



Culinary Corner

See Culinary Corner on thecharlotteweekly.com

FEATURE



Bobby Cochran/CW photos

When he's not cooking at Mert's Heart and Soul, chef and master griller James Bazzelle takes grilling at home to the next level.

then letting the coals sit for about 5-10 minutes before lighting. With charcoal grilling, the cooking process begins when the coals exhibit a white glow. Grilling over coals might not offer the convenience of gas grilling, but it does deliver a char-grilled taste to foods like steak, ribs and other red meats. Charcoal grilling also brings variety to outdoor cooking. Adding wood chips to the charcoal brings another dimension of flavor, and foods also can be smoked.

If you're short on time – or patience – charcoal grilling might not be for you. Building and lighting the charcoal takes time; managing the heat during the cooking process takes attentiveness; and the whole procedure requires a bit more cleanup than gas grilling.

Add variety to both

Whether you use a charcoal or a gas grill, indirect and direct grilling methods add variety to outdoor meals. Direct grilling, or cooking directly over heat, is best for foods that take less than 30 minutes to grill. Examples include hot dogs, hamburgers, boneless chicken, steaks and fish fillets.

Indirect grilling is best for meat and poultry that contain a lot of fat or take 30 minutes or more to cook. Examples include roasts, ribs and whole turkeys. For indirect grilling on a charcoal grill, start the charcoal

While on vacation this week, I've opened the Culinary Corner pages to grilling expert James Bazzelle, owner and executive chef of Mert's Heart and Soul. Bazzelle and his wife, Renee, opened Mert's, located at 214 N. College St., in 1998. Mert's serves Low Country, Gullah and Southern-inspired dishes such as shrimp and grits, Charleston red rice, soft-shell crab, fried catfish and an award-winning macaroni and cheese. For more information, visit www.mertscharlotte.com or call 704-342-4222.

Have a safe and happy Fourth, and I'll meet you back here at next week's Culinary Corner.

– Heidi Billotto

Heart and soul hot off the grill

Local chef shares grilling tips

by James Bazzelle

With another Fourth of July holiday upon us, many across the Carolinas will celebrate America's independence with family and friends over grilled favorites like hamburgers and hot dogs. For those who take grilling to the next level, chicken, ribs, seafood and other choices that add spice to the outdoor cooking season may be added to the mix.

In addition to great food and quality time with loved ones, this summer's holiday season also conjures an ongoing debate among veteran and rookie grillers alike: Gas versus charcoal grilling – which is best? Let's take a quick look at the pros and cons of each.

Gas grilling

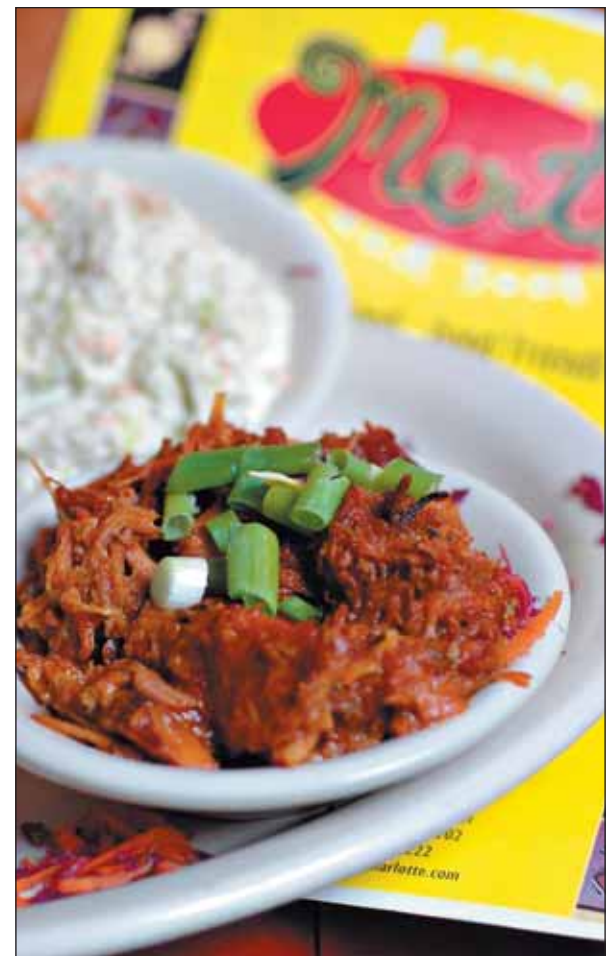
One word that sums up gas grilling is convenience. Gas grilling forgoes charcoal for propane or natural gas as fuel. With the turn of a knob, you can grill an array of foods without the added steps of applying lighter fluid to charcoal and waiting for the coals to

reach the right temperature. Another plus: Gas grilling requires less cleanup than charcoal grilling. You also might save on cooking preparations with a gas grill. Propane and natural gases are relatively inexpensive and, on average, do not need replenishing as frequently as charcoal.

Although gas grilling does have its perks, this option does present drawbacks for those in search of a true char-grilled taste. Because gas grills do not use charcoal, some people might miss the distinct flavoring from their favorite grilled dishes. Also, most gas grills do not allow the cook to experiment with different grilling tricks such as smoking, adding wood chips or using flavored liquids.

Charcoal grilling

Carolínians are known nationwide for their grilling mastery. Those who place themselves in the "master griller" category swear by charcoal grilling. The charcoal grilling process starts by arranging charcoal in the center of the grill, adding lighter fluid to the coals and



Pulled-pork barbecue is one of Bazzelle's specialties, both at the restaurant and at home.

as noted and then spread the coals into two piles on opposite sides of the grill. Place a drip pan in the center of the grill's pit and add water or any flavored liquid. Place the grid on the grill and then close the lid to seal in the heat and smoky flavor. On a gas grill with two burners, light one side on high and cook on the other side. On a three-burner grill, light the front and rear burners or the outside burners and cook in the center.

