

A better barbecue

Go on, have a burger!
With *Zest's* food expert
Alison Clarkson's crafty
recipes, you can enjoy
a summer barbecue
without worrying about
piling on the pounds

PHOTOGRAPHS CRISTIAN BARNETT

When I was battling with my weight, I always found barbecues a struggle. I'd start the afternoon full of good intentions, but it would soon become clear that it required a stronger woman than me to resist the delicious char-grilled smells wafting around the garden.

It was a familiar pattern. The challenge would start with the crisps and dips while the barbecue was being fired up. Then came the temptation from the endless stream of meat, fish and vegetables marinated in exotic concoctions – I felt left out if I didn't try them all... Throw in all the bread, olives, dressed salads, pasta salads, relishes and chutneys there were to pick at, plus a few glasses of Pimms, and by the time the sun went down, I'd polished off more than I could keep track of.

A few years ago, I decided enough was enough. Although I had managed to lose 4st by then and had a new figure to show off (no more big kaftans for me!), frequent garden get-togethers were definitely having an adverse effect on the size of my bottom. Every now and again, the new, slim me would encounter a situation I hadn't dealt with before and I'd find myself slipping back into my old

eating habits – and barbecues were definitely one of those triggers. As all hope of looking presentable in a bikini seemed to be drifting over the horizon once again, I decided I needed to find a new way of enjoying barbecue season with my friends.

Although I conjure up the recipes, the 'barbie' is very much the domain of my husband – so any changes had to be approved by him. So we decided that rather than serving food off the coals, as and when it was ready, we'd cook the whole lot at once, then sit everyone around the picnic table to eat together. This limits the potential for grazing throughout the afternoon, as you're eating from a plate rather than absent-mindedly picking up a chicken leg here



The challenge

The sun is shining, so it's time to get the barbecue out! But with so many treats to graze on once the charcoal is lit, it's all too easy to load up on calories without realising it. Add a couple of glasses of chilled wine, and your resolve is even more likely to crumble! Luckily, my Better Barbecue recipes are full of crafty changes, so even second helpings won't ruin your figure for summer. Have fun!

Alison

and there, but still keeps the fun and friendly atmosphere. Perfect!

My second tactic was to create recipes that were lighter on calories, but wouldn't leave my guests feeling short changed. Of course, you could opt for skinless

chicken and virtuous tofu, but I wanted my friends to come back! A barbecue just isn't a barbecue without burgers – and because my husband considers himself to be a burger connoisseur, I had a particularly tough challenge. But I knew I'd hit on the perfect recipe with my Brilliant Burgers when he didn't notice the difference between my leaner recipe and more fatty versions. I combine equal quantities of borlotti beans and extra-lean beef mince to halve the saturated fat content, but because the beans have a lovely nutty flavour and a good firm texture, you can sneak them in without guests being any the wiser. Adding a generous slug of Worcestershire sauce and a good dollop of mustard gives extra depth to the flavours, which are all enhanced when the food is cooked in the smoke of a barbecue.

The classic accompaniment to char-grilled meats is creamy potato salad smothered with lashings of mayonnaise. My version has a thick dressing with all the creaminess, but the addition of low-fat yogurt means it's not as heavy on your hips. I use the same dressing to make a tasty coleslaw, too. And don't forget to offer plenty of vegetable side dishes. No worthy carrot or cucumber sticks, though! I go for griddled asparagus dressed with lemon and low-fat Greek yogurt, charred peppers topped with (not too oily) olive tapenade and roasted sweet onions drizzled with balsamic syrup. So, go on, invite your friends over for the bank-holiday weekend, dust off the barbie, and get grilling, safe in the knowledge it won't result in shopping for a large kaftan afterwards. Just remember to go easy on the Pimms!

“Why opt for skinless chicken and virtuous tofu when you can have brilliant burgers?”

Clever potato salad

My potato salad tastes just as creamy and indulgent as more calorific versions, but a few crafty swaps means it contains hardly any fat.

SERVES 4

PREPARATION TIME 5 minutes

COOKING TIME 10 minutes

PER SERVING 81 calories, 1g fat (0.5g sat fat)

- 400g salad potatoes, such as Charlotte or Anya
- 2 spring onions finely sliced
- 2tsp extra-light mayonnaise
- 2tsp low-fat natural yogurt
- 1tsp red wine vinegar
- 2tsp capers, rinsed and chopped

1 Quarter the potatoes and put into a pan of water, bring to boiling point and simmer for 8 to 10 minutes until they are cooked through. Drain and cool a little.

2 Mix together all the other ingredients, then pour the dressing over the cooked potatoes, season and stir thoroughly but gently so you don't break them up. Serve warm or cold as an accompaniment to summer dishes. →

Charlotte potatoes have a creamy flavour, or use Anya for a more nutty taste.

