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**GRILLING 101 WITH MERT'S HEART AND SOUL**

*Tips for firing up charcoal grills, direct vs. indirect grilling, and more from James Bazzelle, Mert's Heart and Soul owner and executive chef.*

Charlotte, NC – Memorial day marked the official kick off of the 2007 grilling season and undoubtedly, thousands of folks across the Carolinas have dusted off their tongs to join in the annual rite of passage. James Bazzelle, owner and executive chef of Mert's Heart and Soul, has a few basic tips to help seasoned chefs and newcomers alike master the grill during this outdoor cooking season.

"My customers always ask for cooking tips, so I wanted to give them something to help start the grilling season off on the right note," said Bazzelle. To assist Carolinians in their quest for grilling mastery, Bazzelle offers several "Grilling 101" basics, including:

- **Safety first:** Safety is the first step in any cooking exercise. During grilling, place the grill away from flammable materials, and at least 10 feet away from any structure. Never leave a grill unattended once it has been lit. Also, long-handed grilling tools like tongs and spatulas are recommended for turning foods on grills.
- **Firing up the grill:** When the grill is positioned correctly, the next step in the process is starting the charcoal. To start a charcoal grill, arrange the charcoal in the center of the grill, add lighter fluid to the coals, and let the coals sit for about 5-10 minutes before lighting. When the coals turn white, spread them in a single layer, place the grid on the grill, and close the lid (remember not to place the lid on the grill before the coals are ready). Using the lid helps to prevent foods from burning and locks in the grilled flavor.
- **Add variety with direct and indirect grilling:** Indirect and direct grilling is an exciting way to add variety to outdoor meals. Direct grilling or, cooking directly over coals, is best for foods that take less than 30 minutes to grill. Examples include hotdogs, hamburgers, boneless chicken, steaks, and fish fillets. Chicken legs and thighs take longer to cook so always start with the dark meat first, followed by the white meat. 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, start the charcoal as noted above and then spread the coals into two piles on opposite sides of the grill. Place a drip pan in the center of the pit of the grill and add water or any flavored liquid. Place the grid on the grill and then close the lid on the grill to seal in the heat and "smokey" flavor. Apply barbeque sauce in the final minutes of cooking to avoid burning the meat.

Overall, Bazzelle said that the grilling season is all about fun. "Remember to add your own personal touch to grilled foods by experimenting with different types of meat, poultry, seafood, and marinades. Grilling, like all types of cooking, is best when you add your own unique flair to it."

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### Grilling Recipe

#### **Grilled Soft-Shell Crab Sandwich with Spicy Ranch Aioli**

*Recipe created by James Bazzelle, chef/owner of Mert's Heart & Soul, Charlotte, N.C.*

Preparation Time: 5 minutes

Cooking Time: 20 minutes

Serves: 4

- 1 finely chopped small red onion
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley
- 2 teaspoons capers
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1/2 cup Hidden Valley® Spicy Ranch dressing
- 1/4 cup melted butter or olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 4 soft-shell crabs, cleaned, rinsed and patted dry
- 1 cup flour or cracker meal
- 4 small baguettes, sliced lengthwise
- Chopped lettuce and tomato for each sandwich



In a blender, blend the first five ingredients until well mixed to create spicy Ranch aioli; refrigerate. Light grill using Kingsford® Charcoal with Sure Fire Grooves™. Mix butter or olive oil, lemon juice and cayenne pepper in a large bowl. Roll crabs in mixture. Lightly dredge in flour or cracker meal. Sauté in large pan 3 to 4 minutes on each side; transfer to grill and cook for 5 to 10 minutes on each side.

Warm baguette on grill. Spread inside of bun with spicy Ranch aioli; add lettuce and tomato and top with crab.

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*Mert's Heart and Soul is one of the premier dining destinations in the Carolinas. The restaurant specializes in low country and Gullah favorites, including shrimp and grits, southern fried chicken and award-winning macaroni and cheese. Mert's is located in the heart of Uptown Charlotte at 214 North College Street. Mert's is open for lunch and dinner seven days a week. Brunch is served every Saturday and Sunday from 9AM – 3PM. For more information call 704.342.4222 or visit [www.mertscharlotte.com](http://www.mertscharlotte.com).*