

INSIDER TRADING

Barbecues



Andy Annat, butcher and British barbecue champion, on choosing equipment for alfresco cooking

What you really want is a barbecue with a lid. Not to keep the rain off, but for what we call "off-set" or "indirect" cooking, where you push the charcoal over to one side, put the food above the charcoal-free area, and then close the lid, making a kind of oven. This way you're not just restricted to sausages: in a lidded, 57cm-diameter kettle-type barbecue you can cook anything from the Sunday roast to pizza or bread-and-butter pudding.

Should you use gas or charcoal? It's your choice, really. Charcoal is arguably more macho: it's "real", it burns hotter, and it gives that distinctive smoky flavour. But it's slow to start, you'll get flare-ups—when dripping fat catches fire on the coals below, singeing the food—and there'll be ashes to dispose of. A separate ash pan helps, plus it'll stop ash choking the charcoal as it burns.

Gas barbecues are more expensive, but do give rapid, consistent, controllable heat—and as long as they have more than two burners, will do off-set cooking. To stop flare-ups, the burners will be covered with either lava rocks, ceramic briquettes or V-shaped metal "flavouriser" bars—the latter tend to be the most effective, though cast-iron or stainless-steel ones last longer than the ceramic-coated type.

Choose a model that is stable, a comfortable height, and the right size for your catering ambitions—too big a cooking space and you'll waste fuel. Enamel-coated steel lasts years longer than painted steel, which will soon peel and rust;

but whatever it's made of, it must have a good, sturdy grate of heavy-gauge metal to hold the heat and sear the meat.

Don't get too distracted by accessories. A warming tray in the lid and a decent manufacturer's warranty are probably the only extras you'll need. The one accessory you must never, ever use is a fork—it'll pierce the meat and let all the lovely juices drain away.

INTERVIEW BY JANE YETTRAM

WHERE TO BUY

Barbecue World Cambridge St,
Godmanchester, Cambs;
www.barbecue-world.co.uk
Tel: +44 (0)1480 417624

Giardino Schlosserstrasse 33,
Lindlar, Germany;
www.holz-richter.de
Tel: +49 (0)2266 4735 830

Hayes Garden World Lake Rd,
Ambleside, Cumbria;
www.hayesgardenworld.co.uk
Tel: +44 (0)1539 433434

Mode France Mail-order only;
www.mode-france.com
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