

Fired Up - Arizona Backyard Barbecues

Written by Written by Melissa Larsen & Christine Whitton

There is typically one thing at the center of all backyard bashes: the barbecue. Read on to add points to your barbecue I.Q., as well as pick up a few party-planning pointers for your upcoming summer soiree.



Grill Skills

Unfortunately, we weren't all born with the barbecuing know-how of Bobby Flay. However, our panel of grill masters gives us the pros and cons of gas, electric and charcoal varieties and which summer-friendly foods are best suited for the "barbie."

Charcoal Grill



Pros: "Charcoal grills provide the best in flavor," says chef Ted Reader, Canadian cookbook author, food entertainer and barbecue guru. "With the variety of charcoals available, you can vary the types of flavor you are looking for." It can also be more versatile, as charcoal grills can be used for direct-heat cooking (hot dogs, chicken and hamburgers) as well as long, slow cooking (ribs, brisket and pulled pork). In addition, charcoal grills tend to be less expensive than their gas counterparts.

Cons: "A charcoal grill requires slightly more work to achieve the desired result and must be used outdoors," says Derek Stinard, chef instructor at Scottsdale Culinary Institute. Plus, it can take some time to prepare the coals for grilling (never add cold charcoal to a hot grill, Reader says) and to preheat the grill. Once the charcoal grill is preheated, though, the actual grill time is shorter than with a gas model.

Our pick: Taurus by Conmoto, www.conmoto.com. Contact Conmoto for pricing information.

Gas Grill



Pros: Cooking with a gas model, whether it's propane or natural gas, is much less time-consuming than using a charcoal grill. "You can light the grill with a push of a button and be ready to cook in about 10 minutes—including the preheating time," says George Rassas, product manager for Weber-Stephen Products. Rassas adds that the fire is much easier to control, allowing more precision when it comes to grilling temperatures—great for searing steaks and other meats. Plus, wind and cold weather don't affect the flame.

Cons: Gas grills tend to be the most pricey.

Our pick: Weber Summit E-450 Gas Grill, www.weber.com. \$1,949.

Electric Grill

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Pros: “An electric grill is as easy to use as plugging it in,” Stinard says. Rassas adds: “They are beneficial due to the constant fuel source in electricity. With charcoal grills you have to stoke the fire by adding charcoal and, with gas, you must have a supply of propane or natural gas.” The pros recommend using this type of grill for cooking burgers, sausages, chops, chicken, fruits, vegetables and fish, especially delicate fish since many electric forms have a non-stick surface. Plus, electric models are fit for indoor or covered-patio use—perfect for condos and apartments that don’t allow charcoal or gas grills.

Cons: These grills tend to be a bit smaller than charcoal or gas varieties, and they do not get as hot. Stinard also says they might not impart as much flavor.

Our pick: Fuego Electric Grill by Smith & Hawken, www.smithandhawken.com. \$1,799.

Alfresco Flair

Impress guests with these unique outdoor digs.

Gather 'Round



The Essentiel Dining Table and Chairs (\$5,670 for table; \$2,150 per chair) from Henry Hall Designs provides a comfortable and clean-lined spot for your family and friends to dine outdoors. And the simple, straightforward style won't distract from your verdant landscaping or prized pool. www.henryhalldesigns.com.

Night Light



Whether you're looking for a romantic glow or a bright light, Shady Lady Lighting's Atmosphere Collection Table and Floor Lamps (\$169 and \$349, respectively) offer both. www.shadyladylighting.com.

Take a Seat



Additional seating is a must for any outdoor occasion—and comfort is most definitely key. West Elm's supercushy Beanbag Chairs (\$179) can be casually strewn across any patio or yard, and each is coated in a water-resistant shell should rain come into play. www.westelm.com.

Undercover

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Shield your guests from blazing rays with Design Within Reach's Veneto Alcove with a Sunbrella Canopy (\$4,800 for the alcove; \$500 for the canopy). The canopy is UV-protected, water-repellant and fade- and mildew-resistant. www.dwr.com.

Table Manners

After the invites are sent and the menu has been planned, in comes the concern of setting and styling the table centered between your shiny new grill and plush patio furnishings. With the expert advice of David Tutera, host of WE TV's "My Fair Wedding," and Robin Wilson, C.E.O. of New York City-based Robin Wilson Home, we can help get your patio party in motion.



Weather or not...

Despite endless preparations and weather forecasts, Mother Nature loves to keep us guessing. Be one step ahead: Shade the seating area from the sun and protect it from the rain.

Table Trail

"The table and the path leading to it should be on solid ground and in close proximity to the kitchen, grill and bathroom," Tutera says.

The Underlying Solution

With the table in position, begin by lying down a lightweight tablecloth or runner. Tutera suggests using burlap, whereas Wilson prefers bamboo. This simple step adds a layer of eco-elegance.

Back to Basics

Recommended by Wilson, Viva Terra's colorful Oceana Seaglass dinnerware collection (\$119-\$189 per set of four, www.vivaterra.com) can be mixed and matched to create the perfect place setting. With four colors and three styles, these dishwasher- and microwave-safe dishes make cleanup a synch. As for the silverware, keep it simple. Consider rolling a fork, a spoon and a knife in a napkin and placing it beside the plate. Lastly, a water glass should be put at each place setting.

Guiding Light

"The best outdoor moment is at dusk," Wilson says. "Coolness sets in and you go from daylight to candlelight." Simply place glass votives and pillar candles around the table—doubling as weighted objects—that will later light the night.

Middle Ground

"Any celebration merits a centerpiece," Tutera says. A few freshly cut flowers will do the trick.

Oh, Goodie

Not every backyard barbecue needs a theme, but it's nice for guests to part ways with a few treats. "Consider [gifting them with] infused honey, homemade barbecue sauce or even potted herbs," Tutera says. "'Gimme bags,' [or giveaways for guests], are becoming a tradition," Wilson says.

Warm Weather Recipes

Great grill? Check. New outdoor furnishings? Check. Now round up your pals for a delish summer feast.

Grilled American Kobe Rib Eye with Smoked Sea Salt

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What good is a barbecue if you don't have an amazing steak to show off? Give this meaty method from BLT Steak at Camelback Inn a go.

6 American Kobe rib eyes,
12 ounces each
6 T Softened butter
1 T Smoked kosher salt
1 tsp. Smoked sea salt
1 T Smoked pepper

Spread one teaspoon of softened butter on each steak using a pastry brush. Season with smoked kosher salt and pepper. To cook the steak, sear on a hot grill for five minutes, turn over and cook for another four to five minutes for medium rare. Finish with smoked sea salt and let rest for several minutes before serving. Serves six.

Pomegranate and Grapefruit Margarita

No backyard shindig is complete without a signature drink. We suggest this fruity potion from Scottsdale's Blanco Tacos + Tequila.

1.5 oz. Silver tequila
1 oz. Pomegranate syrup
2.5 oz. Grapefruit juice
1 oz. Sour mix
1 Lime wheel

Take pomegranate juice and reduce by half over high heat. Measure out all ingredients into a cocktail shaker filled with ice, and shake until liquid has white foam on the top. Pour it into a glass with salt along the rim. Add lime wheel as a garnish. Yields one serving.