

Chapter 1

Mastering Grill-Speak

In This Chapter

- ▶ Grilling directly and indirectly
 - ▶ Understanding the finer points of barbecuing
 - ▶ Looking into the process of smoking
 - ▶ Getting to know grilling terms and guidelines
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Nothing — not roasting, not frying, not sautéing, and certainly not poaching — gives such wonderful, smoky flavor to food as grilling does. And because it's done outdoors, grilling is the most social of cooking techniques. For as long as man has known how great foods can taste when cooked over an open fire, grilling outdoors has been a social event that invites people to participate.

By some strange twist of fate, men seem to take to grilling like ducks to water. (Perhaps women have just let men think that they're better at it!) But we find that no matter who's doing the grilling, everyone has fun. Grilling brings the kitchen outdoors and often gathers friends, neighbors, and family members around the grill to share stories, watch the fire, and trade recipes.

Grilling over a charcoal fire is perhaps the most interactive of all cooking techniques. It demands that you respond like an athlete to the changes of a live fire. This intense interaction is one of the aspects of grilling that makes it so much fun. You have to play with and master the elements of fire, smoke, and heat — and this book shows you how (as well as how to use a gas grill).

But first, in this chapter, we start off with some translation for you — from Grill-Speak into everyday language.

Two Key Terms: Direct Grilling and Indirect Grilling

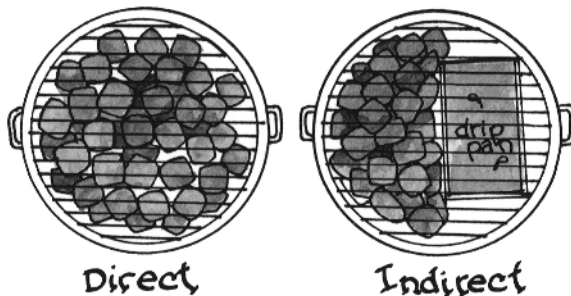
In your introduction to the language of grilling, we start you off with the two basic methods of grilling — direct and indirect.

Searing food with direct, no-frills grilling

Direct grilling means that the food is placed on the grill directly over the full force of the heat source, whether it's charcoal, hardwood, or gas. (See Figure 1-1.) Just about every food, from meats to vegetables, can be grilled directly over fire. Some foods, however, are better cooked over indirect heat, a great grilling technique that's introduced in the following section. Foods that are often grilled directly over the heat include hamburgers, hot dogs, pork chops, lamb chops, boneless chicken breasts, beef tenderloins, and all types of fish and shellfish.

Grilling over direct, intense heat sears the food, coating its exterior with a tasty brown crust that's loaded with flavor. Steamed or boiled foods don't have this flavor advantage, nor do foods that are stir-fried or microwaved. The techniques of sautéing, deep-frying, roasting, and broiling create this crusty effect, but grilling rewards you with a seared crust *and* the extra benefit of smoky flavoring that comes from the charcoal, wood chips, or hardwood chunks. And unlike sautéing and deep frying, grilling doesn't cook food in a layer of hot fat to produce this sear — you get all the benefits of a rich, brown crust with fewer calories.

Figure 1-1:
The placement of coals depends on the type of grilling you're doing.



Direct grilling — the primary focus of this book — is a fast cooking technique that doesn't require elaborate finishing sauces. Simple marinades (covered in Chapter 5), salsas (discussed in Chapter 6), and condiments (also in Chapter 6) are all you need to complement directly grilled meat.



The primary difficulty with direct grilling is that you must watch your food closely to prevent it from burning.

On a charcoal grill, the coals should be spread in a solid layer that extends about 1 to 2 inches beyond the edges of the food. In all our recipes, the *grill*

grid — the metal latticework you place the food on — is placed 4 to 6 inches from the heat.

We find that most foods are best grilled over medium heat because you have more control and end up with a nice brown crust without any nasty charring. However, fire temperatures vary according to what's being cooked. For example:

- ✓ You can sear 1½-to 2-inch-thick steaks first over medium-high (or even high) heat and then finish cooking them over medium heat to end up with a crispy, brown crust and a rare to medium-rare center.
- ✓ Pork and chicken require moderate heat to give the interior a chance to cook completely. However, these foods can be started on a higher temperature, which gives them a nice crust, and then moved to grill slowly over an indirect fire to finish cooking through.

