

STEAK

Try 9 of the best cuts of steak for the grill



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The weather's cooperating, the coals are lit – and you've got your mind on a juicy steak with perfect grill marks.

But what type of steak should you buy? Well, rib-eye remains the favorite across the United States – and the bigger the better. But the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, an industry group, lists some 28 steak or fillet cuts you can choose from. They come in a range of flavor, texture, tenderness, fat content and

price.

The six most popular? Karli Millsbaugh, an association spokeswoman, says they are: Boneless rib-eye, boneless strip steak, top sirloin steak, bone-in rib-eye, bone-in strip steak and T-bone steak. All are familiar and delicious; you can't go wrong with them.

Another route, particularly if your dad thinks of himself as an edgy, lone-wolf type, is to serve one of the new beef cuts entering the market. These new steaks are tender muscles gleaned from hard-working areas of the animal like the shoulder (chuck) or hind leg (round), sections usually relegated to low, slow braising or roasting.

"They are diamonds in the rough. ... The big example is the flat iron," says Craig A. Morris, deputy administrator of the Livestock, Poultry and Seed Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service.

Whatever the steak cut is, be it an old favorite or something new, there are certain factors you should consider in choosing a steak.

Marbling, the amount of fat distributed within the meat, is the most important indicator of quality for consumers, says Randy Waidner, corporate executive chef for Chicago-based Gibsons Restaurant Group. "There's more flavor, more tenderness," he says.

The USDA grades beef quality and labels cuts accordingly, and marbling is a major factor in determining the rating. "Prime" has long been considered the best, followed by "Choice" and "Select."

The challenge is, as Morris notes, that there may be some Choice or Select cuts that are as tender as Prime but at a lower price. To help consumers find those cuts and make wiser choices, the USDA has launched a new program to tag cuts as "USDA Certified Tender" or "USDA Certified Very Tender" based on specific, objective criteria.

Bone-in can make a difference too. Scott Fader, general manager of Petty's Meats in Longwood, Florida, likes a porterhouse steak more than its sibling, the T-bone, because the porterhouse has a larger piece of tenderloin, or filet mignon, on one side of the bone.

"The filet mignon is tender but lacks a bit of flavor. The bone gives flavor; it's a game-changer," he says.

Tougher cuts, like hanger and skirt steaks, can make for delicious eating if tenderized in a marinade for a few hours or overnight, says Frody Volgger, butcher at Tony Caputo's Market & Deli in Salt Lake City. Try a teriyaki or ponzu sauce, perhaps accented with mustard and black pepper, he says.

Whether you'll be cooking for dad or he'll be grilling up a steak himself, we've got the details (with photos so you know what you're looking for) on nine of the best cuts for the grill. Each should be seared over direct heat, then finished in a cooler part of the grill. Thinner cuts (flank, skirt, hanger) should cook with just the searing.

FLAT IRON

(Shoulder top blade steak.) Boneless and cut from the shoulder clod top blade roast, each steak averages 8 ounces, with a thickness varying from 3/4 to 1 1/4 inch. Section: chuck

RIB-EYE

(Also known as Delmonico or cowboy steak). Sold bone-in or boneless. Section: rib

T-BONE

The bone divides the meat into two sections, the large strip, or top loin, and the smaller tenderloin. Section: short loin

PORTERHOUSE

The T-bone's neighbor. Sports a much larger tenderloin attached to the central bone. Section: short loin

STRIP STEAK

(New York strip, Kansas City strip, top loin, Delmonico, shell steak.) Sold bone-in or boneless. Section: short loin

TOP SIRLOIN

(Sirloin butt steak.) Boneless; a continuation of the top loin muscle of the short loin. Section: sirloin

FLANK STEAK

(London broil, jiffy steak.) Boneless. Marinate before cooking; slice across the grain for tenderness. Section: flank

SKIRT STEAK

The diaphragm muscle. Boneless. Marinate before grilling; slice across the grain for

tenderness. Section: short plate

HANGER STEAK

(Butcher's steak, hanging tender.) Boneless. Marinate before grilling; slice across the grain for tenderness. Section: short plate

Sources: National Cattlemen's Beef Association; The New Food Lover's Companion.