



Hamburger heaven

Our easy tips get you there

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEIGH BEISCH

Tan lines on your feet, children running through sprinklers, burgers sizzling on the grill: Certain things let you know you're deep in summer. Hamburgers can be broiled or pan-fried, but a good grilled burger—with its smoky char and rich, juicy meat—has no equal. All you have to do to turn out a really great burger is keep in mind a few simple steps, which you'll find on the following pages, along with recipes for burgers that are bursting with flavor.

Green chiles and cheddar make these burgers exceptionally moist and juicy (recipe on page 104).

FOOD STYLING: MERILEE BORDIN; PROP STYLING: SARA SLAVIN

Our steak tartare–flavored burger (recipe on page 104) gets a kick from gherkins, shallots, and capers.



The perfect burger

These 10 steps are your secrets to success. (For more recipes, see page 104.)

PREP AND COOK TIME: 30 minutes

MAKES: Four 6-ounce burgers

1½ pounds freshly ground chuck

1 teaspoon salt

1. Buy the right meat. For juicy burgers, get ground chuck with a fat content of at least 18%. Lean and extra-lean meat make tough, dry burgers. Also, the more freshly ground the meat is, the more tender and flavorful the burger: If your store has butchers, ask them to grind the meat fresh for you. (Or just grind your own; see page 102 for a no-fuss method.)

2. Mix in your seasonings very, very gently. The more you handle the meat, the tougher your

burger will be. In a large bowl, pull the meat apart into small chunks, add salt, and toss gently with fingers spread apart until loosely mixed.

3. Use wet hands to form patties. This keeps your hands from getting sticky. It also allows the meat to come together faster and prevents overhandling.

4. Make patties thinner in the center. Divide the meat into 4 equal portions and form patties about ¾ inch thick at the edges and ½ inch thick in the center. They'll shrink and even out when cooking.

5. Keep meat cold until it goes on the grill. Put the patties in

the fridge while the grill heats up. This helps more of the flavor-carrying fat stay in the meat.

6. Use a clean, well-oiled, preheated grill. Bits of debris encourage sticking, as does an unoiled surface and too low a temperature; you want your burgers to quickly sizzle, firm up, and release from the grill.

7. Keep grill at a steady high heat (you can hold your hand 1 to 2 inches above grill level for 2 to 3 seconds). If using charcoal, you want ash-covered coals to produce even heat. With a gas grill, keep the lid down while cooking; with a charcoal grill, leave the lid off.

8. Flip burgers once and at the right time. Constant turning will

toughen and dry out meat, and if you flip too soon, burgers will stick. Cook 2 minutes per side for rare, 3 for medium-rare, 4 for medium, and 5 for well-done.

9. Don't press on the burgers while they're cooking. The juice that seeps out holds most of the flavor and moisture.

10. Let burgers rest a few minutes before eating. This allows them to finish cooking and allows their juices, which have collected on the surface during grilling, to redistribute throughout patty.

Per serving: 328 Cal., 60% (198 Cal.) from fat; 30 g protein; 22 g fat (8.8 g sat.); 0 g carbo; 676 mg sodium; 105 mg chol.

Path to perfection



Start with 1½ pounds of fat-edged chuck or sirloin (A). Add salt to diced meat (B). Grind meat twice (C). When shaping the patty, make the edges slightly higher than the centers (D); they'll even out when cooked.



The ultimate burger is made with meat you grind yourself.

The real secret: Grind your own meat

Grinding meat at home is not only easier than most people think, it also makes the moistest and most flavorful burgers. And, given the periodic safety concerns about commercially ground meat, home-ground is the way to go if you like your burgers cooked rare or medium. Manual meat grinders (about \$30) are available at kitchen-supply stores, and grinder attachments (about \$50) for standing mixers perform very well.

