

3 Secrets for the Perfect Grass Fed Steak

Are you tired of tough grass fed steaks, or have you been afraid to try them because of their reputation? I have solutions for you. If you follow these step by step techniques and tips on how to prepare tender grass fed steak, you will be pleasantly surprised.

Tough grass fed steaks and other cuts result from over-exposure to high heat.

The high temperature causes the muscle fibers to contract tightly and become chewy and overly dry. If you do not understand the type of meat you have, you can completely ruin even the most tender beef. If it is not cooked properly you may make it unfit to eat and undo all the hard work and time that was put into raising it.

Grass fed beef is different than grain fed beef in many ways. One negative is that grass fed steaks may be tougher, but they don't have to be. Cooked more gently, grass fed meat is wonderfully tender. The muscle texture of grass fed beef is more variable than grain fed meats due to the fact that the cattle's feed (pastures) changes throughout the season. Grain fed beef receive a specific calculated grain ration that allows for consistent predictable gain, which in turn leads to a more consistent taste and texture.

Grass fed beef has thicker muscle fibers due to all of the exercise the animals receive, and they take longer to "finish," which can create tougher meat.

Don't be like others who have been disappointed with the tough, chewy steak.

The first technique comes from Kelly Winters at Primally Inspired.

The secret is to use a liberal amount of salt to create a "dry brine" and then let the steak rest. Salt is the agent that relaxes the tightened woven protein cells and helps break down the protein and fat. The results are a juicy, absolutely flavorful and tender grass-fed steak.

And don't worry – you won't be eating all that salt and it won't taste like a salt-lick. Most of the salt will get washed away. Only a minimal amount of salt gets trapped inside. And this salt and any other spices and herbs you add get infused throughout the entire steak through osmosis. That makes every bite of your grass-fed steak oh-so-flavorful and tender. It's absolute perfection!

Follow this technique and you will have mouthwatering, perfectly tender grass-fed steak!

- ◆ Pick your steak – any steak will work.
- ◆ Season your steak with 1 teaspoon of coarse sea salt per side.
- ◆ Add any additional herbs or seasonings to both sides.
- ◆ Let steak sit for 1 hour per inch of thickness.
- ◆ Rinse the steak well.
- ◆ Pat both sides completely dry. (Very important!)
- ◆ Grill, cook or broil your steak using your favorite method.
- ◆ Season with pepper and add a pat of butter or favorite fat of choice over top of the steak.
- ◆ Let sit for 5 minutes.
- ◆ Enjoy eating your flavorful, juicy & tender grass-fed steak!

The second technique comes from Shannon Hayes, The Radical Homemaker. She gives 6 tips on cooking grass fed steaks

1. You do not want **wet steaks**. Thawed steak is going to be moist. In order to sear it properly, it must be dry before you put it on the grill or in the frying pan. If the steak is not blotted dry with a towel before you apply salt and pepper, it will not sear; it will steam.
2. Do not use the **wrong pan size**. If you are cooking your steaks indoors, be sure to choose a skillet that allows ample room to sear them. When the steaks are too crowded, even if they have been blotted dry, the excess moisture will cause them to steam rather than brown, leaving them with an unpleasant gray pallor. Make sure your steaks have at least 1 inch of space around them in the skillet to prevent this from happening.
3. Do not use the **wrong direct-heat temperature**. Often in our hunger for a great steak, we fail to wait for our grills and skillets to heat up properly. If the grill or skillet is not hot enough, the meat will start to roast, but it will not achieve that glorious sear that adds flavor. If grilling, hold your hand about 4 inches above the grate. When you can hold it there for no more than 4 seconds, the grill is hot enough for you to sear your meat. When cooking indoors, place the skillet over a hot flame. When you see steam rising off the skillet, you are ready to grease it with a little fat and begin searing.
4. **Allow for indirect cooking time**. High heat is critical only when we begin cooking steaks to achieve the sear. A steak should be exposed to high direct heat for no more than 2 minutes per side. After that, in order to guarantee tender and juicy meat, it should be removed from the

flames and allowed to finish in indirect or low heat. If you are cooking the steak on the grill, simply move it off the flames and put it on the side of the grill that is not lit, set the cover in place, and allow it to cook for about 5-7 minutes per pound. If you are cooking it indoors, once the steak has seared, transfer the skillet to a 300 degree oven for about 5-7 minutes per pound (or to a 200 degree oven for about 10 minutes per pound). During that indirect time, the internal muscle fibers will come up to temperature slowly without contracting too tightly and toughening. Also, the proteins and sugars will have time to caramelize over the surface of the meat, giving the steak that characteristic glossy look and rich taste.

