



Jennifer Dutton
Regional Extension Agent
News Release

Grilling Summer Vegetables

“If you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.” Perhaps Mr. Truman was talking about cooking indoors on a hot summer day. Luckily, you can keep your kitchen cool and save yourself the hassle of making summer side dishes indoors by cooking fruits and vegetables on the grill. The dry heat from the grill caramelizes plant sugars, giving grilled fruits and veggies a delicious sweet and smoky taste.

Vegetables that are high in water benefit most from grilling. Peppers, mushrooms, eggplant, fennel, summer squash, okra, tomatoes, and corn do exceptionally well. More dense vegetables such as potatoes and carrots can also be grilled, but it is best to slightly precook them so that they soften, or slice them so that they have more surface area for cooking.

Large vegetables can be cooked directly on a clean grill grate. You may want to lightly brush the veggies with a flavorful oil such as extra virgin olive oil, walnut oil, or hazelnut oil to give them great flavor and prevent sticking on the grill. For smaller veggies, you may want to invest in a vegetable basket or a flat metal plate with small holes. Metal, wooden, or bamboo skewers also can be used for kebabs. The vegetable basket is helpful in that you only turn the basket, not individual chopped vegetables. Slender veggies such as asparagus are best skewered crosswise in two places to make a “raft” that will not fall through the grate.

To grill veggies in aluminum foil, place a large sheet of aluminum foil on the counter and spray with cooking spray. Spread veggies on top and cover with another sheet of aluminum foil. Then roll the two pieces of aluminum foil into each other to make a pouch, which is great for steaming on the grill.

Veggies generally take 15-20 minutes to cook on the grill over medium heat depending on their density. If you would like to make a healthier version of French fries, spray the inside of an old metal cake pan with cooking spray and scatter thinly sliced strips of potatoes in the pan and sprinkle with seasoning. Simply place the pan over low flame and turn the potatoes until they can be pierced with a fork.

Grilled Vegetable Sandwich

Ingredients:

- 1 small zucchini
- 1 yellow bell pepper
- 4 to 5 large fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1 medium tomato, sliced
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- dried basil to taste
- 2 tbsp vegetable cream cheese
- a few leaves spinach
- 4 slices bread. lightly toasted

Preparation:

Cut zucchini length-wise into 4 (1/4-inch thick) slices. Cut pepper in fourths, remove seeds. Coat both sides of zucchini, pepper and mushrooms with cooking spray.

Place zucchini and peppers on grill rack or broiler pan coated with cooking spray; broil 3 to 4 minutes on each side or until tender. Add mushrooms and broil for 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from grill; sprinkle with salt, pepper and sweet basil leaves.

Spread cream cheese on toast. Layer zucchini, pepper, mushrooms, and tomato on two slices of toast; add spinach if desired. Top with remaining toast slices. Cut each sandwich in half.

Servings: 2

Calories/Serving: 232

Nutrition: Each serving provides approximately: 232 calories, 9 g protein, 39 g carbohydrates, 4 g fiber, 6 g fat (3 g saturated), 9 mg cholesterol, 58 mcg folate, 3 mg iron, 638 mg sodium.

For more information about this or other nutrition related topics please contact Jennifer Dutton at the St. Clair County Extension office by phone at (205) 338-9416 or email jld0021@aces.edu.

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