



For Southern Californians like Denise and Tony Villasenor, outdoor entertaining is the only kind of entertaining. "I love it when people can be casual and relaxed because it keeps me from worrying about anything," says Denise. "And it's always easier when my husband handles the grilling!"

A cooking enthusiast, Denise worked with her mom, Jean LaFlamme, coming up with a barbecue menu that was both flavorful and easy to whip up. Instead of the usual hot dogs and hamburgers, they chose to serve split chickens and pulled pork sandwiches. They also gathered lots of fresh vegetables for a grilled side dish. And while Tony, in his apron and gloves, got to work at the grill, Denise and Jean fixed some finger-licking sauces: tequila-lime and smoky molasses beer. What time is dinner?

### The Menu

- Grilled Split Chickens
- Pulled Pork Sandwiches
- Cornmeal Biscuits
- Chocolate Icebox Cakes
- Peach Sangria

# California

# COOKOUT

*Bring out the grill. It's time for some mouthwatering barbecue that goes way beyond basic burgers and hot dogs.*

Photographs by Michael Weschler  
Food styling by Victoria Granof  
Prop styling by Andrea Caughey  
Written and produced by Alyssa Ettinger





At a barbecue, the food's the main attraction. Other than a checkered tablecloth and a few simple vases of flowers, there's no need for over-the-top decorations.

While these foods might sound fancy, the two cooks were in and out of the kitchen in a little over an hour. The day before, they marinated the chicken and pork loin. The next morning, they popped both in the oven. Partially cooking the chicken in the oven cuts down on the grilling time. While the meats cooked, Denise chopped vegetables and Jean prepared the sauces.

Oh, and let's not forget dessert: individual chocolate icebox cakes. Made with layers of chocolate wafers, they may look complicated, but took just minutes to mix and stack before going into the refrigerator overnight.

"At a barbecue, the food's the main attraction," says Denise. So other than pulling out a tablecloth and adding simple flower arrangements to the tables, she didn't bother with decorations. "The pitchers of peach sangria and lemon iced tea look festive," she adds. All that was left to turn this feast into a party was to put on some of Tony's favorite salsa music. "Just in case the great smells from the grill aren't enough," he says, "this will definitely make everyone happy!" ■

## Taking the Party Outside

Thankfully, there are very few rules for outdoor parties, but these tips help ensure that everyone has a great time:

**Bugs begone.** Place citronella candles around, not on, tables—you don't want the food to taste like the oils! Offer insect repellent for bare arms and ankles. And cover serving dishes with cloth napkins.

**Ice to spare.** Buy extra bags of ice to make sure drinks stay cold. You

can also place side dishes like coleslaw on top of ice-filled bowls so they can stay out longer.

**Cold is good.** Even atop an ice-filled bowl, cold food should be kept in the refrigerator until serving time to keep it from spoiling in the sun.

**Speed cleaning.** Use paper plates and plastic cutlery for easier cleanup. Just make sure plates are sturdy enough to support the food you're serving.

**Spill-friendly.** This is not the party to show off your favorite new table linens. Everything should be easily washable.

**Forgotten essentials.** Gather your spare sunglasses, baseball caps, and visors, and place them in a basket nearby for any guests who may have forgotten theirs.

**Be ready for showers.** Have an indoor contingency plan in case it rains on your party.



**NOW THIS IS OUTDOOR DINING**  
Clockwise from above left: Bug-fighting citronella candles in colorful buckets were strategically placed throughout the party. A heaping platter of pulled pork sandwiches meant there was plenty of food to eat while the chicken was being grilled. The weight of a stone, tied with a simple string, kept the tablecloth from blowing in the wind. Each guest got a miniature chocolate cake to savor. Soaking ears of corn—husks on—in a bucket of water kept them from burning on the grill. Carrying party supplies was easy with a wooden caddy, which organized plates, cutlery, napkins, and more. Roasting potatoes on the grill? You bet. These small red ones, seasoned with salt, pepper, and herbs, were wrapped in a foil packet, then grilled until soft. You can cheat by partially cooking them in the oven ahead of time. Food's on; gather 'round!





## Grilling Pointers

Here's how to get the best food from your grill:

- Store tightly closed bags of charcoal in a dry area. If the bags are stored outside, keep them in a waterproof container. Moisture makes charcoal hard to light.
- Make sure the grill is clean. Use a stiff-bristled brush to remove any food residue; wash with regular dish detergent; rinse. Each grill is different, so check the manufacturer's directions for specifics.
- To get the grill to the desired cooking temperature, light coals, or turn on gas grill, about 30 minutes before you plan to cook.
- Always have on hand: heavy-duty grilling tongs and pot holders; a spatula; a long-handled basting brush; and a fire extinguisher.

- To speed up grilling time, partially precook ribs, chicken, and vegetables in the oven.
- When using skewers, cut your meat and vegetable pieces large enough so they won't fall into the fire.
- Baste often to prevent meats from drying out.
- Grilling fish? Some firmer varieties (tuna or salmon) can be placed directly on the grill. More fragile fish should be cooked in a grilling basket or wrapped in foil. Skewer shrimp so they won't fall through the grill.
- To avoid cross-contamination of food, place grilled food on a clean plate—not the one used to hold raw meat.
- If you're new to grilling, invite a friend who's a barbecue pro to cohost your party. You'll learn the techniques as she or he does most of the cooking!

**A tip from the pros:** It takes about 10 minutes to grill a medium-rare steak, a well-done hamburger, or a boneless chicken breast, turning each once.



### THE PERFECT COMBINATION

Above: When grilling meat and vegetables together, remember that poultry and thicker vegetables, like potatoes, often take longer to cook than steaks and peppers. Right: Denise and her mom, Jean, used affordable, attractive wicker paper-plate holders to keep their meals balanced on their laps.





## Peach Sangria

### SERVES 8

Next to a little salsa music, this sangria is sure to get your party started. You'll need:

- 1 bottle white wine, chilled
- 1 cup peach juice
- 1 cup peach brandy
- 1 bottle sparkling apple cider
- 4 cups sliced fruit, such as peaches, green grapes, and berries

**To make:** Combine ingredients in a pitcher, refrigerate for 30 minutes, then serve cold. Garnish each serving with additional slices of fresh fruit.

## Flavored Ice Cubes

These tasty ice cubes perk up water, iced tea, and lemonade. **To make:** Place berries in ice cube trays, and fill halfway with fruit juice. Freeze until firm. Top off with additional juice, and freeze again until firm.



**JUST DESSERTS** Along with the individual chocolate icebox cakes, guests were treated to two family favorites: frozen strawberry shortcake and peach cobbler. The shortcake simply called for store-bought pound cake filled with strawberry ice cream and fresh berries and drizzled with seedless strawberry jam. The cobbler was topped with sugared biscuits.

