

# Perfect Hamburgers on the Barbeque Grill

By Cyndi Allison

My family has grilled since before I was born, so we're all good grillers. But, when it's time for hamburgers, I'm the one to call. When he was alive, my dad would cut a deal with me for family reunions. He'd buy the meat if I'd prepare the burgers. Now, at reunions, I don't even have to stand over the grill unless I want to. My people love my burgers enough to cut me all manner of slack on other cook out duties. Gotta love that.



To make good burgers, start with high fat meat. Now, I know you may be tempted to buy "better burger" which costs more and has less fat. I made this mistake a few times for special occasions. The problem with the lean meat is that it does not drip and feed the fire, and the burgers tend to come out dry rather than juicy. I was disappointed when I bought leaner meat, so I now stick with something in the range of 70:30. That's 70 percent lean to 30 percent fat.

When buying the meat, aim for a little over ¼ pound per burger. If you have trouble remembering the amount, just think of a Quarter Pounder at McDonald's. I suggest a little over that size when patting these out, because most of the extra fat cooks out leaving the burger smaller when cooked than when waiting to go on the grill. Don't worry about measuring out the meat. Just eyeball and grab enough to make a burger a bit larger than the size of the buns (remembering the shrinkage).

It's best to use fresh meat, but you can take burger out of the freezer and let it thaw. Be sure that the meat is fully thawed in the refrigerator before making patties. If the meat is still chunky and not soft (like fresh meat), it will fall apart during grilling. I can't really explain why this is so, but when I've used meat partially frozen or quickly defrosted in the microwave or dipped in water to fast thaw, the burgers crumble on the grill.

Some people add all kinds of stuff to the meat before shaping out the burgers. This is fine I suppose, but straight meat is hard to beat. I spice up the patties but only after they are patted out. Feel free to throw in bread crumbs, tomato sauce, and seasoning packets, but don't tell anyone I told you to do that. My burgers are straight meat patted out.

When patting out the burgers, use your hands. Devices made to shape burgers pack the meat too tight. This makes the meat tougher and prevents the marinade from soaking in the burger. Take a hand full of meat and pat until the meat is shaped like a burger. Use your thumbs to mash the center down a little flatter—not a lot but enough to see a slight ridge around the edges. This shape means the meat cooks more even and also allows marinade to sit on top without sliding off.

Once the burgers are patted out, sprinkled them with lemon pepper seasoning. I don't measure, but I'd estimate that I put about a tablespoon of lemon pepper on each patty. It's enough that you can see it on the meat. Put that on even and not clumped in the center. Sprinkle both sides of the meat.

Next, splash on some Worcestershire sauce. If you have the bottle with the squirt top, then put 3 to 4 splashes on each patty. Don't worry about putting this on both sides. It sinks in.

The last part of the marinade is Italian dressing. You can make your own, but the store bottled dressing works just fine. Just be sure it's the oily type and not the creamy Italian. Pour this on pretty liberally. I use about half a big bottle on 8 burgers.

Once the burgers are doctored up, put them in the refrigerator. Cover the container with plastic wrap unless you have a lid for the container. I leave the meat soaking from an hour to overnight. It's better with a more time, but an hour is enough to get the taste.

Before putting the burgers on the grill, make sure the coals are cooked down to gray. You don't want flames, or the meat will scorch on the outside. If you're using a gas grill, go with low to medium on heat. You want to cook these fairly slow, since they are thicker.

Use a turner to flip the burgers. If you use a fork and stick holes in the meat, the juices run out, and the meat is tough and dry. Don't mash the burgers. The grease ekes out without mashing which compresses the meat and reduces the natural juices.

These burgers take longer to cook than the skinny little burgers sold for grilling at the grocery store, but they taste much better. After you make these a few times, it becomes second nature to put them together. Once you get used to these burgers, you'll think other grilled burgers are pretty lame.