Extra-light mayo has about 6% fat compared with the whopping 70% to 80% in standard mayo, but it can't be called low fat because technically it's still too high. Mixing it with the same amount of low-fat yogurt reduces the fat content even more, but keeps the creamy taste.

Keeping the potato skins on retains more nutrients and flavour.



Crafty Cook's sneaky tip...
Use the potato salad dressing to make a fab coleslaw with shredded carrot, white cabbage and onion.



Crafty Cook's seasonal favourite

TOMATOES

Whether they're for a spicy salsa to add to your burger or a simple tomato salad, British tomatoes are at their best right now. As well as being rich in vitamin C, they are packed full of the antioxidant lycopene, which is thought to help reduce the risk of cancer, while some studies suggest it can help keep wrinkles at bay by protecting against the damaging effects of UV rays.

Even better is that tomatoes are good for you whether you have them raw in a salad, or cooked in a soup – but your body absorbs the lycopene in tomatoes more readily if they've been cooked.

Most supermarkets stock British-grown tomatoes at this time of year – fewer food miles means a swifter journey from plant to plate, so they'll be richer in vitamin C, which starts to deteriorate quickly after picking. Opt for a mix of what's on offer – a tomato salad made with sweet red cherries, slices of chunky beef tomatoes, baby plums, tasty yellows and even stripy ones makes a pretty and tasty dish.

Tomatoes are also easy to grow as they thrive in pots or grow-bags. Most of the varieties stocked in supermarkets are chosen for their uniform shape, ability to keep well and stay firm – flavour is often quite low down on the list of priorities. So choose old-fashioned varieties, which you can't find on supermarket shelves, such as the elongated Green Sausage, the flavour-packed Brandywine, and the unusual mahogany fruits of Black Russian (available from www.thompson-morgan.com), and you'll be amazed at how 'tomatoey' they taste and smell. One last tip – never keep them in the fridge; it makes them lose all their flavour.

Brilliant burger

This tasty burger replaces half the mince with borlotti beans, so you cut down on saturated fat, while getting extra fibre. But the lovely texture and flavour of the beans mean no one else will notice, I promise!

SERVES 4

PREPARATION TIME 10 minutes, plus 20 minutes chilling

COOKING TIME 10 minutes

PER SERVING 398 calories, 11g fat (3.5g sat fat)

- 1 small onion, grated
- 250g borlotti beans
- 250g extra-lean beef mince
- 1tsp, heaped, wholegrain mustard
- dash of Worcestershire sauce
- 4 soft bread rolls

Mixing lean mince with an equal amount of beans halves the saturated fat content.

Standard mince contains 20% fat on average, but extra-lean mince has less than 5%.

Stick to traditional soft baps. They're a bit lower in calories and contain just 1% fat versus 3% to 5% in a ciabatta roll.





Healthy dips

Your pre-barbecue snacks sorted!

BEST FOR... CREAMINESS

Tesco Light Choices Sour Cream & Chive Dip, 88p for 200g



Low-fat sour cream is the secret ingredient in this dip, and it's hard to tell the difference between it and its more calorific counterpart.

BEST FOR... NO ADDITIVES

Marks & Spencer Butternut & Chilli, £1.19, 170g

Made with roasted butternut squash and topped with a dollop of red pepper and harissa chilli, this dip is full of flavour without being too spicy.



BEST FOR... FLAVOUR

Sainsbury's Be Good To Yourself Lemon & Coriander Houmous, £1.19 for 200g



This dip contains 50% less fat than Sainsbury's standard version, and has just 74 calories per quarter pot.

BEST FOR... LOW CAL

Morrisons Eat Smart Onion, Garlic & Herb Dip, 75p for 170g

You won't be disappointed by this one's flavour. Low in sugar, calories and fat, it's ideal for barbecue dipping.




BEST FOR... LOW FAT

Asda Spicy Salsa, 88p for 200g



Spice lovers will appreciate the added Jalapeno peppers and chilli in Asda's salsa. Ideal for dipping, a whole tub accounts for only 1g of your daily fat allowance!

- 1 In a bowl, roughly mash together the grated onion and the borlotti beans using a fork.
- 2 Add in the mince, mustard and Worcestershire sauce, mix together thoroughly and season. Use your hands to squidge everything together.
- 3 Divide the mixture into four balls of equal size and shape them into burgers, pressing them together so they don't break up when cooked.
- 4 Cover them in clingfilm and leave to rest in the fridge for 20 minutes. Cook on a hot barbecue or grill for about 5 minutes on each side. Serve each burger in a toasted bun with salad and salsa. 

Crafty Cook's sneaky tip...

Serve with salsa rather than cheese to save 80 calories. Ditching the top of the bun saves another 110 calories.

For added kick, dollop in more mustard.