Direct grilling can be done with or without the grill cover. The recipes in this book always tell you when to cover the food. Covering the grill instantly traps and raises the heat and tends to increase the smoky flavor, especially if you're using wood chunks or chips. However, covering food also can increase the chance that you'll burn or overcook it, simply because you can't see the food. When direct grilling, sometimes it just makes sense to use the grill cover. We find that thick bone-in pork chops, for example, grill more evenly and better retain their succulence when grilled with the cover down.



When grilling directly in a covered grill, the vents — if you have them on your grill — are usually left open. Opening the vents allows more oxygen to enter the grill and increases the temperature of the coals. Closing the vents partially or totally has the opposite effect. So, if your fire is too hot and is browning food too quickly, either remove the cover or try closing the top grill vents.

Staying away from the heat: Indirect grilling

Indirect grilling grills foods slowly, off to one side of the heat source, usually over a drip pan in a covered grill (see Figure 1-1). If you want to use this technique, here's what you do:

- ✓ In a charcoal grill, place the food on the grill grid so that it's away from or to the side of the full force of the heat or fire. Arrange the lit coals around the drip pan or bank them to one side of the pan.
- ✓ In a gas grill with two burners, you ignite only one burner and place the food over the unlit burner. If your gas grill has only one burner, place

the food in an aluminum foil pan or on several layers of foil and grill over very low heat. Always preheat your gas grill with all burners on high and the lid down for about 15 minutes; then turn one of the burners off before cooking indirectly.

- ✓ Whether you're using a gas or charcoal grill, place a drip pan directly under the food. Often you fill the pan with water or another liquid, such as broth or apple juice, to add moisture and keep the slow-cooking food from drying out.
- ✓ Close the grill lid to cover the grill, trap the heat and smoke, and mimic the desirable effects of slow, oven roasting.
- ✓ To collect pan juices (especially with large roasts), place the food in a roasting pan and then set the pan on the grill.



When indirectly grilling on a charcoal grill, usually you can partially close both top and bottom vents to hold down the intensity of the fire. So be sure to clean out the ash catcher underneath a charcoal grill before starting the fire. Doing so allows the bottom vents to properly draw air over the coals. Remember to dispose of the ashes properly — in a sealed paper bag. The ashes are a great fertilizer for some trees and plants as well. (Think about how forests restore themselves after a fire.)

Indirect grilling has a multitude of advantages:

- ✓ **It slows down the cooking process.** How many times have you used direct grilling to cook chicken and ended up with skin charred beyond recognition and meat that's practically raw in the center? Indirect grilling takes care of that problem. Food is cooked in a covered grill by heat that never directly touches it. Indirect grilling is comparable to oven roasting.
- ✓ **Indirect cooking actually gives you two types of fires (or two levels of heat) in one grill.** You have a direct fire that can be used to sear food and an indirect fire to cook food slowly and thoroughly. For example, chicken, left whole or cut into pieces, can be first seared over the direct heat of the fire and then placed on the side over the drip pan without any direct heat. You then cover the grill to let the chicken finish cooking.
- ✓ **Indirect grilling eliminates the possibility of dangerous flare-ups.** Fat drips from the food into the drip pan, rather than onto the hot coals, lava rocks, or ceramic briquettes.

Indirectly grill any large cuts of meat or whole birds, poultry pieces, pork tenderloins, ribs, or large roasts for delicious results. In this book, we use the indirect cooking method for the following recipes: Just-Right Pork Ribs

(Chapter 9), Whole Game Hens with Asian Flavors (Chapter 14), Brined and Grilled Loin O' Pork, and Curried Pork Tenderloins (both in Chapter 12).

Slow and Smoky: Barbecuing with Success

Barbecuing is the technique of indirectly and slowly cooking large cuts of meat for a long period of time, over low heat, and with lots of hot smoke. Compare this to direct grilling, which cooks small, tender pieces of food at higher temperatures for shorter grilling times. You might say that the two techniques are almost opposites.

Barbecuing generally takes tough cuts of meat and cooks or breaks down connective tissue into tender morsels that practically fall apart. Foods that are barbecued often include beef brisket, whole hogs, pork ribs, and pork shoulder (which includes two pieces of meat — the Boston butt, which has the least amount of bone, and the picnic ham). These foods are perfect for barbecuing because they actually *demand* to be cooked for long periods in order to break down their stubborn tissues and release flavor. Fish and vegetables can also be barbecued, not to break down their already tender tissues, but to add smoky flavor.



