

Steak

From T-bone steak to
Thai beef salad

PAUL GAYLER



Photography by Peter Cassidy

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INTRODUCTION

Ask me and many other chefs what we like to eat on our night off and you may be surprised to hear the response. Working the long hours we do, and cooking so many different and complex dishes, we often crave something simple, quick and easy to prepare. Enter STEAK – it fits the bill perfectly.

There is nothing quite as satisfying as a thick, juicy, good-quality steak, simply grilled over hot coals – ask any barbecue enthusiast. Before you cook a steak, it's important to understand what constitutes a good piece of beef.

This book sets out to give you confidence when cooking steak, with guidance on choosing, storage, preparation, and cooking. The recipes offer a vast range of possibilities: roasting steak joints; savoury grills; delicious sautés and other inspirational dishes. Each recipe recommends the best cuts for perfect results. Understanding these different cuts will enable you to seek out better-quality meat and choose correctly every time.

Good eating!



What makes a good steak

Most beef produced in the world is graded for quality, usually by government agencies, which is considered vital for their beef industries. The UK and Ireland have set quality assurance schemes to set standards. Generally, grading beef is based on two major factors: the animal's maturity and its fat content. Fat content is vitally important in good beef. The intramuscular fat is integrated with the lean meat, producing an effect called 'marbling'. This inner fat helps keep meat juicy and moist during cooking, producing the best flavour.

The quality of the beef is also greatly improved by hanging. Hanging meat carcasses is known as dry ageing; while the meat is hung in chillers at 1–4°C a hard crust forms on the exterior, and muscle fibre and tissue break down on the inside. As with game, this makes the meat more tender and improves eating quality.

Selecting quality

If you want to buy good-quality meat, you have to be choosy about its provenance. The best beef comes from grass- and grain-fed cattle that are slaughtered when they are at least 24 months old. My favourite beef is British and Irish. The pedigree of both is undeniable.

Here are specific points to look out for when purchasing:

Choose

- Fresh meat, well chilled, from a reputable butcher
- Deep-red, firm-textured flesh with a covering of creamy yellow fat
- Prime joints, such as sirloin, rump and ribs, should be well flecked

with inner fat (marbling): remember fat equals flavour

- If buying pre-packed meats look carefully at the labelling, checking for British or Irish meat, and preferably a sign of quality, such as the Soil Association logo, which assures quality and good animal welfare.

Avoid

- Buying cheap meat or frozen meat
- Pale meat with pale white fat, which indicates only minimal ageing
- Pre-packed meat with excess moisture in the tray.

Storing meat

Ideally, meat should be stored at 1–4°C. Remember to remove it from the fridge and allow it to stand at room temperature for 30 minutes before cooking. Keep raw meat away from cooked food, storing it in a covered container or tray to avoid spillage or seepage.

If you have to freeze meat for one reason or another (which I generally do not advocate), ensure it is well wrapped and frozen as quickly as possible. Use it within three months of freezing.

Choosing the right cuts

Regardless of the quality of the meat, a carcass will have both tough and tender cuts, depending on where they come from; meat is no more than muscle. Some cuts consist of a single muscle – for example, the fillet – while others may be a section of several muscles.

Meat from a part of the animal that is fairly inactive will be more expensive and easier to cook. Cuts taken from the more active joints, such as leg, will have coarser fibres and will need to be cooked slowly.

Leaner cuts of steak rarely hold the best flavour – it is the fattier cuts infused with internal fats (marbling) that give the best flavour.

In the quest for steak that will melt in your mouth, we also have to search out the right cut for a specific cooking method.

Here is a guide to the more common cuts available:

Fore rib, wing rib

Fore rib is the best joint for roasting, to my mind. It has great flavour and texture, good marbling and tenderness. The ribs are cut short for roasting. From this cut the popular **rib eye** (no bone) and **rib steak** (bone on) are taken. Wing rib has a closer texture than the fore rib, but again is superb for roasting, full of flavour and usually very tender. Generally rib steaks are best not marinated before cooking.

Rib steak

Rib steaks are cut from the ribs between the bones, leaving the bone attached or cut into rib-eye steaks. On the bone, the steaks, weighing almost 1 kilo, are generally sliced for two servings. They are full of flavour, with good marbling which keeps them succulent.

Rib-eye steak These steaks are prepared from a boneless rolled rib, and are served as single portions, about 280g in weight.

Sirloin and sirloin steak

The sirloin is found between the ribs and the rump. A boneless sirloin is often known as a **strip loin**. They make excellent roasting joints as well as very tasty steaks cut across the grain. Sirloin steaks have a firm texture and lots of flavour. They are usually cut 2–2.5cm thick. Often known as **entrecôte steaks**, they are great for grilling.