Final verdict

So which is best: charcoal or gas grilling? The preference is entirely personal. I enjoy charcoal grilling because it adds flavor and allows me to control the flame so that I can cook my food a variety of ways. However, I also like the gas grill's convenience. Whatever your preference, add your own style to your meals. This grilling season, make an effort to experiment with different seasonings, marinades, meats, seafood and vegetables. Above all else, be safe, have fun and enjoy your time with loved ones.

BAZZELLE'S BAKED SWEET POTATOES WITH HONEY OR BROWN SUGAR BUTTER

2 medium sweet potatoes
1/2 lb. butter
1/4 cup honey or brown sugar

3 tsp. powdered sugar (use only if making the honey butter)

Prepare grill to medium heat. Wash potatoes, rub with oil and wrap in foil. Place on the grill for 20-30 minutes or until soft (cooking time will depend on potato size). For the honey butter, mix butter, honey and powdered sugar in a mixer or food processor; blend well. For the brown sugar butter, follow the same procedure, omitting the powdered sugar. Serve on sweet potatoes.

MERT'S PULLED-PORK BARBECUE

5 Tbsp. curry powder
1 Tbsp. ground cinnamon
1 Tbsp. salt
1 cup vinegar
8 Tbsp. dry parsley flakes
1 tsp. nutmeg
2 tsp. crushed red pepper
1 (3-5 lb.) pork rump or butt

Barbecue sauce:

1 qt. vinegar
1 cup sugar
2 tsp. cayenne pepper
2 cups ketchup
1/4 cup mustard
1/2 lb. brown sugar

Prepare charcoal grill to medium heat

using indirect heat (with a drip pan). Combine first seven ingredients until mixture resembles a paste; rub on the roast. Place the roast on the grill fat side up. Lower the grill top and cook until meat is tender and falling off the bone. As roast cooks, combine the ingredients for the barbecue sauce, mix well in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Simmer over low heat for 30 minutes.

JAMES' GRILLED PORK CHOPS WITH CORNBREAD DRESSING

4 double-thick bone-in chops

For cornbread dressing:

3 cups cornbread crumbs
2 cups soft bread crumbs
1 chicken-flavored bouillon cube
1/2 cup boiling water
1/4 cup chopped celery
1/4 tsp. black pepper (more to taste)
1/2 tsp. salt (more to taste)
2 eggs, beaten
1 tsp. poultry seasoning
1/4 cup chopped onion

Combine cornbread, eggs and bread crumbs. Dissolve bouillon in boiling water; pour over bread mixture and stir well. Sauté celery and onion in butter until tender. Add to bread mixture; stir well. Spoon into a lightly greased baking

SAFETY FIRST

When grilling, safety should be the top priority. Whether you use gas or charcoal, here are some suggestions.

Gas safety tips:

- Always grill in a well-ventilated area.
- Check gas grills thoroughly before using; examine carefully for leaks and tears in equipment.
- Make sure that the grill burner controls are turned off after cooking is complete.
- Use or store cylinders upright.

Charcoal safety tips:

- Place the grill away from flammable materials and structures.
- Use starter fluid on coals only before lighting.
- Never bring a grill indoors or into an unventilated space.
- Never leave a charcoal grill unattended; stay attentive to ensure that flames stay controlled.

dish. Cook at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Season chops with salt and pepper. Cut horizontal pouch in each chop; fill with cooked dressing. Grill over medium heat for 6-9 minutes per side. □

Culinary Corner

What's cookin'

edited by **Heidi Billotto**
heidi@thecharlotteweekly.com



Morton's The Steakhouse seeks women in Charlotte who have been exemplary volunteers and have provided exceptional service to the community. One nominee will be celebrated as Morton's "Woman of Spirit" at a dinner Aug. 14 at 6:30 p.m. at Morton's SouthPark location. Charlotte is one of 38 cities participating in Morton's "Women of Spirit" dinner events held through September. Nominate candidates online at www.mortons.com/womenofspirit by July 24. The cost to attend the event is \$150 per person; Morton's will donate \$15 from each ticket and all silent auction proceeds to the American Red Cross.



Lawry's urges consumers to get creative in the kitchen by starring in their own cooking show. The company's Reel Creative Meals contest challenges families to produce their own mini cooking show for a chance to win the grand prize of \$25,000 and dinner with restaurateur

and food and home décor expert B. Smith. Ten first-prize winners will receive \$1,000 and Lawry's products. To enter, submit your favorite family recipe using Lawry's seasoned salt, garlic salt or marinades and include a video (three minutes or shorter) of you and your family preparing the recipe. The more creative the video, the better your chances of winning. Visit www.lawryfoodtube.com by Aug. 31 for complete rules.



Duke's Mayonnaise is celebrating its 90th anniversary by awarding Duke's lovers with cash prizes and free jars of the savory spread. From now through year's end, Duke's fans will find specially marked sweepstakes jars on retail shelves, giving consumers an opportunity to win \$90 cash prizes or free 32-ounce jars of Duke's Mayonnaise. Sweepstakes details are located under the safety seal on the top of the jar. The cash prize of \$90 may be redeemed by following the directions located on the jar label. Coupons for free jars can be redeemed at any store that sells Duke's. Contest rules can be found at www.dukesmayo.com. □