

Try Grilled Summer Produce

While grilling is typically associated with meat, incorporating fresh fruits and veggies can offer a unique twist. A wide array of produce paired with sauces, spice rubs, and marinades will overflow your table with delicious additions to your grilling repertoire.

During these warm summer months, you may harvest various fruits and vegetables from your garden or visit a local farmers market for fresh produce. Are you tired of eating and preparing your produce the same way? Have you ever tried grilling fruits and vegetables?

The *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* report that most Americans do not consume enough fruits and vegetables. A healthy adult eating pattern includes 2½ cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruits daily.

Fruits and vegetables contain essential nutrients, vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Grilling them can help preserve these nutrients. They are low in calories and fat, making them an excellent food choice for a healthy diet. You reduce their calorie and fat content by grilling these foods instead of frying.

When grilling, select different types of vegetables, such as dark green, red, orange, starchy, and non-starchy. Some of the best vegetables for grilling include artichokes, asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, corn, eggplant, mushrooms, okra, onion, potato, romaine lettuce, summer squash, sweet and hot peppers, tomato, and zucchini.

A wide variety of fruits are great on the grill, but generally, you want to use firmer varieties. Try apples, apricots, citrus, figs, kiwis, mangos, melons, nectarine, peaches, pears, plums, pineapple, and strawberries.

Grilling fruit and vegetables is easy, but different items have different characteristics. Grilled fruits and vegetables often have a unique, smoky flavor that can make them more appealing. To help you get started, follow these few guidelines when prepping to grill these ingredients:

- To prevent sticking, brush the fruit or veggies with oil after slicing or oil the grill grates before adding the food. This also makes it easily flipped without breaking apart.
- Select fruit that is firm and not too ripe.
- Most fruits can be cut in half. Other fruits like apples or melons must be cored, peeled, and cut into large slices. Grill halved fruit with flesh-side-down to create gorgeous grill marks.
- To prevent pieces from falling through the grill grate and avoid extra time flipping numerous pieces, cut vegetables into the largest possible pieces.
- To allow the most surface area and contact with the cooking grates, cut and flatten the produce. For produce with skin, once cut, place the cut side of the fruit or vegetable on the grill.
- Marinate produce in the refrigerator for 10 to 20 minutes for the best flavor.
- Instead of using a fork, use tongs when flipping food so the skin is not punctured.

- Smaller items may require equipment like a grill basket or griddle plate.
- Larger and denser veggies require precooking or more time with indirect heat. This can be done by boiling, steaming, or microwaving until the produce is barely tender. Corn doesn't always cook through on the grill. Blanch it in boiling water for a few minutes first, then grill for 5 to 10 minutes to add a smoky flavor and finish cooking.

The internet is an excellent resource for recipes to help you get started experimenting with grilled produce. Add veggies and fruits to the menu next time you fire up your grill.

Don't miss out on the bounty of summer produce that gets even better on the grill!