

WASHINGTON, D.C.

pit stop

Keep your grill in top shape with these **maintenance tips from Doug Halo**, champion griller and organizer of the National Capital Barbecue Battle (*June 26–27, bbqdc.com*). —JENNIFER CHEN

NEVADA

BACKWARD BURGER FLIP

Show off with this trick from Joshua Nemerow, flair bartender at Harrah's Las Vegas.

STEP 1 Set a raw patty on the edge of a spatula. A thicker shape is more likely to hold its form in the dismount.

STEP 2 Hold the spatula upright while facing your audience with the grill behind you (careful!). Quickly bend your elbow upward and back, aiming for the grate as you flip the burger over your shoulder. Start with as direct a path as possible, working your arm up to add height.

Steam-clean the grate. For a gas grill, heat to 350°, then turn off the gas and mist the grate with water using a spray bottle. Scrape it with a wire brush, then a damp (just water, no detergent) rag. For a charcoal grill, remove the grate from the base before cleaning. Brush it very lightly with vegetable oil before cooking.



tip

Read the grill marks on meat and note where cold zones occur (usually around burner borders); adjust by making sure there's no buildup on the grate or by moving meat to hotter areas.

Test the flame strength.

Turn your flame up high and check the color: Blue is ideal, but if yours is more yellow, there may be too much air seeping in, which can require longer grill times, Halo says. To adjust, clean the pinholes (the small holes where the flame comes out) with a wire brush or small pin. If you still see yellow next time you grill, you may need to replace the old burners.

Keep the grease trap in check. Since any buildup can cause a fire, use a screwdriver to keep the grease hole open, and be sure to clean the trap after the grill (and the fat stored in the trap) cools.

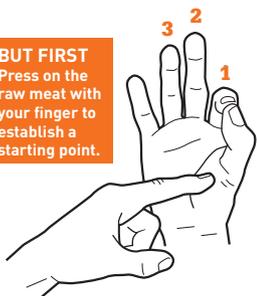
Check the propane level. Before you grill, use this test: Pour warm water down the side of the tank—the part that feels cold is probably still filled with fuel.

MISSISSIPPI

Get in touch with your meat to test if it's done, says C. Clark "Smoky" Hale, a grilling expert based in McComb.

- 1 MEDIUM-RARE** The meat's surface will feel squishy (similar to the way your hand feels in position 1, shown left).
- 2 MEDIUM** The surface will feel firmer and won't give as much. [Switch to finger 2 for a similar feeling.]
- 3 WELL** The meat will feel firm and bounce back when you apply pressure. [Switch to finger 3.]

BUT FIRST Press on the raw meat with your finger to establish a starting point.



INDIANA

Hitting the Nascar Brickyard 400 race in Indianapolis on July 25? Let your food do some of the rooting: At the tailgate, brand your burger bun using metal cookie cutters shaped like your driver's number. Place them cutting side down on your grill for a minute, then, using an oven mitt, press them lightly into either side of the bun.

GRILL COURTESY OF WEBER. ILLUSTRATIONS BY RYUMI.