

GRILL like a pro

Tips to add to your
barbecue playbook this summer

By Liz Johnson | ewjohnson@lohud.com

Most of us can't wait to fire up the grill and start flipping burgers, but before you stock up on propane or charcoal, re-think your routine. Vow to make this a break-out year — the summer you try grilling something out of your comfort zone — like pizza or pineapples. Or, master a new technique — such as how to gently grill mushrooms alongside your seared T-bone.

Let's reverse some bad habits, too, like cooking over dirty grates, squirting lighter fluid all over your coals and slicing into your steak to see if it's done.

And don't forget safety, too. Singed eye-

brows are a terrible look!

To make this outdoor grilling season your best ever, we've compiled our best BBQ tips — and some solid expert advice to back them up. Happy grilling!

THE BASICS OF BBQ AND MORE, 4B AND 5B



TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS

ROCK STAR RESIDENT 10 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT HARTSDALE'S SANDY MORRISSEY



FRANK BECERRA JR./THE JOURNAL NEWS

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Since setting out her first bluebird nesting boxes in 1998 — they sat on metal poles at Scarsdale Golf Club, where she is a member — Sandy Morrissey has put out some 300 boxes around Westchester, mostly in the central and southern portions of the county.

This year, she's got a good 200 bluebird boxes out in the field and has already confirmed 31 nesting pairs of adult bluebirds with eggs (30 pairs last year). "We also have many promising nests and sightings of bluebirds," says Morrissey, who has called Hartsdale home for 40 years.

Bluebirds had all but disappeared from much of the state by the 1960s because of encroaching development that wiped out open fields and farmland and brought down the number of dead trees, their favorite cavity nesting site. These beautiful sapphire-colored birds also suffered from competition with invasive species of birds, such as house sparrows and starlings.

Much of the credit for the local resurgence of bluebirds over the last dozen years or so goes to people like Morrissey, who have put up wooden nesting boxes to encourage their return and offer them a place to raise their young. Bluebirds like a good degree of open land near their nesting sites, well away from deep woods or clusters of buildings.

"In Westchester, cemeteries and golf courses are the only places to find the open land that bluebirds want," Morrissey says. So that's where she's put up most of her boxes — Kensico Cemetery in Valhalla, in fact, has been the most productive site over the years.

Isn't it great to have a volunteer take such interest in a worthy cause and keep at it, year after year? Here are 10 things you probably didn't know about Sandy Morrissey.

1. Earlier this year, she got her banding license after a two-week course at a lab near Rochester. As a master bander, she can capture and attach bands to birds' legs so that they can be tracked and monitored from year to year. "It doesn't bother the birds," she says. "Bluebirds are very tolerant of human handling and human interference."

2. New this year are three nesting boxes in Lasdon Park and Arboretum in Somers. "Right away, all three got nesting bluebirds," she says.

See **MORRISSEY, 5B**

INSIDE



Travel

Italy is for lovers — but with careful planning, it's also great for kids.

Restaurants We Love

A specialty of La Herradura in New Rochelle's north end is its frozen mango margarita.



Books

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Chef and owner Jeffrey Kohn sprinkles a dry rub onto chicken wings in the smoker at Q Restaurant & Bar in Port Chester. Meats prepared on the grill, such as burgers, are an example of direct grilling, whereas meats prepared in the smoker are indirectly grilled. XAVIER MASCAREÑAS/THE JOURNAL NEWS

The ABCs of BBQ: tips from the pros

For tender pork and poultry, brine first

Pork and chicken cooked on the grill can get dried out fast—especially over direct heat. Brine them first and the meat will turn out juicy and flavorful every time. The recipe is purposefully flexible to allow for innovation. Dissolve 2/3 cup kosher salt and 1/3 cup sugar into 2 quarts of water. Add any combination of herbs, lemon juice, spices or whatever else (tequila?) suits the food. Soak chicken pieces for 4 to 8 hours, and pork for no more than 2 hours. Allow time to let the poultry or meat air dry before you put it on the grill. You can also brine turkey (for a long time) and shrimp (for just a few minutes), but don't brine beef or lamb, as these have more fat to keep them juicy.

Expert advice: Peter X. Kelly, chef-owner of four restaurants, including X20 Xaviars on the Hudson in Yonkers and Xaviars at Piermont, always brines pork and poultry—including chicken, duck breast and quail—for his restaurants. “Brining allows us to season evenly and keeps meats moist while cooking,” he says.

For juicy burgers, handle gently

When shaping burger patties, work quickly and don't pack the meat too tightly. (A few scraggly edges are OK; they'll crisp up nicely.) Once you've shaped the patty the size you like—about 6 ounces per burger works well—use your thumb to make a depression in the center of the burger. This will keep it from puffing up as it cooks.

Expert advice: At The Burger Factory in Armonk, chef-owner Josh Elstein cooks 150 hamburgers a day. He says to keep ground beef very cold because it holds together better. And never, ever squish the burger with the spatula. “The juice that makes it flavorful gets pushed out,” he says.



A chimney starter lights coals easily without the use of chemicals like lighter fluid. TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Keep cooked and raw food separate

There are many rules about food safety, but the No. 1 most important in our book is to avoid cross contamination. Don't let raw food come in contact with cooked food—in the kitchen, out by the grill, never, ever!

Expert advice: Doug Nguyen, the chef-owner of Wasabi in Nyack, specializes in sushi, so you can bet he keeps raw and cooked foods separate. At the restaurant, by law, he's required to keep different colored cutting boards for different meats—green for chicken, red for beef. At home, he says, you should be conscientious about washing up—your hands, cooking utensils and platters. “In the summer heat, the germs divide quickly, so you can get sick really easily,” he says.

