

## Great deals on the grill

Portland cookbook author Diane Morgan shares some of her latest smart ideas, all with a budget and summer weather in mind

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**DIANE MORGAN**

Special to The Oregonian

Gasoline costs more than \$4 a gallon, and everyone is understandably fixated on that dollar threshold. So as I perused my grocer's meat department, I wondered if I could find delicious meats or poultry to grill for less than \$4 a pound. Is it possible to enjoy the sizzle and flavor of live-fire cooking without busting the budget?

While steaks (not so cheap), burgers and hot dogs are the usual suspects, budget-crunched families who like to light a fire and enjoy our splendid Northwest summers outside can find many great and creative possibilities for the grill. Whether you're cooking with charcoal briquettes, hardwood or natural gas, there are budget-saving tips to learn and terrific new recipes to discover.

First, let's talk about fuel and how to use it most economically. A gas grill needs to preheat, with the lid closed, about 15 minutes in order to get the grill grates and internal temperature searing hot; heating it any longer wastes fuel.

For a charcoal grill, the quantity of charcoal you need depends on the size of your grill and how much food you will be cooking. Start with enough to cover the bottom charcoal grate in a single layer. You can always replenish it as needed. Here are a few guidelines for estimating amounts: A 6-quart chimney starter filled two-thirds full holds roughly 4 pounds of charcoal or 60 briquettes, which is enough to provide a 22-inch kettle-style grill with a single layer of coals and about 45 minutes of cooking time. A 14-inch kettle-style grill needs about 2 pounds of charcoal, or 30 briquettes. At standard retail prices, a 9-pound bag of charcoal briquettes cost \$6.49, so on a medium-sized grill it will cost about \$2.20 to \$3.25 to grill for 45 minutes. If you can find charcoal on sale you will do even better.

Next, consider the efficiency of grilling your entire dinner on the grill or, better yet, grilling once and cooking extra to have enough food for a second night's meal. With 45 minutes of grilling time, I can grill-roast new potatoes tossed with olive oil, salt and pepper on the perimeter of the grill while grilling my protein. After the meat and poultry are removed to rest for a minimum of 5 minutes (which allows the juices to redistribute and ensures juicy and tender meat), I use that time to grill a vegetable or two to accompany the meal. Grilling asparagus, thickly sliced zucchini, onions or bell peppers over the direct coals brings big smoky flavors and a crisp texture to summer's best vegetables.

Skip the expensive rib-eye or New York strip steaks at almost \$12 a pound and set your sights on beefy cross-cut short ribs (called "flanken" ribs), which are often on sale for \$4 a pound. Or select a skirt steak or flank steak, both easy to grill with a bold beef taste. The savings come because these cuts are sliced before serving, making a smaller portion size that is both economical and healthier. While you are likely to serve a whole strip steak weighing almost 3/4 pound to each adult, a sliced skirt steak weighing 1 1/3 pounds serves four nicely.

Skip the boneless chicken breasts, which can cost as much as \$9 a pound, and buy chicken thighs at \$1.99 per pound or kid-friendly, eat-with-your-fingers drumsticks at \$1.29 per pound. A value pack containing 20 to 24 drumsticks can be had for around \$7. That's a meal or two, and some great lunch fixings to boot.

I recently found bone-in pork loin chops, delicious on the grill, at \$3.99 per pound with a store "savings club" price of \$2.99 per pound.

The accompanying recipes can be enjoyed on busy weeknights or relaxed weekends. The only requirement is cooking them on the grill, where delicious smoky flavors make for big-flavored food with low-budget bills. And all that thriftiness is bound to make filling your car at the gas pump a little less painful.

Diane Morgan's latest book is "Grill Every Day: 125 Fast-Track Recipes for Weeknights at the Grill" (Chronicle Books, 2008).

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## Skirt Steak, Argentine-Style

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Makes 6 servings

Full-flavored, inexpensive skirt steak is great for grilling. It can measure more than a foot long but is quite thin, so searing it quickly over high heat is best. If it seems too unwieldy to manage, cut it in half crosswise; the shorter pieces are easier to grill. For this recipe, I pair skirt steak with chimichurri, a classic garlicky herb sauce from Argentina, a country famous for its beef. The sauce is a cinch to make with a food processor.

Steak:

- 2 pounds skirt steak, trimmed of excess fat
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 large cloves garlic, minced
- Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Chimichurri:
  - 2 large cloves garlic
  - 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
  - 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
  - 1/2 teaspoon kosher or sea salt
  - 1/2 teaspoon granulated sugar
  - 1 cup lightly packed fresh Italian (flat-leaf) parsley
  - 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
  - 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

To make steak: Light a hot fire in a charcoal or gas grill (see note).

Remove the steaks from the refrigerator 20 to 30 minutes before grilling and place them on a large rimmed baking sheet. In a small bowl, combine the olive oil and garlic. Rub the steaks on both sides with the mixture. Lightly season the steaks on both sides with salt and pepper. While the grill is heating, make the chimichurri. To make chimichurri: In a food processor fitted with the metal blade, combine the garlic, red pepper flakes, cumin, salt and sugar; process until the garlic is minced. Add the parsley and lemon juice and pulse until the parsley is finely chopped. With the machine running, pour the olive oil through the feed tube and process until the sauce is well-blended; set aside.