Depending on the preference of the cook, barbecued food may or may not be seasoned. But many barbecuing chefs create elaborate rubs, basting sauces, and finishing sauces to enhance the flavor of foods. At your local supermarket, you can find a tremendous number of packaged and bottled dry rubs, seasonings, and marinades specifically for use on grilled and barbecued foods. It's also fun to pick up some of these products while visiting places like Texas, Arizona, North Carolina, and Florida for local varieties.

A *barbecue pit* refers to a solidly built, upright grill apparatus with a deep hold for the fuel. The term also can mean an actual pit dug into the ground and filled with heated stones, over which the food is cooked, creating a steaming process. Most of the smoky flavor you get from using a barbecue pit comes not from fat dripping on the coals or coils, but from smoldering wood. (Flip to Chapter 3 for more on wood chips and chunks.)

A common kettle charcoal grill can come close to duplicating the effects of a barbecue pit. Simply build a small, indirect fire and use a combination of good-quality charcoal briquettes and flavored wood chips or hardwood chunks.



You have to give the flavored smoke a chance to have an effect. Adding a handful of wood chips to a fire when grilling a piece of fish for a few minutes won't have much of an impact. But cooking the same piece of fish slowly and indirectly, adding a steady supply of presoaked wood chips as you go along, can produce excellent smoky flavor.

A few more techniques can help you turn your covered charcoal grill into a mini-barbecue pit. Consider the following:

- ✓ **Because the food is cooked indirectly, you'll need a drip pan under the food to catch the drippings.** (See Chapter 2 for more on drip pans.) If the food requires a long cooking time, more than 30 to 40 minutes, fill the pan with water, apple juice, beer, or another flavored liquid to add moisture and prevent the food from drying out as it slowly grills.
- ✓ **The grill must have a vented hood.** Keep the top vents partially closed to trap the smoke and decrease the supply of oxygen that fuels the fire. Position the lid so that the top vents are opposite the fire and directly above the food. This helps to draw the flavored smoke across your food. And don't lift the lid to peek — each time you do so, you release precious smoke and disrupt the cooking process.
- ✓ **Keep a supply of preheated coals next to the grill in a metal bucket.** Add a few every 40 minutes with long-handled tongs (see Chapter 2) to maintain the temperature of the fire. Lift the grill grid gently to add the hot coals, or use tongs to insert them into the space near the grid handles. Or add a few fresh briquettes to the edges of the fire every 20 to 30 minutes. When they're ashy, move them to the center of the fire.

Even Slower than Barbecuing: Smoking

The technique of *smoking* food differs from barbecuing because it uses even lower heat to slow down the cooking process. Food cooks for hours, and becomes infused with hot, aromatic smoke. The cooking temperatures for smoking foods range from 180 to 250 degrees. You can choose from two methods — dry or wet — and both can be duplicated on your kettle grill. However, if you do use your kettle grill, you should place a temperature gauge on the grill to monitor and keep the heat within the proper temperature range.

A 7-pound whole turkey or a 12- to 14-pound ham can take 9 hours or more to smoke. A 5- to 7-pound roast beef takes 5 to 6 hours to reach an internal temperature of 140 degrees. At many professional barbecue eateries and stores, beef and pork may be smoked for 12 hours or more at a very low heat.

Dry smoking

Dry smoking requires indirect cooking in a closed charcoal grill. The food is placed on the grill with the lid on top. Then the air vents are adjusted enough to lower the flames but still keep enough oxygen inside to allow the fire to burn and create smoke. This smoke, in turn, flavors the food while the low heat cooks it. The degree of smoking is based on personal taste and the kind of food to be cooked. Instead of using your kettle grill, you can buy a dry smoker — a contraption that looks like a horizontal barrel and, depending on its size, can cook up to 50 pounds of food at one time. The dry smoker has two chambers: one for the food, and one that vents heat and smoke into the cooking chamber.



If you've tried smoking but find that the smoke flavor is too intense for your taste, cover the food with foil about halfway through the cooking process.

Water smoking

Water smoking, also known as *wet smoking*, is an alternative to dry smoking. This technique involves placing a pan of water in the grill in order to maintain the moisture needed for moister, more succulent foods. Water smoking is an excellent method for delicate foods such as fish, shrimp, and lobster. It also does well with vegetables that would otherwise dry out quickly.

