

Fire-Roasted Fruit and Other Sweet Treats on the Grill

Seasonal fruits grilled to warm, juicy perfection make a dramatic finish to any meal—grilled or not. I still remember the first time I grilled peaches that I bought at the farmers' market. They were firm but ripe and at the peak of the season, which in Oregon is mid-August to mid-September. They were as sweet as could be, freestone, and the size of a baseball. I halved them and let them macerate in a tropical syrup of rum, melted butter, and dark brown sugar. The sugar caramelized over the fire, incising beautiful grill marks across the golden fruits. Dessert became a lusty treat of two warm grilled peach halves nestled in a bowl with a big scoop of *dulce de leche* ice cream and some extra rum syrup drizzled over the top. It was an ooh-and-aah moment for everyone at the table, and it launched my quest to try to grill just about every fruit in the market.

When I wrote *Grill Every Day*, I decided to devote an entire chapter to my favorite fruits to grill, and added in some other quick sweet treats. I'm in love with grilled pound cake, either plain or poppy seed. Brushed with melted butter and grilled just long enough to toast and warm the slices, pound cake turns into a delectable treat when topped with fresh fruit and a mountain of whipped cream or crême fraîche. Now, that's an easy dessert to make—especially when a good bakery does the baking! Here are a few tips and guidelines for grilling fruit successfully.

First, start with a clean, medium or medium-hot, well-oiled grill surface. Even small bits of charred food left on the grill grate will stick to the cut side of fruits and tear the flesh when you try to move them, especially bananas. Have the grill preheated, brush the grill grate so it's clean, clean, clean, and oil the grate thoroughly so it is well coated and slick.

Second, have the fruit at room temperature. If it has been refrigerated, remove it an hour or so prior to grilling. After washing the fruit, blot it dry with paper towels so there is no residual moisture. This way, for the recipes in which the fruit is macerated, the flavored liquids won't be diluted by excess moisture on the fruit, and for those recipes where butter is brushed on the fruit, the melted butter won't congeal due to the fruit being cold.

Third, with the exception of the apples, pineapple, and nectarines for the crisp, all the fruits in this chapter are grilled over direct heat with the grill uncovered. Because fruits are rich in natural sugars, they caramelize quickly. You must pay careful attention to achieve beautiful grill marks and bronzing without the sugars burning. It is sometimes a good idea to create a cool zone before the fruit goes on the grill, so you have the option of moving the fruit to a cool area to finish cooking. This is especially true for large peaches and nectarines. Searing caramelizes the fruit, but sometimes it still needs extra time to soften. Moving the fruit away from the direct flame and covering the grill gives it that extra time.

Fourth, even if the fruit has been macerated in a butter-based sauce, be sure it is well buttered before it goes on the grill. Bananas are prone to sticking and need a good slathering with butter before the cut sides are grilled. The same is true for slices of pound cake.

Finally, use the right tools for turning fruits and for ensuring you get them off the grill in time. Always use tongs, never a two-pronged fork, to move or turn the fruit, because a fork can tear the flesh. For slices of pineapple or pound cake, use a wide spatula in tandem with tongs for

ease. A grill basket or grill grid is the perfect tool for cooking small fruits, such as figs and plums. I arrange all the fruit cut side down on the basket or grid before I set it on the grill grate. It makes it easier to control the grilling time, because you can lift the grid or basket off the grill as soon as the fruit is caramelized, rather than remove the fruit piece by piece.