5. Don't use the **wrong doneness temperature**. USDA temperature guidelines suggest that beef should be cooked to a minimum temperature of 145 degrees. When you are using reliably-sourced grass fed meat, you don't run the same risks of consuming food borne pathogens. Thus, cook the steak to an internal temperature of 120 degrees for rare, or 140 degrees for well-done.

6. Do not **marinate the wrong meat**. Rib eyes, top loins, porterhouse, T-bones, and sirloin steaks should only be seasoned with a little salt and pepper. These tender cuts of meat have the most delicate flavors, and their beefiness is easily upstaged by most marinades. Furthermore, if marinated too long, the acid in marinades pre-cooks the meat, turning it gray and leaving an otherwise tender steak mushy. However, if you are planning to marinate your meat, select the lower-priced cuts. Those cuts have enough extra flavor and connective tissue to stand up to the marinade. Their more pronounced beefy flavor won't be over-powered by the stronger seasonings, and the acid in the marinade will help break down some of the connective tissue.

The third technique comes from Julius Ruechel of Grass-Fed Solutions. Julius gives us tips for cooking grass fed beef steaks and roasts.

Grass fed beef requires lower cooking temperatures and shorter cooking times because it is leaner. Turn down the heat and check the meat sooner than you normally would!

Never microwave grass fed beef to thaw it. Microwaving beef to thaw it makes the beef tough because the microwave turns some of the moisture to steam, which allows this valuable moisture to escape from the beef. Preserving moisture is key to keeping your beef tender.

Another important recommendation for thawing beef is to always remove beef from the original wrapping paper, cellophane, or butcher paper prior to thawing. This keeps the tastes and smells of the packaging from leaching into the meat during the cooking process.

It is also a good idea to rinse your frozen beef immediately after removing it from the packaging to remove any ice that may have absorbed the flavors and smells of the packaging.

Quick-Thawing Tip

The best way to thaw beef quickly if you are in a hurry and don't have time to let it thaw on the fridge or counter (and without thawing it in a microwave) is to take the frozen beef out of the butcher wrapping, give it a quick rinse, then put it inside a watertight Ziploc bag.

Submerge the entire package in cool water inside a bowl or in the sink. Make sure that there are no large air pockets in the bag - you want to ensure good contact between the water and the meat, otherwise it will not thaw any faster than simply leaving the meat out on the counter. Close the bag with the majority of the bag held underwater to help force as much air out as possible.

It's okay to let the meat package float in the water bath, but if you are in a hurry you can hold the meat under water by placing a heavy item on top of the package to hold it underwater. This ensures maximum contact between the wrapped meat and the water.

A 2-lb package of ground beef or steaks usually thaws sufficiently within 15 - 30 minutes to be able to begin cooking.

Pre-Cooking Meat Preparation Tips

If the temperature of your beef changes too rapidly during the cooking process, it can cause the meat fibers to contract, and will also cause moisture to escape through condensation, which will make your meat tough.

When cooking steaks, it is a good habit to remove your steaks from the refrigerator several hours before cooking so your steaks can warm up to room temperature before they are thrown on the grill. This reduces the temperature range that the meat has to adjust to when it begins cooking.

While this tip is valid for any meat that you want to grill, it is even more important to pre-warm grass-fed steaks to room temperature before cooking because grass fed beef has less external fat than grain fed beef. Fat acts as an insulator to slow down how quickly your beef changes temperature during cooking.

Cooking Time and Cooking Temperature

Changing the proteins during cooking to achieve a desired flavor and texture depends not only on the temperature of the cooking process, but also on the rate of temperature change experienced by the meat during the cooking process.

A slow temperature change during cooking allows the protein fibers to remain relaxed. A very rapid temperature change is a shock that will cause protein fibers to contract. Slow-cooking steaks and roasts ensures that the proteins don't contract and become tough during the cooking process.

Slow-cooking meat at lower temperatures also means less moisture in the meat will turn to steam and escape.

Since fat acts as an insulator, it should come as no surprise that lean beef cooks faster than

fatty beef because the heat from the grill, oven, or frying pan is able to penetrate through the entire beef cut more quickly.

Since grass-fed beef is leaner than grain-fed beef, expect to shorten your cooking times by 10-25% when using grass fed meat in your recipes. Just start checking your grass fed beef roasts and steaks a little sooner than you normally would check your store-bought grain fed beef to make sure you don't overcook them.

Since heat is able to penetrate through lean beef easier than through fattier beef, you should adjust your recipes to use slightly lower cooking temperatures when switching from grain fed to grass fed beef.

Reduce cooking temperatures by 10-15% when cooking grass fed beef. So, if a recipe normally calls for 350° cooking temperatures, turn down the heat to around 300-315°.

If you follow these tips and techniques, you too can learn to cook and enjoy flavorful tender grass fed steaks

Enjoy!

Brian