

Plank Grilling

A new way to push the flavor of food on the grill.

By Julie Geiser

I love grilling, and I'm always looking for new ways to push the flavor of different foods. One of my favorite methods is plank grilling, a simple technique that gives meat and veggies an impeccably moist, smoky taste.

Plank grilling is easy – begin with a clean, untreated piece of wood that is at least ¼ to 1 inch thick. I prefer a plank that is thicker so it can be reused several times. Planks can be purchased in the grilling section of most stores, online, at specialty stores, or you can make them yourself through your local lumberyard to customize fit and desired wood. Cedar and apple are woods of choice, but oak, maple and cherry are good for planking as well.

To start, the planks must be soaked prior to grilling to prevent them from catching fire. You want the board to burn a little but you don't want it to incinerate. The smoldering wood creates the smoke that will give your finished dish its great flavor. Submerging the planks overnight in a kitchen sink, bucket or cooler will ensure that the planks are completely saturated before being thrown onto the hot grill. Recommended soaking time for the planks is 2 to 6 hours.

A trick I quickly learned was to soak my planks in warm water; this helps to open up the pores in the wood, aiding in the saturation process. Using warm water to dissolve your favorite spices is another trick to enhancing flavor. For a different twist, try adding white wine, beer, whiskey or apple cider and fresh herbs to the water for a flavorful soaking solution.

Almost any type of meat can be plank grilled. My favorites are fish, chicken, turkey breasts and pork chops, but I have been known to plank grill elk and deer steaks as well. Meats can be marinated ahead of time or seasoned before being placed on the plank – it's your choice; prepare the meat as you normally would before grilling.

Along with meat, I like to grill



Plank grilling works well with a variety of foods, including meat, fruit and vegetables.

veggies and fruit with my meals. Creating a bed of orange and apple slices along with fresh veggies for the meat to sit on top of is sure to add flavor. Beds of onion, mushrooms, fresh sage and other spices are also options. If you prefer, place the meat directly on the plank and garnish the tops and sides of the meat instead.

To cook, pre-heat the grill to around 300 degrees Fahrenheit – try to keep the temperature constant for the duration of the grilling time. Using a grill thermometer will help keep temperatures even.

Pick one side of the soaked plank to be the top and pat it dry. Lightly coat the top surface with olive or vegetable oil. You can also rub the top of the plank with sea salt, garlic and fresh herbs during this step for extra flavor. Finally, load the plank with your ingredients of choice.

Once the grill is up to temperature, place the loaded plank on the grill, close the lid and cook. For fish, plank grill for about 15-25 minutes. For beef, depending on how you like it done, grill it about double the time you normally would. Keep in mind that the

thicker the meat, the longer the grilling time. Do not turn the meat over on the plank; it will cook completely as is.

Keep the grill lid closed to capture smoke from the plank and to retain heat. Although it is tempting to open the grill lid several times, just peek in every so often to see if the plank is on fire. While you don't want to stop the plank from smoldering, you want to keep it from catching into flames. Keep a spray bottle close and apply just enough water when needed to extinguish any flare-ups.

When the food is grilled to your taste, transfer the plank from the grill using hot pads to a cookie sheet, cooling rack or serving platter. You can eat directly off the plank, which will also serve as a great conversation piece for guests. ■

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