

Diane's Blog
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Zen and the Art of Grill Maintenance

Playing on the title of Robert M. Pirsig's classic book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, I thought I would address the un-sexy but necessary topic of grill maintenance. I am asked about grill maintenance almost every time I teach a grill class, so let's talk about it now.

Whether you own a simple kettle-style charcoal grill or a deluxe, stainless-clad, six-burner gas grill, at some point—and hopefully often—you are going to peer into the deep dark recesses below the grill grate and think it might be a good idea to remove the ashes, grease build-up, and other carbonized bits at the bottom of the grill. So how is this done? Here is a reasonably short yet detailed tutorial for both gas and charcoal grills.

The Simple Rules of Gas Grill Maintenance

A clean grill is a well-functioning, well-performing grill. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning the grill annually or semiannually (depending on how much you grill). This involves turning off the gas supply; taking off the grill grate and brushing it; removing the V-shaped metal bars, ceramic briquettes, or lava stones covering the burners and brushing them clean; lightly brushing the burner tubes to make sure all the gas ports are clean and open; cleaning the bottom of the grill and the grease-collection tray; and replacing the disposable pan (if needed). If you have what looks like peeling black paint on the grill lid or grill bottom, use a bristle brush or putty knife to scrape off the flakes. This is buildup of carbon from the accumulated cooking vapors. Put everything back together and you are ready to grill. Every time you use the grill, first check the grease-collection tray to make sure it is not full. (A grease fire under a lit gas grill is dangerous.) Once the grill is preheated, brush the grate with a grill brush. The burnt bits of food from the last time you grilled loosen more easily when the grate is hot. Oil the grate before grilling. If you have time, brush the grate again once you have turned off the grill.

The Simple Rules of Charcoal Grill Maintenance

As with a gas grill, a clean charcoal grill is a well-functioning, well-performing grill. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning the grill annually or semiannually (depending on how much you grill). This involves taking off the grill grate and brushing it, removing the charcoal grate and brushing it, cleaning the bottom of the grill, and cleaning out the ash catcher. If you have what looks like peeling black paint on the lid or the bottom, use a bristle brush or putty knife to scrape off the flakes. This is carbon buildup from the accumulated cooking vapors. Put everything back together and you are ready to grill. Every time you use the grill, check the ash catcher to make sure it is not full. Once the grill is preheated, brush the cooking grate with a grill brush. The burnt bits of food from the last time you grilled loosen more easily when the grate is hot. Oil the grill grate before grilling. If you have time, brush the grill grate again once when the grill is cool.