

BEFORE OR AFTER AN EVENT

Summertime Means

BURGERTIME

Mak'em or Find'em: Chef Chuck Harris Gives Tips for Both



By Chuck Harris

Chuck's Catering and Special Events

Hamburgers... !!@%&*&^@! An item, as a chef, I hate to deal with, or even put on a menu.

I know, you think hamburgers are easy. What's the big deal, right? Well, there are a lot of combinations of burgers, first off. You can do them a million ways, so a chef can get easily lost in the choices. And, hamburger making is a competitive business. Because everyone is doing hamburgers, you can get anything from \$2.00 sliders to \$85.00 burgers in Vegas! It seems like a no-win food item for a chef, and I'm just one of those guys who doesn't want a hamburger to define me. But, like so many chefs across the country starting around 2005, I finally said: "If you can't beat them, join them." And if we're going to join them, do the best burger ever!

Burgers are a traditional summertime food. Here's how to make the best burger ever:

Learn the Secret to Meat

The meat is very important. If you like meat, then use fresh ground. Go to your local butcher and ask to watch him grind a good grade of beef in front of you. Have him add salt, pepper and quality fat product, such as bacon fat. Get 20% fat in your ground beef. When you get quality meat, you can cook it to medium, which is how a burger should be cooked.

If you have your meat of choice and you are ready to make patties at home, remember to keep it simple. Adding all types of seasoning packets to your meat is not always going to make it better. If you're making thick patties, make sure you work seasoning into the meat at least with salt and pepper. But again, if the butcher added salt and pepper when ground, and you have quality fat, extra seasoning is not necessary.

Your patties need to be even all the way across no matter how thick you are making them. A good guide is to make your patty a quarter of an inch in diameter bigger than the bun you're going to use.

Get Better Buns

Buns are so personal, but I'll share my favorite options - Hawaiian bread, onion bun or Brioche bun (a French pastry bun), if you can find it. Just as important as picking the bun, is what you do with it. Do you brush it with oil or butter and toast it? Don't just let it be cold, do something with it,

but not too early so it's not hard once the patty is done.

Get Fired Up

Most hamburgers are cooked on a griddle, not an open flame. Your kids' favorite fast-food restaurants cook on a griddle so be aware they may turn their noses up to open flame cooked burgers. Oh, well.

The key to grill cooking is to have the grill real hot, clean and oiled. Put your patties on and get nice grill marks on both sides, then turn down heat. A burger will not stick once it's ready to flip, so let it sit there longer than five seconds and, leave it alone, before flipping. Also, don't push the burger down. You just paid the butcher to put that fat in so STOP pushing all the good juicy fat out. We want the fat in the burger so it will be juicy when it's finished.

Put on Quality Tops

Here's another point of personal preference - burger toppings. You know the usual - lettuce, tomato, purple onion, pickles. Have those for the kiddies but get fun, creative... live a little. Here are some ideas:

- Bleu cheese dressing
- Roasted red bell pepper mayo
- Spinach
- Boston bib lettuce
- Heirloom tomatoes
- Caramelized shallots
- Brown sugar bacon (Do it yourself!)
- Coleslaw
- Cambert Cheese
- Smoked Gouda

NOT INTERESTED IN BURGERTIME AT HOME?

Try some of my favorite burger
stops in Southeast Texas:

Finch Hutton

147 Boston Avenue | Nederland | 409.722.3100

Goodfellas

3350 Dowlen Road | Beaumont | 409.861.2500

Dippity's

815 S. Main Street | Lumberton | 409.755.3632

Moz Grill

8110 FM 565 | Baytown | 281.374.2953

The Grill on Thursdays on the patio from 8-10 p.m.
6680 Calder | Beaumont | 409.866.0039

If you're traveling west this summer, look for an
In-N-Out Burger, www.in-n-out.com!