Minute steak This is a small sliced sirloin steak about 5mm–1cm thick. It needs to be quickly seared for the best results..

Porterhouse steak It is cut from the rib end of the sirloin, usually about 5cm thick, weighing about 400g as a single serving. Only 2–3 porterhouse steaks can be obtained from one joint.

Fillet and fillet steak

Fillet is the muscle housed on the underside of the rump and sirloin. It is the most tender part of the entire animal. The fillet can be roasted whole, then sliced to make a lovely presentation. It is also used whole in beef Wellington, and can be used in other dishes which need extremely tender meat, such as carpaccio and beef tartare. Trimmed, it produces a beautiful fillet steak, weighing on average 175–225g, that the French give different names to – filet mignon, tournedos, Chateaubriand etc. It does require careful cooking, as it can be dry.

Filet mignon steak Filet mignon (or little steak) is a thinner-cut

steak from the narrow tail end of the fillet. It is very tender but, like all cuts from the fillet, requires care and attention when cooking.

Tournedos steak Similar to fillet steak but generally cut closer to the head of the whole fillet. It can be cut in various sizes, as desired.

Chateaubriand The name for the cut taken from the head of the whole long fillet, usually roasted or grilled whole for two people, often served with béarnaise sauce.

T-bone steak

T-bone steak is cut from the chump end of the sirloin. It is easily identified by its 'T'-shaped bone, which has both sirloin and fillet steak attached.

Rump steak

A flavourful steak but it can be a little tough in texture, slightly chewy. It needs to be cooked with care. It can be used as a secondary roasting joint – ask your butcher for top rump. Rump also braises well when used in slow-cooked dishes.

Topside

A joint taken from the inside of the hind legs. It is usually left whole and used as a roast which needs to be well cooked and well rested, then thinly sliced. It can be dry, as there is less marbling so butchers often wrap it in fat which bastes it as it cooks. Topside cut into steaks is more often braised, cooked slowly at a low temperature until meltingly tender.

Chuck/blade

These two joints are taken from the shoulder and neck area of the animal, made up of several muscles. In general they are used only in slow, braised dishes.

Feather steak

This is a shoulder joint; generally feather steak is used for braised dishes. It has an excellent flavour that improves with long cooking.

While most of the great steaks come from the loin and rib, below are two that are not cut from roasting-style joints.

Flank steak

A lean, flat cut, coarse textured and flavourful. It marinates well for quick grilling, but don't overcook it or it will be tough. Also good stuffed and rolled. It is often known by its French name, *bavette*.

Skirt (or goose skirt) steak

Skirt has a lot of marbled fat, full of pure beef flavour. It is removed in one piece but when trimmed, it can be divided into two pieces. These can be braised, but they also make two great steak pieces, which can be grilled. It's important to cook them rare and slice them thinly for the best results.

Cooking methods

The best beef for roasting or steaks comes from the back half of the animal, and the most tender cuts from parts such as the loin and the ribs. As exercise develops the muscles, cuts from parts such as the lower leg, shoulder and neck, need to be cooked slowly by the moist heat method.

Grilling and barbecuing

Grilling has a well-justified reputation for being fast and healthy. Whether you are using a simple ridged grill pan, a grill or an outdoor barbecue, it requires a little practice, but does give great results.

An overhead domestic grill is not really suitable for cooking steaks, as it generally cannot supply enough heat. Grill pans should be almost smoking before you start to cook, while charcoals should be ash grey. To prevent smoking, always brush the meat with oil rather than the grill. Leaner pieces of meat may need to be marinated to help them cope with the fierce heat and this also adds flavour. Baste often with the marinade as the steaks cook.

The smallest, most tender steaks should be cooked closest to the heat. The thicker the piece of meat, the longer it will take to cook, and the further from the heat it should be. When grilling, meat needs to be browned quickly to seal in the flavour and caramelise the fat.

Good cuts to grill and barbecue Sirloin, rump, fillet, T-bone, porterhouse, rib-eye, rib steaks and other lean, tender cuts. Skirt or flank can be tender when well hung and cooked just to medium rare.

Roasting/pan roasting

Roasting is the cooking of prime cuts by dry heat. The art of roasting is to achieve the perfect balance of taste and succulence. Roasting times (see opposite) are calculated by the weight of the meat and the degree of doneness you require. The prime cuts, such as loin and rump, are best roasted at a high heat, and served rare or medium. Tougher cuts, such as topside and silverside, need thorough cooking to tenderise them and benefit from slow braising.

