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Fire starters: This season's hot gourmet grilling cookbooks

By Tiffany Owens
Special to MSN

Tired of the same old burgers and brats? Looking to add some range to your grilling repertoire?

Our roundup of the season's best grilling cookbooks can help you choose the perfect guide for every taste, skill level or special occasion. What's more, the true measure of grilling success is that your new cookbook will be dog-eared and sauce-stained by summer's end.

Hall of Flame: Essentials for better grilling

If you want just one new easy-to-use grilling compendium for the season, make it *Weber's Real Grilling*. Author Jamie Purviance's approach is that "grilling should be simple and fun," which is exactly how he dishes out his 200-plus recipes. From sumptuous starters like Cilantro Pesto Chicken Tenders and Pulled Pork Tostadas to a myriad of zesty marinades, rubs, sauces and salsas for every stripe of flavor or feast, Purviance's recipes typically keep to just one page and contain commonly found ingredients. Especially helpful is his advice on how to match the cut of meat to the proper grilling method for perfect results every time.

Now you're cooking with gas! A. Cort Sinnes is back with his newly revised and expanded *The New Gas Grill Gourmet*, with more than 300 recipes. The book has easy-to-follow recipes and instructions that can turn any novice griller into an instant guru. Recipes range from Fish Tacos to Lamb Shanks in Guinness and Apricot Nectar, plus a special section devoted to simple off-the-grill side dishes that serve as clever complements to more intense entrees.

Get Grilling: Recipes, Tips and Techniques for Terrific Food and Big Fun in the Great Outdoors is a collaborative effort from the behind-the-scenes crew of the wildly popular cooking channel, the Food Network Kitchen. The book transitions the griller painlessly from new twists on traditional burgers and dogs to "art of the grill" fare, like Lobster with Tarragon Butter and Fingerling Potatoes and Pesto-Stuffed Salmon. Special "Know-How" and "Cook's Note" text provides additional insight on various cooking methods or ingredients.

Sloooow Good: What's new for BBQ

Peace, Love and Barbecue: Recipes, Secrets, Tall Tales and Outright Lies from the Legends of Barbecue by Mike Mills is part cookbook, part memoir, with a dash of travelogue. Here, Mills takes readers on a crisscross journey to America's best BBQ joints and shacks and introduces them to highly competitive barbecue contest circuit and its colorful characters. But best of all are Mills'

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wide variety of finger-licking recipes: his own secret concoctions and treasured family recipes, plus choice contributions from his pit-master peers.

Ray Lampe (aka Dr. BBQ) also reveals the juiciest stories from his days on the barbecue circuit in his new *Dr. BBQ's Big-Time Barbecue Cookbook*. Looking to develop your own BBQ style? Lampe shows you how; the book also contains tips on tools, equipment and fuel, as well as 180 classic and specialty mouthwatering recipes.

Another worthy mention for "smoke" devotees is the award-winning *Grilling and Smoking with The Home Chef* by Steve Collins. A slim volume at just under 100 pages, it's packed with helpful hints on choosing a smoker (vertical, drum or cabinet) and his fire-starter creations, such as Smoked Trout with Tomatillo Salsa and Grilled Duck Breast with Raspberry Chipotle Sauce. Collins has even included his personal e-mail to assist with your recipe questions.

Spice World: Ethnic fare with flair

Su-Mei Yu (the "Asian Smoke Queen") captures the splendor and diversity of Asia's finest cuisines — Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Indian, Burmese, Laotian and Cambodian — with the 85 satay, skewer, kebab and wrap recipes in her *Asian Grilling* cookbook. Pair these light and spicy entrees with her grilled salads, noodles, rice, fruits and vegetables, seasonings and sauces for light and flavorful summer fare.

To Italians, family and food are of the utmost importance. Micol Negrin's *The Italian Grill* shares this view with quick and refreshing twists on traditional Italian favorites, like antipasti, pizza and bruschetta, plus yummy low-carb alternatives using asparagus, arugula, prosciutto, pork and more to be shared with *your* family. After all, simplicity in taste and preparation is the essence of food prepared over an open flame — an essential part of authentic Italian cooking.

True to Douglas Rodriguez's international reputation for highly inventive Latin-fusion fare, the 100-plus recipes in his *Latin Flavors on the Grill* draws on spices, authentic dishes and grilling techniques from over 20 Latin American countries. Once you've been seduced by such exotic numbers as Honey, Lime & Rum-Glazed Shrimp or Grilled Lobster with Coconut-Ginger Mojo with a Kiwi Cooler in hand, will you ever be able to return to tamer dishes again?

Barbecues aren't just for carnivores anymore. From asparagus to zucchini, the season's freshest vegetables get a flame-kissed makeover in Andrea Chesman's *The Vegetarian Grill*. From Portobello Mushroom & Goat Cheese Sandwiches to Pesto-stuffed Plum Tomatoes, all 200 recipes are so savory and satisfying, you won't even begin to miss the meat.

Crowd-Pleasers: For every occasion under the sun

With three James Beard Awards under their belts, Cheryl & Bill Jamison's new *Good Times, Good Grilling: Surefire Recipes for Great Grill Parties* is sure to get your next casual celebration fired up. Of special note are the wide array of "Hot Little Numbers," like Grill-Roasted Oysters with Tabasco Vinaigrette or Bite-Size Chicken Kebabs, best enjoyed tapas-style or as appetizers, plus juicy Rosemary and Mint Lamb Burgers and Paella for bigger appetites.

Take along the perfect picnic food with *The Big Book of Backyard Cooking* by Betty Rosbottom. With her more than 250 festive, fail-proof recipes for parties and everyday outdoor meals, such as Sesame Fried Chicken with Honey Glaze, you may never want to eat indoors again!

Cottage Life columnist Jane Rodmell's *Best Summer Weekends Cookbook* is the one to take along on your vacation getaway. Simple recipe categories include one-step grilling (Wine-Marinaded Steak Kebabs) and make-ahead or one-pot dishes with "quick tricks" (Slow-Roasted Garlic Chicken with Olive Mashed

Potatoes) that rely on a core group of main ingredients — plus suggested variations should you find yourself short and far from a grocery store.

Tiffany Owens is a freelance writer and avid wine and culinary enthusiast whose move to Portland, Ore., last year coincided with a desire to be in closer proximity to some of the country's best produce and Pinot Noirs.

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