

# Maillard Burger

No, not duck

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Editor



You've probably seen claims for the ultimate burger recipe. Usually it is just a variation on an existing theme, or the addition of "zany" ingredients. Never have you seen a truly new take on the American burger.

Until now.

This is going to involve more time and hassle than your normal burger. Trust me, it is all worth it.

This method works on any meat you would like to use for a burger. But just like any other method, burgers made from lean meats such as game are prone to be dry - especially if cooked beyond medium-rare.

There are legitimate safety issues with eating ground meat rare - whether it came from the grocery store or the woods. This recipe handles the safety issue, allowing you to cook your burger however you like. And does so with lots of flavor.

The Maillard reaction is what causes that beautiful delicious crust on a properly prepared steak or burger. It is named after a French physician and chemist who first described it in 1912.

In brief, it depends on certain variables to deliver its full potential. The main conditions we want to exploit are high heat, and meat with a relatively dry surface. By the way, several pronunciations are correct. I favor my-'yard.

## Ingredients:

- A thick piece (or pieces) of meat that, will result in the amount of burger you want. No thinner than an inch and a half - thicker is better. It must not be rolled or folded - all surfaces must be directly exposed to the heat source. A venison round or sirloin roast is perfect. If you don't have game handy, a thick sliced chuck roast - something that looks like what Andre the Giant

would have called a steak - is great too.

- A chimney style charcoal starter. They seem to come in 2 sizes, the wider version being about 7 1/2 inches in diameter. The wider the better.
- Natural lump charcoal, or briquettes if you don't have lump handy. Lump charcoal burns hotter and you want the hottest you can get.
- A meat grinder. This is a small job - any grinder should do. If you don't have a grinder you can cut well chilled meat into cubes and pulse it in a food processor a few times..
- A timer that works with seconds not just minutes.
- Salt and fresh ground black pepper
- Other spices if you like but go easy - the whole point of this burger is to show off the supercharged maillard flavor.

### **Directions:**

*From beginning to end - remember this mantra: Clean surfaces, clean tools, clean hands. Because you are using higher heat than usual, be careful and be prepared.*

1. Cut the meat into the largest pieces that will fit inside the diameter of your chimney starter without touching the sides.
2. Blot all surfaces with paper towels until they come away clean. Then rub a little salt onto all meat surfaces.
3. Wrap the meat pieces in paper towels, place them on a rack and move them to the fridge. Do NOT put them in ziplocks or cling wrap or do anything to block evaporation. We want the towels to wick as much moisture out of the surface of the meat as they can, and to have that water evaporate away.
4. Leave meat in fridge for a while. At least 2 hours, up to 2 days. Check every once in awhile and change the paper towels if they show much color.
5. Fill your chimney about half way or a little more with charcoal. Try to avoid small pieces. Fire it up like you normally do. Lump charcoal heat peaks quickly and fades fast, especially in the chimney. Keep a close eye on it and be ready to pounce when it looks ready to roll. Handle the chimney gently to avoid dislodging any of the burning charcoal.
6. When it's making good heat, lift the chimney off the burned newspaper residue and brush your grate clean. Set the chimney back down on the cleaned grate.

*Some savvy cooks stage their meat awhile at room temp a while before slapping it on the heat. That can be a valuable technique - but not in this case. We want the meat fully chilled and dry - straight from the fridge to the grill.*

7. Lift the chimney, place the meat on the grill. Give the chimney a light tap and a shake over a

clear area of the grill (to eject any loose bits and ash) and gently place it over the meat. Start a 90 seconds timer.

8. Pick up the chimney, brush any charcoal bits off the meat, flip it, and repeat for another 90 seconds. If the charcoal is burning properly two minutes is way too much.

*This subjects the meat to a much higher temperature than normal cooking methods. An overhead high heat method is used by many fancy steak houses who use a specialty broiler (for some reason called a "salamander"), and is one reason their steaks taste so darn good. In fact this whole burger idea is a riff on a process from Alton Brown (of "Good Eats" fame) called "Dry Aged Chimney Porterhouse", which is pretty fantastic and well worth googling.*

9. Immediately move the meat to a clean rack and place in the freezer for a few minutes - long enough to firm but not to freeze. Get the heat out as quickly as possible to keep the interior as raw as possible.
10. Repeat for all the pieces, but keep an eye on the charcoal. If it gets past its peak and you have more meat, start another load. Start over, don't just throw more lumps in the chimney.

*Ok, ok. All that stuff above about the chimney method is wonderful but if you prefer, use a pan or a broiler instead. Put a little peanut or canola oil in a cast iron pan, heat it until you see wisps of smoke, then whip a really good sear on both sides. Try to get the edges as well. Or broil it in as hot a broiler as possible, flipping once. Watch it carefully to avoid burning. You want it browned, not blackened - and you need the interior to remain cold and raw. Keep the process as hot and short as possible and get the meat to the freezer immediately after it leaves the heat.*

11. Remembering the mantra of clean hands, clean surfaces, clean tools, remove the chilled pieces from the freezer and slice into inch-wide strips or chunks - discarding discarding any bones but keeping any fat. The meat should still be mostly raw, except for the browned surface.
12. If they are not firm, return to the freezer for another 15 minutes or so.
13. It's also good to stage the detachable metal parts of your grinder in the freezer. Grinding works best if you don't let the natural heat generated by the process take over. A grinder cuts cold meat but smears warm meat. You can guess what provides the better texture on the bun.
14. Add fresh ground pepper to the meat then run it all through the grinder.

Relax, the hard part is done. Now you have a nice wad of flavorful burger, safe to use for even rare burgers. Use or freeze it right away.

Why is this safe?

The interior of a fresh steak or roast is relatively sterile - it's the surface where the nasties reside. When meat is ground the surface contamination is spread throughout the whole thing, where the nasties really get to work.. This is why many restaurants who are happy to sell you a rare steak refuse to sell a rare burger.

But you subjected the surface of the meat to the high heat of Dr. Maillards tender mercies before grinding, which takes care of any nasties. If you kept everything clean your rare burger should be as safe as a rare steak.

Still, don't get cocky. Time and ground meats are natural enemies. Even if you take great care, it's wisest to use or freeze ground meats right away.

Prepare the burger however you like. A hot method that adds more of Dr. Maillards magic will double down on that great flavor.

Depending on how lean the meat is, patties may not hold together as well as you are used to, so you may need to pat them tighter than normal. Some folks mix a little olive oil in the meat to help with that.

If you don't mind the calories etc., adding 10-20% beef or pork fat (before grinding) to lean meats adds flavor, improves texture, and helps the patties hold together better. But keep in mind that added fat was not processed by Dr. Maillard, and may not be safe to eat rare.

One way around that is to include fatty pork butt or beef chuck roasts with your meat from the beginning, at a ratio of a third to half of your lean meats. Process them all the same way using the high heat, mixing them together at the grinding step.

If you want to use the charcoal chimney method to cook your burgers, I like the way you think! Just follow the Alton Brown method (google "Dry Aged Chimney Porterhouse"). Enjoy!

*celebrating  
the ultimate  
organic free  
range food*