The oven should always be heated to the correct temperature in advance. Generally small joints are cooked at a high temperature while large joints started at a high temperature, then the heat is reduced to finish the cooking. Meat roasted on the bone tends to be moister, have more flavour and less shrinkage. Boned joints, however, cook more evenly, there is little wastage and they are easier to carve.

Choose a roasting pan suitable for the size of the meat. Too big and the juices will burn; too small or deep and the meat will steam.

Pan roasting describes when smaller joints of meat such as fillet or

rib steaks, are quickly seared on all sides in a frying pan, then transferred to the oven. This brings the juices to the surface so that they caramelise, sealing in the flavour and making it look appetising.

Good cuts to roast/pan roast Prime cuts include wing rib, fore rib, sirloin, fillet and rump. Don't be tempted by the appealing look of topside and silverside; keep these for slow pot-roasting or braising.

Frying

Frying or sautéing is a technique of cooking the most tender cuts of meat in a little oil or butter while moving them rapidly in a shallow pan. It is undoubtedly one of the most popular cooking techniques, and stir frying is also another favourite method of quick frying.

The degree of heat is very important – medium-high heat is usually best, as it allows the meat to brown evenly, making it caramelise appetisingly. Too low a heat allows the juices to escape, creating unappetising, half-fried food. Too high a heat and the food will burn before it is cooked inside.

You will need a strong, heavy-bottomed pan for the job. Black cast-iron is popular in the professional kitchen, although nowadays chefs like to use non-stick pans too, ideal for making sauces from the pan juices after frying.

Choose a frying pan suitable for the size of the joint. Do not crowd the pan, as this creates unwanted steam. If you have large amounts of meat to cook, it is best to fry it in batches, but ensure you reheat the pan thoroughly before continuing with the second batch.

Best cuts for frying Tender cuts e.g. fillet, sirloin, rump and rib eye.

Braising

Braising is a method of cooking by moist heat and is ideal for the tougher cuts of steak. These cuts score top marks for taste but need long, slow cooking at low temperature to transform them into memorable meals.

Generally the meat is seared first to caramelise the surface, giving it an appealing colour before it is cooked slowly in a well-flavoured cooking liquid. Cooking times are dictated by the quality of the meat.

Most braising is done in the oven but it can be done on top of the stove, too, as long as it is done gently. Many braised dishes are all the better for being made in advance and reheated thoroughly before serving. Often meat for braising is marinated first in wine with aromatics, which add flavours, and the wine acts as a tenderiser. I suggest investing in a thick cast-iron casserole with a tight-fitting lid, which will conduct the heat well, and distribute it evenly.

Good cuts to braise Topside, silverside and top rump. Also, neck, clod, chuck, blade, thick rib, flank, skirt, shin and leg.

How do you like it cooked?

Cooking steak perfectly can intimidate home cooks, but it really isn't that difficult. The problem is finding out when it is done as you like it.

Different joints and cuts cook at different rates and every one has to be judged for its thickness, internal temperature and fat content. Then there is the question of the temperature of your oven or grill. They can vary immensely, and you have to know your own oven.

Below are some guidelines for perfect results every time.

Roasting (cooked at 190°C) on the bone

Rare 20 minutes per 450g (plus 20 minutes) 60°C*

Medium 25 minutes per 450g (plus 25 minutes) 70°C*

Well done 30 minutes per 450g (plus 30 minutes) 82°C*

**final temperature after resting*

- For meat roasted off the bone, allow 5 minutes less per 450g (plus 5 minutes less too)
- A roast is best rested for 10–15 minutes before serving

Grilling, frying

The cooking time for steaks will vary with the heat of the grill, the type of pan, the distance of the food from the heat and, of course, the thickness of the meat.

The table below is based on a steak 2.5cm thick, grilled over a high heat. It is best to sear the steak on each side first to caramelise the juices, then cook it to your liking.

Cooking degree	Cooking time	Internal temperature	Resting time before serving
Blue			
Almost raw inside, but hot	1–2 minutes each side	49–52°C	9 minutes
Rare			
Red inside with plenty of red juices running freely	2–3 minutes each side	58–60°C	8 minutes
Medium rare			
As rare, but with few free-flowing juices, paler centre	3–4 minutes each side	60–63°C	7 minutes
Medium			
Pink in the centre with juices set	4–5 minutes each side	65–68°C	6 minutes
Medium well			
Deep pink in the centre, juices set	5–6 minutes each side	65–70°C	5 minutes
Well done			
The centre brown but flesh still clear and juicy	6–7 minutes each side	70–77°C	4 minutes
Very well done			
Centre beige, not many juices remaining	7–8 minutes each side	80–82°C	3 minutes

Resting meat

Leaving meat to rest after cooking (covered with foil in a warm place) is as important as the cooking itself. During cooking, the heat penetrates from the outside, and at higher temperatures the juices nearest the surface of the meat are forced out. Resting it allows it to cool and continue to cook with the heat that has built up in the meat. The contracted fibres gradually 'relax', allowing the inner juices to coagulate evenly throughout the meat, resulting in a more tender texture and a better taste.

