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20 Acton/Georgetown, Friday, September 16, 2005

Meet a good slice of meat

A friend of mine, Paul Basha, reminded me the other day that meat has been sorely lacking in our recipe department. Seeing as he is a meat specialist for the company he works for, I can see why he might be a bit prejudice to this topic. But he's right. So here we go.

This particular recipe is a favourite of mine. I make the marinade and throw the steak with the marinade into a Ziploc bag overnight. Then it's ready for the barbecue the next day. Flank steak is delicious when marinated, cooked on the barbecue or roasted in the oven, then sliced thinly to serve. This is not the cut of meat that you would serve as a thick slab. Slice it thin and slice it on the bias.

There are so many cuts of meat available, how do you ever figure out how to cook them? Well, first of all, these days, a lot of the meat cuts at the grocery store will use terms like "marinating steak" or "roasting beef" right on the package. In general, less expensive cuts of meat need to be tenderized either before or during the cooking process. The tenderizing process is to break down connective tissue which is more prevalent in older animals, animals that are frequently exercised and in the large moving muscles of the animal.

This does not mean that cheaper cuts of meat are less tasty. On the contrary, there is nothing quite like a fabulous melt-in-your-mouth pot roast or a well-marinated steak!

It's just important to choose meat and cooking methods that match. For example, if you want to make a pot roast, then don't buy beef tenderloin (the single most expensive cut of meat). Buy a rump roast or a blade or saddle. And if roasting a beautiful roast with little potatoes and veggies surrounding it is what you have in mind, don't buy a rump— buy at least an eye of the round or top sirloin.

To marinate a piece of meat, you must come up with a liquid that infuses flavour into your meat as well as containing a liquid that will break down connective tissue and a liquid that will moisten. The liquid that does the breaking down is the acidic one— wine, citrus or vinegar are most commonly found in marinades. The moistening liquid is an oil of some sort and the flavour infusers are things like the garlic, ginger, herbs, spices, etc. As long as you have those basic ingredients, you can mix up your own combinations!

If you'd like to tenderize during cooking, the most common method is to braise. That means to cook, covered in a small amount of liquid, usually after preliminary browning. The liquid is then made into a sauce when cooking is finished. This is how a pot roast is cooked, or stew, or a casserole.

The last, but most important step in cooking up a nice, tender and juicy piece of meat is to allow it to rest before serving. Whether it's a small steak on the barbecue or a gigantic roast to feed an army in the oven, it needs to rest before slicing. The resting process is key because it allows the meat to "relax" and for all the juices to be re-absorbed into the tissue.

If you cut into a piece of meat right out of the oven, you will have a sluice of liquid come pouring across the cutting board. But if you wait 5-30 minutes, depending on the size of the piece of meat, when you cut into it, very little liquid will pour out and your meat will be deliciously juicy. However, because of this resting time, you must also remove meat from the heat a little earlier, because the meat will continue to cook as it rests. So, for a small steak on the barbecue, remove it slightly before it reaches the feel that you prefer. For a large roast in the oven, remove it when the roast is 10-15 degrees (F) below the desired temperature.

Have fun and keep cooking!

What's cookin'?

Lori Gysel
Gerry Kentner



Flank Steak with Asian Marinade

Ingredients

- 1 lb flank steak
- 3 tbsp soy sauce
- 3 tbsp fish sauce
- 3 tbsp lime juice
- 4 tsp minced ginger root
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp dry sherry (or red wine)
- 1/2 tsp curry paste
- 1/2 tsp sesame oil

Method

1. Place steak in a resealable plastic bag.
2. Whisk together remainder of ingredients and pour into bag with meat.
3. Seal bag securely and shake around to ensure meat is all covered.
4. Place in refrigerator and marinate for at least eight hours or as much as 24 hours. Turn the bag occasionally to ensure all meat gets marinated.
5. After marinating, remove meat from the bag and grill over a medium heat barbecue until desired doneness. Medium rare should take about 10 minutes.
6. Meanwhile in a small saucepan, heat marinade until boiling.
7. Once meat is done, allow to rest for 10 minutes.
8. To serve, slice meat thinly on the bias. Serve with a spoonful of the marinade over top.

Cook's Note: It is important that the meat has a chance to rest after cooking and it is very important that this meat is sliced thin and on the bias, otherwise it will seem tough. This meat is delicious on its own or over a salad or on a crusty bun.



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