Oil the grill grate and place the steaks directly over the hot fire. Grill the steaks on 1 side until nicely seared, about 2 minutes for rare and 3 minutes for medium-rare. Turn and cook until seared, 2 to 3 minutes more. Skirt steaks are too thin to yield an accurate reading with an instant-read thermometer. Instead, cut into the steak at its thickest part to check for doneness.

Transfer the steaks to a carving board and let rest for 5 minutes. Cut the meat across the grain into 1/4-inch-thick slices. Arrange overlapping slices of steak on warmed dinner plates or a platter, and spoon any accumulated juices over the top. Spoon about half of the chimichurri over the meat and place the rest in a bowl for passing. Serve immediately. Note: To check grill temperature, count the seconds you can hold your hand, palm side down, 2 to 3 inches above the grill grate, until it feels uncomfortable: 2 seconds for hot.

-- From "Grill Every Day: 125 Fast-Track Recipes for Weeknights at the Grill" by Diane Morgan

PER SERVING: calories: 481 (67% from fat); protein: 35.8 grams; total fat: 35.9 grams; saturated fat: 8.1 grams; cholesterol: 78 mg; sodium: 258 mg; carbohydrate: 2.6 grams; dietary fiber: 0.4 gram

## Grilled Southwest Chipotle Chile Chicken

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Makes 4 servings

The big, spicy, smoky flavors of this easy glaze turn ordinary grilled chicken thighs into a revved-up weeknight meal. Serve them whole, or slice them and pile the slices on warmed flour tortillas with sliced avocados and chopped tomatoes. Mix a generous tablespoon of minced canned chipotle chiles into 1/2 cup mayonnaise and you have an instant sauce for your tacos. Double the recipe and reserve the leftovers to make Grilled Sweet Corn, Black Bean and Cherry Tomato Salad (see accompanying recipe), a bountiful main-course salad.

- 1/4 cup unsalted butter (1/2 stick)
- 1/4 cup honey
- 2 tablespoons minced canned chipotle chiles in adobo sauce
- Kosher or sea salt
- 8 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Freshly ground black pepper

Light a medium-hot fire in a charcoal or gas grill (see note).

In a small saucepan or microwave-safe bowl, melt the butter. Add the honey, chiles and 1 teaspoon salt and stir to mix thoroughly. Keep warm.

Generously brush the chicken thighs on both sides with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

To create a cool zone, bank the coals to one side of the grill or turn off one of the burners. Oil the grill grate. Place the chicken thighs, skin side down, directly over the medium-hot fire and sear on one side, about 4 minutes. Turn and sear on the other side for 3 to 4 minutes. Move the chicken to the cooler part of the grill and brush generously on both sides with the chipotle butter. Cover and grill, basting once or twice with more chipotle butter, until an instant-read thermometer registers 165 degrees, 15 to 20 minutes longer. Divide the chicken among warmed dinner plates and serve immediately. Note: To check grill temperature, count the seconds you can hold your hand, palm side down, 2 to 3 inches above the rack, until it feels uncomfortable: 3 seconds for medium-hot.

-- Adapted from "Grill Every Day: 125 Fast-Track Recipes for Weeknights at the Grill" by Diane Morgan

PER SERVING: calories: 385 (59% from fat); protein: 31.2 grams; total fat: 25.4 grams; saturated fat: 9.2 grams; cholesterol: 131 mg; sodium: 168 mg; carbohydrate: 6.5 grams; dietary fiber: 0.5 gram

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## Grilled Sweet Corn, Black Bean and Cherry Tomato Salad

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Makes 4 servings

Because the Grilled Southwest Chipotle Chile Chicken is so flavorful and easy to make (see accompanying recipe), I like to cook extra and have it for another dinner. Here the chicken thighs are sliced to top a colorful, big-tasting and refreshing summer salad.

Dressing:

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 2 teaspoons whole-grain mustard
- 3/4 teaspoon adobo sauce from canned chipotle chiles, or more to taste
- 1 teaspoon kosher or sea salt
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- Salad:
- 2 ears corn, shucked
- 1 15-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 12 cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 5 slices cooked bacon, crumbled
- 2 green onions, including green tops, cut on the diagonal into 1/4-inch-thick slices
- 1/2 to 1 cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
- 6 cups coarsely chopped romaine lettuce
- 4 to 6 Grilled Southwest Chipotle Chile Chicken thighs (see accompanying recipe), bone removed and meat cut into 1/4-inch-thick slices

To make dressing: In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, vinegar, mustard, adobo sauce, salt, sugar and pepper. Set aside. To make salad: Light a hot fire in a grill (see note). Grill the ears of corn, turning occasionally, until charred on all sides, about 8 to 10 minutes total. Set aside until cool enough to handle. Working with 1 ear of corn at a time, stand it upright, stem end down, in a large bowl. Using a sharp knife, cut downward along the cob, removing the kernels and rotating the cob a quarter turn after each cut. Discard the cobs.

