

MAN VS MEAT

It's the simple things in life that matter – and one of those is a juicy, medium-rare steak served up on a plate



can't make chicken soup with chicken shit". Going by that adage, if you want to make a great steak, you need to start with a great piece of meat.

Making the cut

There are many cuts of meat available in the local market, but not all are created equal.

Here's what you need to know:

- **Rib-eye:** Prized for its high fat content, lending the steak its irresistible juiciness and flavour.
- **New York strip:** Known by steak lovers for its rich, meaty flavour – a nice balance between meatiness and tenderness.
- **Tenderloin:** Also called the filet or filet mignon, this lean cut is about delicate texture and silky quality. Made into a larger roast, called the chateaubriand, the tenderloin is perfect for a romantic dinner.
- **Top sirloin:** A great value steak. It has a respectable fat content (aka, juiciness) and, at half the cost, is only a little less

by the tremendous depth of flavour imparted by the bone.

• **Porterhouse:** The Porterhouse steak is a T-bone on steroids. What distinguishes it is that it's cut further down the loin of the animal, where the meat is more tender. And the portion of tenderloin is larger than in the T-bone.

Quality check

Cut through the jargon to pick cuts of the highest quality:

- **Marbling:** The term refers to the delicate veins of fat that run throughout the meat – important because they provide succulence and flavour to the steak. The better the marbling, the better the steak.
- **Aging:** Once the animal is harvested there's not much that can be done to improve the quality of the meat. Except for dry-aging – the aging of meat in a dry environment – which intensifies the flavour and tenderizes the meat. It's expensive, but worth it.
- **Thickness:** Generally speaking, a steak should be at least 1½ inches thick, if not more. If too thin, the inside of the steak will overcook by the time the outside has developed a nice brown crust.

• **Overall appearance:** Aside from the more technical aspects involved in gauging the quality of your steak, the overall appearance and smell can be a great indicator. Simply take a look at the steak in question. Is it bright and beautiful? Does it smell fresh? Use your senses and you are sure to find a beauty.

Step 2: PREPARATION

Once you've selected the right specimen, the perfect steak is within your reach. Most of the cuts I've suggested require little to no preparation – just a sprinkling of salt and pepper and they're good to go. Still, some steaks benefit from a little more attention. These marinades not only tenderize tougher cuts, but also impart some really great flavour.

Raise the steaks

A good steak is hard to find on a menu in India. Still, you don't need a Michelin Star to get it right. Mumbai chef **Alex Sanchez** of The Table shows you how to perfect this manliest of meals



THE DETAILS

THE TABLE
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As a kid, I remember watching in wonderment as men, shrouded in smoke and flames, carefully attended to their grills – an adjustment here, a spray of water there (to prevent flare-ups) and a meticulous monitoring of the coals, ensuring the perfect cooking temperature for their steaks. The focus and care with which they cooked was impressive. In their eyes, this was a preservation of their manhood.

Back then, I didn't bother to question this odd, ritualistic display of caveman-like

behaviour. I was too busy indulging in the results. And as my passion for food and cooking developed – coincidentally, around the same time my belly protruded further – my admiration for the level of commitment it took to create the perfect meaty masterpiece only grew. Now, as a chef – and indeed a man – I feel responsible for passing along a few tips to my fellow meat-lovers, so they, too, can partake in the timeless ceremonies of man and meat.

Step 1: SELECTION

We chefs have a saying: "You

tender than rib-eye or New York strip steaks.

- **Flank:** A tougher cut from the belly of the animal, which packs in loads of flavour. Can be made more tender with a great marinade.
- **Skirt:** Like the flank, the skirt steak has bags of meaty flavour, and a delightfully chewy texture.
- **T-bone:** The quintessential steak, it's a cross-section from the loin of the animal, its T-shaped bone separating two pieces of meat. On one side, New York strip, and on the other, tenderloin. Characterized

PHOTO: JIGNESH JHAVERI/PHOTOLINK; FARZANA BEHRAM CONTRACTOR (SANCHEZ)

SPECIAL SAUCE
A bottle of red and some basic veggies and you have a winning marinade



RED WINE MARINATED FLANK STEAK

Ingredients

1 kg flank steak, trimmed and cleaned
500 ml red wine
50 gms carrots, peeled, sliced
50 gms celery, sliced
100 gms onions, peeled, sliced
3 cloves of garlic, smashed, skin on
5 branches of thyme

Method

Mix everything together in a sealable bag and marinate in the refrigerator for 12-24 hours.

TOP SIRLOIN "LONDON BROIL"

Ingredients

1 kg top sirloin

4 Tbsp soy sauce
4 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
4 Tbsp olive oil
2 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
2 cloves of garlic, smashed, skin on
2 branches of rosemary

Method

Mix everything together in a sealable bag and marinate in the refrigerator for 12-24 hours.

Step 3: COOKING

The perfect steak has a salty brown crust that gives way to a beautifully moist, red centre. This is my preferred method:

- **Temper it:** Remove the meat from the refrigerator an hour before cooking and bring it to room temperature. This not only helps the steak

cook evenly, but significantly improves its texture.

- **Dry it:** Too much moisture causes steam, which prevents the formation of that rich, brown crust we love. Simply dry the steak with a tea towel and it's ready to go.
- **Season it:** Sprinkle the steak on all sides with a liberal amount of salt and pepper just before cooking it.
- **Sear it:** Cast-iron pans give the best results, but any thick-bottomed pan will work. Heat the pan on medium to high heat and add a thin film of neutral cooking oil. When the oil gives off a light white smoke, add the steak and allow it to brown for 3-4 minutes. Turn and repeat on the other side.

- **Finish it:** If you like your steak rare, the initial searing may be enough to warm your steak through to the centre. If you prefer your steak cooked more, finish it by removing it from the pan, placing it on a baking tray with a fitted rack, and placing it in a 180 degree Celsius oven. Cook it to just below your desired doneness as it will continue to cook while resting.

- **Rest it:** In a plate or a fresh baking tray, cover the cooked steak loosely with aluminium foil for 5-10 minutes. The juices will get redistributed through the meat, keeping it perfectly moist and preventing those flavourful juices from running out. ☺

ON THE SIDE

When it comes to choosing a side dish to accompany a steak, go with something that doesn't overshadow the star of the show.

BEER-BATTERED ONION RINGS



Ingredients

100 gms rice flour, plus extra for dusting
100 gms flour
200 ml beer (Pilsner, Kingfisher work well)
150 ml vodka (any inexpensive variety)
½ tsp baking powder
½ tsp honey
Oil for frying
½ kg large white onions, peeled, sliced into ½" thick rings
Salt to taste

Method

Combine 100 gm of rice flour with the flour, beer, vodka, baking powder and honey in a mixing bowl and whisk until smooth. Reserve. Blanch the sliced onions in boiling, salted water for 20 seconds to soften, then plunge into a bowl of ice water. Lay out on a tea towel to dry. Heat the oil in a saucepan to 180 degrees Celsius. Dust the onion slices with rice flour and shake off excess. Dip slices in the beer batter and fry in batches until golden brown and crispy, seasoning with salt as they come out of the oil. Drain them on a baking sheet fitted with a wire rack, and serve while hot.

TIP There are endless varieties of steak sauces and condiments you can buy. Simple sauces, like Maitre d' Hotel Butter, Béarnaise Sauce, A1 Steak Sauce and Chimichurri, accentuate the natural quality of the meat, and take hardly any time to prepare.



STEP IT UP
Season and sear.
Simple, right?