You can buy a water smoker if you don't want to use your kettle grill. Water smokers are now being made by most grill manufacturers, but two companies — Brinkmann and Meco — specialize in such equipment. Water smokers come in three varieties:

- ✓ **Charcoal:** This is the most popular and least expensive water smoker; however, charcoal must be replenished every hour for long-term cooking. Charcoal water smokers also tend to have peaks and valleys of heat as the coals burn down.
- ✓ **Electric:** This popular type of smoker plugs into an electric socket and offers consistent heat.
- ✓ **Gas:** This is the most expensive type of water smoker, but it's a cinch to use (and you don't have to be near an electric outlet to use it). A gas water smoker also provides consistent heat.



Water smoking is a very slow and easy method, but don't expect a crusty exterior on your food — which, for many people, including us, is the whole point of good grilling.

A Whole Mess of Grilling Terms: A Griller's Glossary

To help you wade through the Grill-Speak that you may hear when shopping for accessories — or from your neighbor down the street — we compiled the following glossary of terms. Use these, and you'll be a grilling guru in no time!

- ✓ **Baste:** To brush a seasoned liquid over the surface of food to add moisture and flavor.
- ✓ **Brazier:** An inexpensive, open charcoal grill with a grid that's usually just a few inches from the coals. A brazier is best for quick grilling. Some braziers may have a partial hood or cover to better retain heat. Braziers sometimes also come with rotisserie attachments.
- ✓ **Ceramic briquettes:** These briquettes are made of radiant materials and are used in gas grills to transfer heat from the burners and spread it evenly under the grill grid. Briquettes made of ceramic don't burn up like charcoal briquettes do. *Lava rock* and *metal plates* are an alternative to ceramic briquettes. They don't, however, give the smoky, charcoal flavor that many folks crave.
- ✓ **Charcoal briquettes:** The most common fuel for a live fire, manufactured from ground charcoal, coal dust, and starch. These materials are compressed into a uniform, pillow shape and packaged for sale in 5- to 50-pound bags.
- ✓ **Charcoal chimney starter:** A metal, cylinder-shaped container that's filled with newspaper and charcoal and used to quickly ignite a charcoal fire.
- ✓ **Charcoal grill:** A grill that uses charcoal as its principal fuel. A charcoal grill can be round, square, covered, uncovered, portable, or stationary. The most common type is a covered kettle grill.
- ✓ **Coal grate:** The rack that holds the charcoal in the firebox.
- ✓ **Drip pan:** A metal pan placed under the food to catch drippings when grilling indirectly.
- ✓ **Electric grill:** An indoor or outdoor grill whose heat comes from electric coils.
- ✓ **Fire starters:** Any number of gadgets or materials, such as the chimney starter, electric coil, wax or gel cubes, or compressed wood, used to ignite charcoal. (Flip to Chapter 3 for the lowdown on all these fire-starting gadgets.)

- ✓ **Firebox:** The underbelly or bottom of the grill that holds the fire or heat.
- ✓ **Flare-ups:** Flames caused by fat dripping onto hot coals or lava rock.
- ✓ **Gas grill:** A grill whose heating source is gas from a propane tank (or occasionally, a main gas line).
- ✓ **Grid:** The latticework of metal rods where you place your food on a grill is called a *grid*, or a *grill grid*. (Weber confuses things a little by calling this area the grate, which everyone else calls the metal piece on which the charcoal sits.) One grid is included with every grill.
- ✓ **Grill baskets:** Hinged, wire baskets that ease the grilling (and turning) of sliced vegetables, a delicate piece of fish, burgers, and other foods. Chapter 2 has more on accessories.
- ✓ **Hibachi:** A small, portable, uncovered grill that's often made of cast-iron. A hibachi is great for beach or tailgate grilling.
- ✓ **Kettle grill:** A relatively inexpensive, round charcoal grill with a heavy cover. It stands on three legs and is excellent for either direct or indirect grilling.
- ✓ **Lava rock:** This long-lasting natural rock results from volcanic lava and is used as an alternative to ceramic briquettes. The irregularly-shaped lava rock heats evenly in gas or electric grills. Unlike charcoal briquettes, it can be used over and over.
- ✓ **Marinate:** To soak food in a seasoned liquid mixture in order to impart flavor to the food before it's cooked. The steeping liquid, often made with herbs, spices, oil, and an acidic ingredient like lemon juice or vinegar, is called a *marinade*.
- ✓ **Natural lump charcoal:** The carbon residue of wood that's been charred in a kiln — usually found in the form of chunks. This is one heating source for charcoal grills. Natural lump charcoal gives you the smokiest flavor.
- ✓ **Roasting:** The process of cooking food in a pan in a closed-grill setup. By using indirect heat, you can roast an entire prime rib or turkey to perfection on a grill.
- ✓ **Rotisserie rod:** The spit or long metal skewer that suspends and rotates food over a grill's heat source.
- ✓ **Rub:** A concentrated, flavorful blend of dry or wet herbs, seasonings, and spices that's rubbed onto the surface of food before grilling.
- ✓ **Sear:** To cook food directly above relatively high heat in order to seal in juices and impart flavor, a brown color, and a slightly crusty surface.