It takes almost the same time to cook a rare steak as it does a well done one because, since the rare steak has minimal cooking, the resting period will be longer.

Some important do's and don'ts when cooking steak

- Season meat just before cooking, or immediately after. If meat is salted too early, the juices are drawn out making the meat dry
- Ensure excess marinade is shaken off meat before grilling
- Never cook steak from frozen, it will be tough. Always leave meat to thaw thoroughly and come to room temperature before cooking
- Never cut a piece of steak off just to see if it's done; flavourful juices will be lost
- Never turn steaks over with a fork as it releases the juices; always turn them with kitchen tongs
- When in doubt, undercook steak rather than ruin it by overcooking.



The ultimate steak and chips

SIMPLE GRILLS



The ultimate steak and chips

Simply grilled steak of any cut is one of the favourite ways to enjoy good beef. The cut depends entirely on your choice, whether tender cuts of fillet, tournedos, T-bone or more highly flavoured ones like sirloin steak, rib-eye etc. For cooking the ultimate steak see page 9. With the steak, I like to serve a simple grill garnish and the best quality accompaniment of good chips. Sauce béarnaise is my favourite sauce, although any of the cold butters is excellent.

SERVES 4

4 flat mushrooms, trimmed and cleaned
little olive oil
1 garlic clove, thinly sliced
1 sprig thyme
4 tomatoes
4 x your chosen steak (sirloin, rib-eye, fillet, T-bone, porterhouse, flank)
100g watercress (optional)
your favourite sauce, béarnaise or flavoured butters (see pages 133)

- 1 Place the mushrooms in a small dish with the olive oil, garlic, thyme and leave to marinate for 1 hour.
- 2 To make the chips, trim the potatoes then cut them into sticks about 1 x 7.5cm. Keep in cold water until needed, then drain and dry in a clean cloth.
- 3 Heat the sunflower oil slowly to 160°C and cook the chips in the oil to blanch them for 4–6 minutes with no colour; remove and drain them. Increase the oil temperature to 190°C, return the chips to the pan and fry until golden and crisp. Drain on kitchen paper.
- 4 Grill the mushrooms and tomatoes on the grill while cooking the steak to your liking. Garnish the steaks with the mushrooms, tomatoes, watercress, if using, and the sauce of your choice. Serve with the chips, sprinkled with coarse salt.

FOR THE CHIPS

1.2kg floury potatoes (such as maris piper), peeled
sunflower oil for deep frying
coarse sea salt

Grilled fillet Niçoise, olive béarnaise

What I love about béarnaise sauce is its versatility. Here it is flavoured with black olives, giving it a nuance of Provence: an altogether healthy and wonderful tasting dish.

SERVES 4

4 tbsp olive oil
1 garlic clove, sliced
sprig of fresh thyme plus extra to garnish
6 fresh basil leaves
4 x 180g fillet steaks
2 courgettes, cut lengthways into 3mm thick slices
1 aubergine, cut into 5mm slices
1 red pepper, skinned, halved, deseeded, cut into strips
2 tomatoes, skinned, halved, deseeded
2 tbsp balsamic vinegar

- 1 Mix all the olive oil with the garlic and herbs in a dish. Add the meat and coat well with the marinade. Cover with clingfilm, marinate at room temperature for 4 hours.
- 2 Remove the meat, add the vegetables and the tomatoes to the oil, and marinate for a further 2 hours.
- 3 Heat a pan grill and, when hot, heat a little of the marinade in the pan, place the vegetables and beef on the grill until the vegetables are golden and lightly charred all over. Grill the beef to your liking.
- 4 Mix the olives with the prepared béarnaise sauce, and season to taste.
- 5 Arrange the grilled vegetables on plates and sprinkle the balsamic vinegar over. Arrange the beef on top of the vegetables and spoon a little olive béarnaise over each steak. Garnish with thyme and serve.

FOR THE OLIVE BÉARNAISE

1 tbsp chopped black olives
150ml béarnaise sauce (see page 133)
salt and freshly cracked black pepper



Grilled teriyaki steak

with grilled beans, chilli and shallots

When you are feeling like something a little different, but at the same time simple, this Japanese steak preparation fits the bill beautifully.

