

## **Killer Kebabs**

Kebabs can consist of cubed, ground, or sliced meat, as well as vegetables, with or without seasonings or marinades. In the American backyard, kebabs have become mostly synonymous with chunks of meat threaded onto a skewer, often interspersed with vegetables and/or fruit.

Not all cuts of meat are suited to being cubed and grilled over high heat. The key is to know which ones do the job well.

Trying to find a balance between flavor, tenderness, and value means reaching for beef sirloin tip. For pork kababs, consider using center-cut boneless pork chops, which are just thick enough to be cut into perfectly sized cubes. Take the extra measure of brining the pork to ensure it stays juicy. Skinless, boneless chicken thighs are delicious and remain much more tender and moist than chicken breasts, making them the champion of the kebab. Lamb leg cubes grill up tender and have a good flavor. Fish should be heartier, so use cod, halibut, mahi-mahi, salmon, swordfish, and tuna. Shrimp or scallops can also be used for kababs.

Larger meat cubes are the best way to keep meats moist while grilling over direct, high heat. At the very least, 1-inch cubes should be used, but 1 1/2-inch cubes are even better because they allow more leeway in cooking. For meats that cannot be cut into cubes that large, such as chicken thighs, longer strips can be cut and then folded over on themselves when skewering to create evenly sized chunks.

Marinate the meat for a flavorful kebab. For food safety reasons, always marinate in the refrigerator. Discard the marinade after use.

When selecting vegetables and fruits for kebabs, they should complement the flavors of the meat and marinade, take about the same amount of time to cook as the meat, and be able to stay on the skewer. Some to consider are bell peppers, zucchini, yellow squash, onions, grape tomatoes, mushrooms, pineapple, mango, and peaches. Regardless of the vegetable or fruit, they should all be cut to approximately the same size as the meat to ensure even cooking.

There are two primary considerations for skewers – metal or wood. It's best for the skewers to be flat instead of round to keep the food in place.

Metal skewers have the advantage of being reusable. If you're using wooden skewers, soak them before cooking to prevent burning by submerging them in room-temperature water for 30-60 minutes before grilling.

By making skewers of single ingredients, you can cook each to perfection in its own time. Since foods cook at various rates, keeping them separate gives you the most control. Leave space between the items on the skewer so the heat can circulate and cook everything evenly.

Heat the grill as hot as it will go for at least 15 to 20 minutes. Use a wire brush to scrape off any previous debris, then give it a thorough wipe-down with a paper towel soaked in high-smoke-point oil. Food should naturally release when seared. If it is sticking, give it another minute and don't force it.

Turning the kebabs regularly will help with even cooking. As soon as the kebabs have had a full rotation, read the temperature, avoiding the skewer if possible, and be sure to pull them off the grill five degrees before your desired doneness, as they will continue to cook with carryover cooking.

Who doesn't love eating meat on a stick?! Your imagination is the only limit to what you can do with skewers. Food on a stick is a fun and affordable way to feed a family or a crowd.