



The Art of Wood-Fire Grilling The Basics

“Nothing is like grilling over wood... ‘Overtly or secretly, everyone wants to grill on wood. It’s the real thing.’” – The New York Times

Wood is the oldest grilling fuel and remains an excellent source because it enhances the natural flavors of food. But it requires practice and it’s advisable to let the wood burn down to hot embers before placing meat or fish on the grill.

Hard woods – like the oak used by Red Lobster – give the best results, because soft resinous woods produce a black, stronger smoke. Red Lobster’s research shows that wood-fire grilling is the most preferred method of preparation out of more than 15 surveyed, especially for fresh fish, shellfish, chicken and steak, because of the delicious flavor it imparts.

Fresh Wood-Fire Grilled Seafood...

Red Lobster is offering wood-fire grilling for many different species of fish, from salmon to cod to mahi-mahi to shellfish. The goal is to give guests a consistently high culinary experience that reflects the “art” of wood-fire grilling in America’s favorite seafood restaurant. Red Lobster’s new menu offers 14 Wood-Fire Grilled menu items, eight of which are new items, such as Peach Bourbon BBQ Shrimp & Scallops, Wood-Grilled Lobster, Shrimp & Scallops and Wood-Grilled Sirloin & Shrimp. Guests can also choose “wood-grilled” as a preparation for any of the five to eight daily fresh fish species available on Red Lobster’s “Today’s Fresh Fish” menu.

Our Grill Masters...

Approximately 3,500 employees have been trained and certified as Grill Masters for the roll-out of the Wood-Fire Grill initiative. Every Grill Master must complete certification by undergoing training, testing and validation. In each restaurant a Certified Grill Master will be the only employee to work the grill. Every restaurant across North America will have four to five Certified Grill Masters on staff. The menu will showcase the name of the Certified Grill Master each day. Specifically, Certified Grill Masters will:

- Demonstrate a high level of grilling expertise by properly cooking every grilled item Red Lobster serves
- Have a clear understanding of proper grilling techniques including seasoning, glazing and cross hatching
- Demonstrate proper wood grill maintenance, cleaning and safety procedures

- Be on duty at all times at each Red Lobster

Our Servers...

Red Lobster developed and implemented an ongoing training program for all servers, ensuring that they are true seafood experts. This program includes in-person, video and online training and regular testing and certification to guarantee that they maintain current knowledge. The content ranges from how to crack a lobster to information on the benefits of Omega 3 fatty acids in seafood.

The company also supported each server with more information about seafood than they have ever had before. This includes constantly updated materials and a new Seafood Expert encyclopedia – an interactive proprietary tool that allows Red Lobster servers to look up information, anytime a guest may have a question. .

Our Grills...

Red Lobster retrofitted 680 restaurant kitchens with wood-fire assist grills, with particular attention given to the grates – the width of the bars, sturdiness, durability and ease of cleaning.

- Oak logs are used in the grills; Red Lobster soaks the oak logs overnight before placing them on the grill
- High flames are not conducive for wood-fire grilling. Instead the Certified Grill Master must manage the burning logs as an even heat, using cross-hatching – typically recognized by diagonal grill marks - to know when meat and seafood need to be flipped

Our Brand...

Red Lobster is in the midst of a three-phased plan to grow profitably and sustainably. The first phase was to strengthen the fundamentals by focusing on getting the right team in place and following the operating principle of running “Fresh, Clean, Friendly and Full” restaurants. These initiatives resulted in record guest satisfaction scores and record sales. Now, the company is concentrating on refreshing the brand by fulfilling our guests’ craving for a refreshing seaside dining experience through:

- Fresh seafood prepared with culinary expertise
- Clean, comfortable restaurants that take their minds to the coast
- Friendly and attentive service that lets them relax and reconnect with family and friends

The third phase of the plan is to grow new units, which will begin later this year.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What are the number of grills and people trained?

A: We retrofitted 680 restaurants with the wood-fire assisted grills and trained more than 3,500 people (four to five per restaurant) across the nation to become Certified Grill Masters. We also developed and implemented an ongoing training program for all servers to certify that they are true seafood experts.

