Grilling season is here. Nothing tastes as good as a steak or salmon fillet right off the grill. But if your grill is so dirty that you are questioning its food safety, now is the time to act. By cleaning it regularly and maintaining it properly, you’ll get the most out of your grill and lengthen its life.

When grease and burned food build up on the grill racks over time, it can change the flavor of your food. But the most important concern is that the food left on the grates could harbor harmful bacteria that can invade the new foods you are cooking.

It doesn’t matter if you are a charcoal grill fan or if you prefer a gas grill, cleaning is important to both food safety and the life of the grill. Not having to replace that grill will save you money in the long run.

Make sure your charcoal grill is completely cool before cleaning. Remove grates and place them on old newspaper to catch any drips. Spray them heavily with oven cleaner and let the grease and residue soften. Take a moment and spray the lid of the grill with the oven cleaner.

Clean out the ashes in the bottom of the grill. Some grills have an ash collector, so be sure to dump this as well. Make a dish soap and water solution and clean the outside of the grill.

After the oven cleaner has had enough time to soak in, use a paper towel to remove the oven cleaner from the grates. I often use wadded up newspaper to get the majority of the gunk off, finishing up with paper towels. Be sure to use a final water rinse on the grills to remove all the oven cleaner residue. If you sprayed the lid, wipe down the lid and rinse the cleaner residue.

If you have a bit more time, place grill grates in a large garbage bag. Pour a cup of ammonia over the grate and seal it up. Let it set for 24 to 48 hours. Open it up and use an old sponge to clean up the gunk. It is a little slower, but works well. Again, be sure to use a final water rinse after cleaning to get rid of any residue left behind.
Wipe down everything and dry grills before reassembling.

The procedures for a gas grill are a little different. In fact, heat is your friend in easy cleaning of the grill.

Turn the lit grill on high and shut the lid for 10 to 15 minutes. Let it cool just a little and use your wire brush to clean up the grates. Not only will that prevent sticking, but it will also help avoid flare-ups when grilling. If the grills are still very grubby, use one of the above methods to clean the grill grates.

When the grill is completely cool, clean both the inside and the outside with warm water that has a little dish soap in it. Rinse the surface with clean water and dry it off.

Clean up your grill before your next cookout and you’ll save time and money, and your foods will retain their natural tastes.

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