Grilling Web sites to fire you up

If you can pull yourself away from your grill long enough, you may enjoy searching the Internet for tips and recipes for outdoor cooking. Here are some sites to get you started:

- ✓ **World Wide Weber** (www.weberbbq.com): The mouth-watering recipes at this site will send you scurrying to your grill. (And, of course, if you don't have one, the Weber folks tell you all about their products here.)
- ✓ **About.com** (bbq.about.com): This site links you to recipes, grilling books, cooking

magazines, and videos. It also has updates on new barbecue and grill products and cookers.

- ✓ **USDA Guide to Grilling and Smoking Food Safety** (www.fsis.usda.gov): This site doesn't offer the attractive graphics of some other sites, but the information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture is a good, basic grilling guide. The site contains facts on defrosting, marinating, grilling away from home, and serving food safely.

- ✓ **Smoker box:** A small, perforated steel or cast-iron container that's placed directly on the lava rocks or ceramic briquettes of a gas grill. This box holds flavored wood chips and provides smoke.
- ✓ **Vent:** The holes in a grill cover or firebox that open and close like shutters. An open vent increases the oxygen and heat of a fire, while a closed vent does the opposite. Some grills don't have vents.
- ✓ **Wood chips and wood chunks:** Natural hardwood materials added to the fire to impart smoky flavor to food as it grills. Some of the best materials are hickory, mesquite, and grapevine trimmings.

Looking at a Few Guidelines before You Begin

Every cook has his or her preferences, so it's best to know ours before you begin sampling our recipes. Here are some guidelines:

- ✓ **All recipe cooking times are just estimates.** The wind, temperature of the air and the food, and the intensity of the fire all affect, sometimes radically, the amount of time needed to grill food.
- By testing gas grill thermometers, we've found that their temperature readings can be off by a great deal. Charcoal grills nearly always burn

hotter and cook faster than gas grills. Our best advice is to experiment with your own grill and adjust the cooking times of our recipes accordingly.



- ✓ **Marinate all foods in the refrigerator in nonmetal or nonreactive containers like glass or ceramic.** Metal may impart an unpleasant flavor to the foods. Plus the acids in the food may cause a chemical reaction to the metal. Plastic, resealable bags are excellent for this purpose and take up less space than dishes. (Flip to Chapter 5 for more on marinating.)
- ✓ **Be careful with leftover marinade.** Never use leftover marinade as a finishing sauce unless you thoroughly boil the marinade for 15 minutes to kill any possible bacteria picked up from the raw food.
- ✓ **Don't bring food to room temperature.** Although some cookbooks say to bring your food to room temperature before cooking, with few exceptions, we don't recommend this tip for outdoor cooking. If the temperature is in the 80s or 90s, foods can spoil quickly.
- ✓ **Salt can add tremendous flavor and even a little texture to grilled food.** The optimum time to salt food is just before you place it on the grill. You can add more salt and sprinkle on the pepper (which should always be freshly ground) after you remove the food from the grill.
- ✓ **Oil your grids.** Before preheating a gas grill or building a fire (see Chapter 3 for how to do that), brush the grill grid with a vegetable oil, such as peanut or corn oil. This step helps to keep the food from sticking unpleasantly to the grill grid. Some grillers find it easier to use a nonstick cooking spray. Never brush or spray the grid while the grill is heating or after the fire has started, because this can cause dangerous flare-ups. The food itself should also be brushed with oil or marinade and basted, when necessary.
- ✓ **Stay safe!** Always read all safety information and every warning icon (like this one) in this book. Following the safety advice is absolutely essential if you want to have a pleasant grilling experience.