In a large bowl, toss together the corn kernels, black beans, tomatoes, bacon, green onions and cilantro. Add the dressing and toss gently to coat the ingredients evenly. Add the lettuce and toss just until lightly coated. Divide the salad among 4 dinner plates. Arrange the chicken slices over salads and serve immediately. Note: To check grill temperature, count the seconds you can hold your hand, palm side down, 2 to 3 inches above the grate, until it feels uncomfortable: 2 seconds for hot.

-- Adapted from "Grill Every Day:

125 Fast-Track Recipes for Weeknights at the Grill" by Diane Morgan

PER SERVING: calories: 587 (63% from fat); protein: 24.4 grams; total fat: 40.9 grams; saturated fat: 8.3 grams; cholesterol: 65 mg; sodium: 833 mg; carbohydrate: 35 grams; dietary fiber: 9.1 grams

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## Espresso-Cardamom-Rubbed Pork Chops

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Makes 4 servings

The assertive espresso-cardamom mixture that seasons these chops pairs beautifully with grill-roasted new potatoes or thickly sliced and grilled sweet potatoes brushed with melted butter and a bit of the spice rub. The rub is also terrific for beef and dark chicken (legs and thighs).

- 1/4 cup finely ground espresso-roast coffee beans
- 1/4 cup kosher or sea salt
- 1/4 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons hot paprika
- 1 tablespoon ground cardamom
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 4 bone-in, center-cut loin pork loin chops, 3/4 to 1 inch thick (about 10 ounces each)

In a small bowl, combine the ground coffee beans, salt, sugar, paprika, cardamom, ginger and garlic powder. Stir well to blend.

Prepare a medium-hot fire in a charcoal grill or gas grill (see note).

Remove the pork chops from the refrigerator 20 to 30 minutes before grilling and place them on a rimmed baking sheet. Using 1/4 cup of the rub mixture in all, rub the seasoning on both sides of the pork chops. (Store remaining rub for later use in a jar with a tight-fitting lid, away from heat and light.)

To create a cool zone, bank the coals to one side of the grill or turn off one of the burners. Oil the grill grate. Place the pork chops directly over the medium-hot fire. Grill the chops on one side until nicely seared, about 4 minutes. Turn and cook until seared, 3 to 4 minutes longer. Move the chops to the cooler part of the grill, cover and grill until the pork is slightly pink in the center or an instant-read thermometer registers 145 degrees, 10 to 12 minutes longer. Remove the chops from the grill and let rest for 5 minutes. Transfer the chops to warmed dinner plates and serve immediately. Note: To check grill temperature, count the seconds you can hold your hand, palm side down, 2 to 3 inches above the grate, until it feels uncomfortable: 3 seconds for medium-hot.

-- From "Grill Every Day: 125 Fast-Track Recipes for Weeknights at the Grill" by Diane Morgan

PER SERVING: calories: 389 (47% from fat); protein: 44.6 grams; total fat: 20.3 grams; saturated fat: 7.4 grams; cholesterol: 126 mg; sodium: 1,440 mg; carbohydrate: 4.9 grams; dietary fiber: 0.9 gram

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## Korean-Style Grilled Short Ribs

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Makes 4 to 5 servings

For those who like to have finger-lickin' grilled foods to nibble, these beef short ribs, marinated in a Korean-style garlic-and-green-onion-punctuated soy marinade, are a savory, smoky and budget-saving treat. Serve accompanied by kimchi, the fiery Korean pickled cabbage, if desired.

- 2/3 cup soy sauce
- 1/3 cup mirin (rice wine), sake or dry sherry
- 1/3 cup unseasoned rice vinegar
- 1/3 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons dark sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons finely minced garlic (about 7 cloves)
- 4 green onions, both white and green parts, trimmed and minced
- 1 tablespoon finely minced fresh ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3 to 3 1/2 pounds flanken-cut beef short ribs

In a medium bowl, whisk together the soy sauce, mirin, vinegar, sugar, sesame oil, garlic, green onions, ginger and pepper.

Arrange the beef in a nonreactive 9-by-13-inch baking pan or heavy jumbo-sized resealable plastic bag. Pour the marinade over the meat and turn several times until well coated. Cover the pan or seal the bag and refrigerate for a minimum of 3 hours and up to 8 hours. Remove from the refrigerator 1 hour before grilling.

Prepare a medium-hot fire in a charcoal or gas grill.

Remove the ribs from the marinade, drain or blot lightly and place on a rimmed baking sheet. Discard the marinade.

When ready to grill, oil the grill grate. Place the rib strips, without crowding, directly over the medium-hot fire. Grill, covered, on one side until nicely seared, about 3 minutes. Turn and cook, covered, until seared, 3 to 4 minutes longer. The meat should be lightly charred at the bones and cooked through with no pink. Remove from the grill and serve immediately.

-- From Diane Morgan

PER SERVING (based on 5): calories: 390 (54% from fat); protein: 38 grams; total fat: 23.3 grams; saturated fat: 9.6 grams; cholesterol: 113 mg; sodium: 439 mg; carbohydrate: 3.6 grams; dietary fiber: 0