

The Not-So-Intrepid Griller

Our typical image of a person grilling is that of someone standing outdoors grilling over an open flame. However, a looser interpretation, and one that better fits my definition of a “griller,” is someone who grills over an open flame—indoors or out. (I’ll distinguish and save barbecuing— with its long marinating times, low fires, smoking techniques, and hunks of meat tended for hours— for another blog.)

I’ve written two cookbooks on grilling, *Grill Every Day: 125 Fast-Track Recipes for Weeknights at the Grill* and an earlier one entitled *Dressed to Grill: Savvy Recipes for Girls who Play with Fire* (both from Chronicle Books). I’m completely comfortable inside or out, wielding tongs, maneuvering skewers, flipping burgers, and sizzling and searing anything fit to grill.

I’m an intrepid griller— as long as I can choose between a grill pan, kettle-style charcoal grill, flat-top grill, and four-burner gas grill. Bring on the warm sunshine, a lively group of friends, and cool cocktails, and I’m ready to haul charcoal and light a fire. Doing the weeknight “dash to the store and dine” routine, I flick the switch on my gas grill and prepare an entire meal— veggies, starch, and protein— all beautifully seared and sizzling, ready for a family meal. But when it rains, I frequently turn to my indoor grill.

As you’ll see in my video, I have a French-made, professional-style range equipped with a cast-iron grill plate that fits over two burners. It was specially designed for the stove and is an optional accessory. Lacanche, the manufacturer of the range, recently designed a splatter shield that wraps around three sides of the grill plate. All of this is fabulous, but none of it necessary in order to be able to grill inside. There are, however, two key elements needed for indoor grilling: first, a good-quality, ridged grill pan; and, more importantly, a good ventilation system— a hood that can suck smoke up and out without making a smoke alarm go off.

Grill pans can be small or large— some grill pans are small and accommodate only two chicken breasts, while a grill plate that fits over two burners can hold enough food to serve a family of four. Some are made of cast iron, or feature enamel-coated steel on the outside with a pre-seasoned cast-iron surface, while less expensive grill pans are often made of anodized aluminum. I’ve used almost all of them and prefer cast iron because, when heated to smoking hot, these pans really do sear the foods in the pan. All ridged grill pans will etch the foods with grill marks, but that doesn’t necessarily provide the desired caramelization that a good cast iron pan can produce.

As you’ll see in the video, in the time it takes the water to boil and the pasta to cook, I have grilled a colorful array of bell peppers and some sweet onions. With the pasta drained and the grilled vegetables chopped, I simply toss the cooked pasta and veggies together, add fresh herbs, a glug of extra-virgin olive oil, and a scattering of Parmesan. Dinner is at hand, I’m away from the cold and rain, and I’m ready for a glass of wine. Buon Appetito!