

Bringing Outdoor Cooking Inside

BBQ, grilling, smoking, or cooking out, whatever you want to call it, outdoor cooking is ruling the air waves (get it?) right now. Whatever you call it, either based on where you're from or how you cook it, cooking over an open fire is a trend that is thriving! I have to admit that as a chef one of my weaker areas is on the grill. I know that by admitting that I am also putting my "man card" in jeopardy, but I blame my father. When I was growing up, the only thing my Dad did on the homemade grill located out our back door was cook steaks or burgers and hot dogs. So, I didn't grow up slathering barbecue sauce on ribs or smoking pork shoulders. In Iowa in the 70's there was very little BBQ presence other than the occasional BBQ'd pork ribs that we had at our local supper club. It wasn't until I moved to Nashville that I experienced what the term BBQ really meant.

Now, barbecuing and smoking has spread from the South all through the Midwest, and any of us can find a good BBQ joint a short drive away. What has changed over the last few years is how the restaurant industry has grasped on to this trend and expanded the possibilities of what you can do on a grill. You can walk into any number of restaurants and order grilled pizzas, salmon, lamb, scallops, all manner of vegetables and even desserts; the possibilities are only limited by your imagination. The nuances and depth of flavor that you experience when cooking over a fire cannot be matched with any other cooking style. I dined in a local restaurant on a recent Friday evening and I was pleasantly surprised to find that the chef installed a simple wood fired grill on his

line. Now, I know not everyone has the ability or desire to do the work that is involved in such an endeavor.

There are ways to bring that outdoor flavor to the inside. A nice smokey profile can be added to your grill by tossing a few mesquite chips that have been soaked in water onto the rocks under your grill or if your operation has a grill with diffusers, you can accomplish this by placing the wood chips in a small, low profile stainless steel pan underneath the grates and replenish them as they smolder out. You can move to the stove top and rig up a roasting pan by sprinkling wood chips, on the bottom of the pan, top them with a drip tray or foil that doesn't quite reach the edge of the pan, and a rack to hold food. Set the pan over medium low heat, and cover it with foil. If wisps of smoke seep out, use more foil. After 20 minutes you can remove the meat and finish cooking it however is appropriate. After a 20-minute smoke and then a flash in a hot pan, chicken thighs taste like they are straight off the grill.

Add a little summer flavor to your menu by experimenting with rubs, sauces and cooking techniques and it will help attract those people who want the flavor but might not have the time. Good luck and have a great summer!

Doug Goettsch

National Account Executive

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