Use a chimney to light charcoal fires

The easiest and best way to get charcoal perfectly lit is to use a chimney starter, which lights briquettes or wood quickly without the use of lighter fluid, so your food

tastes like food and not like chemicals. You can pick one up where barbecue grills and tools are sold. Set the galvanized steel cylinder on the bottom rack of your grill, fill the top with charcoal and the bottom with a sheet or two (no more) of newspaper. When the newspaper is lit, it burns and lights the charcoal above. It will take 10 to 20 minutes for the coals to be ready. You should see orange flame deep inside the chimney starter, and gray ash just starting to form on the charcoal at the top.

Carefully—wear heat-proof gloves—dump out the coals, using long-handled tongs to arrange as you like. Place the top grate on the grill, and be very careful where you set the chimney down to cool, as it will remain quite hot.

Expert advice: Charles Department Store in Katonah has an impressive selection of grills and barbecue equipment, and salesperson Mary Kratochvil is a big believer in using a chimney starter. The shop carries one brand: the Weber, at \$19.99. “We used to have other models, but a lot of them aren't very good,” says Kratochvil.



Instead of using a gunky grill brush, use a wadded-up piece of aluminum foil to scrape up residue off the grill. TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Match the flame to what's being grilled

Some foods require cooking directly over high heat. Others do better cooked over a lower temperature—called indirect heat. You need to know which to use, and how to create an indirect-heat cooking area on your grill. Foods that cook fast (burgers, steaks) usually require direct heat. Foods that need more time (chicken, pork, ribs) do better over indirect heat.

To create an indirect-heat zone, turn off some of the burners on your gas grill, or build a charcoal fire on one side or the other of the grill (or on both, leaving the center bare, covered with a strip of aluminum foil to catch any drippings).

Expert advice: “If it's a single portion—like a steak or a chicken breast—that's direct,” says Jeffrey Kohn, the owner of Q Restaurant in Port Chester. “Anything that's on a bone—the tough cuts of meat, the large cuts of meat—that's indirect.”

Clean the grill, every time

If you left a mess, first heat the grill until the grates are hot. Wad a softball-size bunch of foil and, holding it in tongs, scrape the grates—the cooked-on residue will come right off. You can also use half an onion to scrub off light buildup, which doubles as a flavor booster, too.

Expert advice: Nigel Spence, the chef-owner of Ripe Restaurant in Mount Vernon, where he cooks but-

terflied chicken on the backyard grill almost every night, suggests you clean the grill as soon as you are done cooking. Close the lid to get the grill very hot—then use a grill brush to scrape the loosened charred food. “I haven't found anything that works better than a very strong and sturdy grill brush,” he says. So keep your cleaning tool clean, too.

Use a grill pan for delicate foods

Some foods are impossible to balance between the grates. Asparagus, for instance, or chopped onions and red peppers. For smaller, delicate foods, use a grill pan. Some are shaped like a basket, with a long handle, others resemble a cookie sheet with holes.

To set up vegetables for the grill, chop and season then place in a grill pan, and set on a sheet pan to wait its turn on the grill. After grilling the vegetables, transfer the hot grill pan—with a seriously thick oven mitt—back onto the sheet pan for transporting.

Expert advice: Rui Correia, the chef-owner of Piri-Q in Mamaroneck, cooks his signature “frango”—butterflied chicken—directly on the grill with an open flame. But when he's grilling zucchini or potatoes he uses a grill basket. “It's a lot easier to grab multiple pieces at once,” he says. “I'll put 12 potatoes in there, and then you're less likely to overcook them, because you're turning them all at once with an even movement.”

Don't guess! How to check if food is done

If you have a thermometer, cook chicken to 165 degrees, pork to 140 (it will come off the grill medium-rare but will continue to cook to medium as it rests, see next tip) and beef to 125 (for medium rare) or to 130 to 150 (medium) or 150 and over (well).

Expert advice: Eric Dewes, the head chef at Morton's The Steakhouse in White Plains, advises you know about how long your steak is supposed to take—anywhere from five to eight minutes a side for medium rare—and start checking with the touch method (see photos) as it gets close.

Give meat a rest before you cut

After you grill, let the meat rest on a cutting board for at least five or 10 minutes—even up to 15 minutes. It will still be hot, we promise. If you slice, dice, carve or cut it before it rests, all the juices will seep out. You don't want the juices on the cutting board. You want them in your steak, so it will be juicy and delicious.

Expert advice: Kevin Bertrand, the chef at The Tap House in Tuckahoe and a regular home griller, agrees the meat must rest. “If you cut a piece of meat right after you cook it, it will all bleed out and you'll have just a center of red,” he says. “If you let it rest, the meat will be a more uniform color and doneness all the way through.”

TECHNIQUES: IS IT DONE? THE ANSWER IS AT THE TOUCH OF YOUR FINGERTIPS

Chefs can tell by poking a steak the degree to which it's done. Here's how to develop this feel: PHOTOS BY TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS

MEDIUM-RARE



Join your forefinger and the tip of your thumb. Press the thumb muscle. That's the feel of medium-rare. (For rare, hold your palm flat and press same thumb muscle).

MEDIUM



Bring the tip of your middle finger to the tip of your thumb. With your other hand, touch the thumb muscle. That's the feel of medium.

WELL-DONE



Bring your fourth finger and your thumb together. With your other hand, touch the thumb muscle. That's the feel of well-done.

OVERCOOKED



Bring your pinky and your thumb together. With your other hand, touch the thumb muscle. That's the feel of meat overcooked beyond recognition.