

The Hamburger

Forming Patties

Many recipes caution that over-handling ground beef will make hamburgers tough. The key is to handle the ground beef just enough to shape it without compressing it like a meatball, and without melting the fat with the heat of your hands. If you prefer, you can use a jar lid.

My ideal hamburger is 1/3 pound of meat (about 5 ounces) shaped into a uniform disk about 1 inch thick. I make it wide enough to fit within the bun, roughly 5 inches. I also use my thumbs to make a shallow well in the center, which helps keep the patty flat as it cooks instead of forming a dome in the middle.

The Lean Factor

Every cut of grass-fed beef is more susceptible to overcooking simply because it is extra-lean. Ground beef from pasture-raised animals is typically 85 percent to 90 percent lean, far less fatty than the 70 percent lean meat many burger connoisseurs recommend. Less fat means that there's less insulation to protect the proteins and baste the meat internally. (I had a little bit of olive oil, salt and pepper.)

Grilling

Place the patties on a well-scraped and -oiled grate on the hottest part of the grill (preheated to 425 to 450 degrees). Then stand by for 3 1/2 minutes. (If you need to multitask, set a timer.) During this time do not touch the hamburgers -- and never press them, which only expels precious juices. After flipping them, the burgers cook another 3 1/2 minutes.

If anyone likes their burger beyond medium-rare, I slide it to the coolest part of the grill, close the cover, and wait 3 to 5 minutes more. (This is also when I add and melt the cheese for cheeseburgers.)

Give the burgers a rest in a warm spot for a good five minutes, just like a steak. This small window of time allows the hot juices drawn to the middle of the burger to flow back into the periphery and completes the cooking.

It's also the most convenient time to toast the buns and get all the toppings ready to enjoy the best hamburger you'll ever have.

Recipe by Lynn S. Curry