbing a hot grill surface.

As the grill master, it's important to make sure that kids and pets are a safe distance away from any grilling, smoking, or cooking surfaces. If you need to keep both eyes on your cooking, ask for a little help in keeping the workspace clear and safe.

5. Know your wood

If you're using wood instead of charcoal briquettes, it's important to know what you're using. While oak, pecan, applewood, cherrywood, hickory, maple, and mesquite are all wonderful choices for smoking, there are a number of varieties you should avoid.

Cedar, pine, and spruce can all burn extremely hot, and the sap could cause flare ups. Additionally, the tar in the smoke can build up in your smoker, causing unintended flames in the future. That's not to say you can't place your meat on something like a cedar plank for a little extra flavor, just avoid using it for fuel.

6. Attend the flame at all times

A good grill master attends his or her work at all times! Not only is this essential for optimal cooking, it's important for safety. Should a flame get out of control, you'll need someone there at all times, ready to put it out.

7. Prepare to put out a fire

Any time you're using fire, you should always be prepared to put it out in a hurry. If a flame gets out of control, you can try to spread the coals out to stifle the outburst. However, if it's too big or you can't get it under control, having a fire extinguisher on hand is a must. If it's a grease fire, you'll want baking soda to put it out - never put water on a grease fire!

8. Use lighter fluid in moderation

When it comes to lighter fluid, a little bit goes a long way. Before applying the fluid, stack your coals or wood in a neat pile to encourage the flame to spread. Following the lighter fluid directions, carefully squirt a moderate amount onto the coals and light immediately afterwards. Never add lighter fluid to hot coals or open flames.

If possible, start your charcoal with a chimney starter and avoid using lighter fluid altogether. This can actually be a more effective method for evenly lightning your coals, and is much safer.

9. Check for gas leaks on propane tanks and lines

22% of outdoor gas grill-related fires are caused by leaks and breaks in the gas lines.

While you can usually spot most leaks or damaged lines with a simple visual inspection, it's important to conduct a more thorough check before your grilling season. Make sure all of the fittings and valves are seated properly. Once you've turned the fuel supply on, take a water and soap solution and coat the various lines to look for leaks.

10. Cook thoroughly

While low and slow is the mantra for a good BBQ, it's important to make sure meat is cooked to the proper internal temperature to kill off possible pathogens. Use a thermometer to make sure that your food is cooked to the proper internal temperature in accordance with the recommended safety guidelines.

Pork and beef ribs, pork shoulder/butt, and beef brisket should have an internal temperature of 140 degrees. For ground meat, burgers, or sausage, 160 is the recommended temperature. Poultry should rise to 165, and fish should reach 145.

11. Start gas grills with the lid open

Gas building up beneath the lid can cause substantial fire flare ups. If you use propane, or another gas grill, always open the lid before turning on the supply or the burners. This will prevent gas from building up and flashing into an explosion when you try to light it.

12. Shut it down

When you're done with your BBQ masterpiece, it's important to make sure that you shut down your grill or smoker properly. For a gas grill, turn off your burners as well as the valve on the supply tank.

For a charcoal grill or smoker, make sure to allow the coals to cool before properly disposing of the ashes in a metal container. If necessary, douse them in water and stir to help the cooling process. If you have a compost pile going, you can add ash to it to increase the carbon content!

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