1. For four 6-ounce burgers, buy 1½ pounds chuck roast or sirloin and keep a thin layer of fat on the meat.
2. For added safety, bring a large pot of water to a boil and boil the roast for 30 to 60 seconds. Remove meat and rinse with cold water.
3. Cut the meat into 1-inch pieces. In a large bowl, toss meat pieces with 1 teaspoon salt. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
4. Chill the grinder for 30 minutes before starting (a cold grinder is more efficient).
5. Set up grinder according to manufacturer's instructions, using the coarse plate or setting. Feed meat into funnel and grind, stopping to clear the grinder if necessary. Put ground meat through grinder once more and proceed with step 2 of master recipe (see page 100).

Herb butter burgers taste great topped with ripe tomatoes and spicy arugula.

Well done but still juicy

Commercially ground meat should be thoroughly cooked (to an internal temperature of 160°) to kill bacteria—which means burgers can end up dry. These five variations on our master recipe (see page 100) all yield well-done burgers that are also moist and delicious. (For exact nutritional information on each of these recipes, use *Sunset.com's* Kitchen Assistant.)

Gorgonzola Burgers

METHOD: Follow our master recipe (see page 100), except in step 4, divide the 1½ pounds **ground chuck** into 8 equal portions and form into ¼- to ½-inch-thick patties. Divide 12 tablespoons of softened **gorgonzola dolce** into 4 equal portions; shape each into a disk and put on a patty. Top gorgonzola disks with remaining 4 patties and seal edges of patties around cheese.

FINISH IT OFF: These rich burgers are fabulous with a slice of tomato on top.

Green Chile Cheeseburgers

METHOD: Roast 2 **Pasilla chiles** on a gas burner, a grill, or under a broiler until blackened. Wrap in foil and let sit 15 minutes. Peel off skins and discard the stems and seeds. Finely dice chiles. Then follow our master recipe (see page 100), except in step 2, in a large bowl gently toss chiles with the 1½ pounds **ground chuck**, 1 cup grated **cheddar** cheese, and 1 teaspoon **salt**.

MAKE IT CHEESIER: Melt slices of cheddar on top during the last few minutes of grilling.

Herb Butter Burgers

METHOD: Chill 1 stick **butter** in the freezer for at least 2 hours. Follow our master recipe (see page 100), except in step 2, grate half of the stick (¼ cup) into a large bowl, using the other half as your handle (reserve remaining ¼ cup for another use). Add the 1½ pounds **ground chuck**, 2 tablespoons **mixed minced herbs** (such as parsley, thyme, rosemary, and dill), and 1 teaspoon **salt** and toss gently to mix.

WATCH OUT: The butter tends to cause flare-ups at the grill. Have a spray bottle filled with water on hand to tame the flames.

Spicy Tomato Burgers

METHOD: Follow our master recipe (see page 100), except in step 2, in a large bowl first mix 3 tablespoons **ketchup**, 1 tablespoon **prepared horseradish**, 2 teaspoons **Worcestershire**, 1 teaspoon **salt**, and ½ teaspoon **pepper**. Add the 1½ pounds **ground chuck** and toss gently to mix. Put 5 **ice cubes** in a large zip-lock plastic bag. Seal bag and pound cubes into tiny chips with the bottom of a small frying pan. Toss ½ cup ice chips with the ground beef mixture.

KEEP IT TOGETHER: These burgers have a tendency to fall apart somewhat. Forming them a little more firmly helps, as does a gentle hand at the grill.

Steak Tartare–Flavored Burgers

METHOD: Follow our master recipe (see page 100), except in step 2, in a large bowl first mix 2 **egg yolks**, ¼ cup diced **gherkins**, ¼ cup diced **shallots**, 2 tablespoons **chopped capers**, 1 teaspoon **minced pickled green peppercorns** (optional), and 1 teaspoon **salt**. Add the 1½ pounds **ground chuck** and toss gently to mix.

IT'S ALL IN THERE: Good simply dressed, with just a bit of ketchup or mayonnaise—or maybe a few slices of gherkin if you want even more pickle flavor. *

