

Outdoor grills need attention too

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Now that conditions are right for cookouts, the Texas AgriLife Extension Service is reminding Texans to thoroughly clean their outdoor grills before using them. Credit: Texas AgriLife Extension Service photo

Now that it's outdoor grilling time again, many people are eager to fire up their grills and get cooking.

But before grilling those steaks, burgers, hot dogs or chicken breasts, remember to thoroughly clean the grill to make it safe for cooking, said Dr. Connie Sheppard, Texas AgriLife Extension Service family and consumer sciences agent for Bexar County.

“For grills with a lot of greasy residue, you can scrape off some of the grease with a wire brush and then use a spray over cleaner that’s safe for this purpose to help remove the rest of the accumulated grease and burned food,” Sheppard said. “Let the cleaner sit long enough to penetrate the residue on the grate and the inside of the grill, then wipe it

off and wash the grate and inside of the grill with detergent.”

Sheppard said many outdoor grill manufacturers provide cleaning instructions and consumers should familiarize themselves with them.

“One of the most frequent problems with charcoal grills is rusting in the bottom of the grill, which is mainly caused by not adequately removing the ashes that accumulate on the bottom as the result of spent charcoal, food, grease, sauces and marinades,” she said. “It’s important to remember that once the grill cools off you should remove the ash catcher – if there is one. If not, scrape the ashes out with a garden spade or possibly a whisk broom. Then clean the inside of the grill with a wire brush.”

She added that if a grill has a grease trap, it is vital that it be cleaned periodically to reduce the chance of a flare-up due to grease’s flammability.

Sheppard said gas grill owners should be sure to periodically check the grill for leaks and check for any blockages that might restrict gas flow.

“You should clean your gas grill after every use by putting it on the high setting with the lid down and leaving it for about 15 minutes,” she said. “Then turn it off and let it cool down to where you can use a brush to loosen the gunk. Wipe down the inside and outside of the grill with a warm, wet, soapy cloth, rinse and then dry them off with a dry cloth.”

Sheppard said people have tried cleaning their dirty grill grates in the dishwasher or by placing them inside their indoor oven and turning on the self-clean cycle.

“While these may sound practical in theory, they can ruin your appliances and fill your kitchen with smoke or harsh fumes. Also, the

stuff that accumulates on the grate can become combustible at high temperatures, so if you put your grate in a self-cleaning oven, there's a risk of fire as well."

Sheppard said regular maintenance by a routine brushing of the grates and cleaning up any ashes or residue after each use will keep gunk from accumulating.

She added that spraying the grate and interior of the grill with high-temperature cooking oil will also help prevent rusting.

"Also, since most outdoor grills are at the mercy of the weather and rain is another major contributing factor to grill rust, it makes good sense to have a grill cover and to use it," she said.

Sheppard added that grill safety is very important and that grills should never be used indoors or in a garage, carport, breezeway or hallway, under any flammable surface or near any flammable item.

"Keep the grill at least 10 feet from your house when in use," she said.

"And if you're storing propane gas tanks, remember to keep them upright and in a safe location. Don't ever store them in the trunk of your car or in the bed of your truck."

For more information outdoor grilling, go to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service website, www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety...It_Safe/index.asp.

Provided by Texas A&M University

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