SERVES 4

8 x 90g mignon steaks or skirt steaks

375g French beans

6 large banana shallots, cut into thick slices

2 tbs olive oil

8 spring onions, shredded

1 tbs fresh picked coriander leaves

2 tbs hot chilli sauce

salt and freshly cracked black pepper

FOR THE MARINADE

6 tbs dark soy sauce

2 tsp caster sugar

2 tbs sake or dry sherry

2 garlic cloves, crushed

5cm piece root ginger, finely grated

- 1 Prepare the marinade by combining the soy, sugar, sake, garlic and ginger in a large dish. Add the steaks, allow to marinate for 2–3 hours at room temperature, remove, reserving the marinade.
- 2 Cook the French beans in boiling salted water for 8–10 minutes then drain and refresh them in cold water.
- 3 Heat a chargrill or pan grill until smoking. Cook the steaks over a high heat until cooked to your liking, golden and charred all over, remove and keep warm.
- 4 Place the beans in a bowl with the shallots and toss with the oil. Place the beans and shallots on the grill and cook until lightly charred and wilted. Place in a bowl, add the spring onion, coriander and the chilli sauce, lightly toss together and season to taste.
- 5 Heat the marinade in a pan until boiling. Dress some grilled beans on 4 individual serving plates, top each with 2 grilled teriyaki mignon. Pour the marinade sauce over and serve.



Grilled sirloin steak with thyme potatoes, anchovy–caper dressing

Here is one of the most popular dishes in my steak repertoire. Anchovy and capers have the natural acidity to cut through the richness of a grilled juicy steak. Some grilled asparagus or radicchio is also great served with this dish.

SERVES 4

450g waxy new potatoes, well scrubbed
salt and freshly cracked black pepper
2 tbsp olive oil plus extra for brushing
1 tsp fresh thyme leaves
4 x 200g sirloin steaks, trimmed of fat

FOR THE DRESSING

½ tsp Dijon mustard
1 garlic clove, crushed
1 tbsp white wine vinegar
4 tbsp olive oil
1 shallot, finely chopped
2 tbsp superfine capers, rinsed, dried
2 anchovy fillets, rinsed, dried, chopped
1 hard boiled egg, chopped
½ red pepper, deseeded, cut into 5mm dice

- 1 Cook the potatoes in a pan of boiling salted water until just tender, then drain, cut in half lengthways. Place in a dish, toss with the olive oil and thyme, along with a little seasoning.
- 2 Make the dressing, place the mustard, garlic and wine vinegar in a bowl, whisk in the olive oil to form a dressing. Add the remaining ingredients, toss well together, season to taste, place to one side.
- 3 Heat a ridged pan grill or preferably a barbecue until smoking, then add the potatoes and cook until golden on both sides, about 10–12 minutes, remove and keep warm.
- 4 Wipe the pan grill clean. Brush the steaks with a little more oil and season with salt and pepper. Grill as desired, about 5–6 minutes per side for medium rare.
- 5 Heat the prepared dressing over a low heat. Arrange the grilled potatoes on 4 individual serving plates. Slice each steak into 4 thick slices and arrange next to the potatoes. Spoon the warm dressing over and serve.

Irish carpet bag steak

It wasn't until quite recently that I learnt from an Australian chef friend of mine that carpet bag steak originated from Australia and is not an American invention as I had always thought. Could this be the dish that led to the creation of the famous surf and turf concept, who knows? It's a simple dish that relies on the best steak and top quality fresh oysters, which for me, at present, are from Ireland.

SERVES 4

4 x 180g fillet, rump or sirloin steaks
12 medium rock oysters, preferably Irish
salt and freshly cracked black pepper
25g unsalted butter, softened
juice of 2 lemons
2 tbsp Worcester sauce
2 tbsp chopped fresh Italian flat-leaf parsley

- 1 Using a good sharp knife, slit each steak lengthways to form a pocket.
- 2 Open the oysters, strain and reserve the liquor. Season the oysters and insert 3 into each steak pocket. Close the openings with a small cocktail stick.
- 3 Heat a pan grill or barbecue until smoking. Season the exterior of the steaks. Add the steaks to the grill and cook to your liking.
- 4 Meanwhile, mix the oyster liquor, softened butter, lemon juice, Worcester sauce and parsley, spoon over the cooked steaks, then serve. For an oriental variation, add 2 tbsp oyster sauce to the oyster and lemon juices, and pour over the steaks, it is equally delicious.