Q. Where does this launch fall in terms of rolling out various seafood programs in the brand's history?

A: This is a culinary milestone for Red Lobster; it is the most comprehensive culinary change in our brand's history.

Q: How can you execute the “art” of Wood-Fire Grilling across 680 restaurants?

A: We brought Senior Executive Chef Michael LaDuke and his culinary team on board three years ago to raise Red Lobster's level of culinary expertise. Our guests tell us they are delivering on that promise already and our guest satisfaction scores continue to rise each year. We've developed an extensive training program for all of our Certified Grill Masters and will continue to enhance their training and understanding of the “art” of wood-fire grilling.

Q: How do you know this is what your guests will want?

A: We conducted extensive research through focus groups and reviewed guest reactions at 36 restaurants serving wood-fire grilled menu items for more than a year. Consistently, grilled and wood grilled ranked as the preferred method, out of more than 15 choices, for fresh fish and shellfish as well as chicken and steak.

Q: Others offer wood-fire grilling. Why did you take so long?

A: Historically Red Lobster has been the leader in bringing innovative and original preparations of seafood to America. No other seafood restaurant has similar scope in terms of guests and number of restaurants to do that. As the leader in our category, Red Lobster has the responsibility to be sure we got wood-fire grilling absolutely right from a culinary, operations and service perspective before we rolled it out to 680 restaurants across North America.

Q: What's next?

A: We are continuing to enhance the dining experience for our guests. We've already changed touch points in our restaurant, including new plateware and silverware, and consumers can get recipes and seafood tips on Red Lobster's newly designed web site. The company has also unveiled a new restaurant design inspired by Bar Harbor, Maine. In coming months, guests will see other initiatives from Red Lobster as it continues to set the standard in seafood and full-service casual dining.

Five Facts About Wood-Fire Grilling

1) Does wood grilling actually make food taste different?

Yes. The hard wood, oak, provides a crisp, clean flavor that enhances the natural flavor of the food.

2) How do I pick the right fish?

Some fresh fish work better than others on the grill. Here are the basics:

- **Thick steaks**, such as mahi-mahi, salmon and tuna fare well on a grill but don't discount whole fish like trout, red snapper, striped bass and bluefish.
- **Tender fillets** like sole, catfish, flounder and tilapia don't do as well on a grill, because they tend to break up and fall through the grate. You can grill more fragile fish in a foil packet or using a wire fish basket.

3) How do I prepare/season the fish?

- Before igniting the grill, make sure it's clean. You also may want to brush the grill grate with a light coat of oil or nonstick cooking spray to prevent fish from sticking.
- If you're going to use a marinade or sauce, soak the fish for approximately two hours to infuse it with the flavor. Be careful when selecting the marinade, because a marinade heavy with sugar can cause the fish to stick to the grill as the sugar caramelizes. Before putting it on the grill, drain off the excess marinade or sauce and pat the fish dry.
- While cooking, you can baste the fish with the marinade or sauce to create a deep, rich glaze, but make sure to avoid using the marinade or sauce the fish was soaking in, as it can contain bacteria. Instead, set aside some extra marinade or sauce for basting.
- Another way to season the fish is to brush it with a light coat of olive oil and then add your favorite seasonings. Try using black pepper, sea salt and a touch of lime juice. For a more intense flavor, add ground celery seeds, crushed capers, garlic, marjoram and thyme. Grill half a lemon and squeeze the juice on the fish just before serving.

4) What do I watch for when cooking seafood on the grill?

- The grill should be hot enough so that the fish sizzles when you put it on the grill. Fish cooks fast, so make sure you keep an eye on it. Cook it until it's about 80 percent done, and then use a wide spatula to turn over each fillet. Remove the fish from the grill when it's medium-rare because it will continue to cook as it rests.
- To grill shrimp, place them on a skewer, side by side. Watch them closely, because they will cook quickly. To grill scallops, place them on a skewer with the flat side up. This allows them to pick up more flavors from the grill.
- Shellfish, such as oysters, mussels and clams, cook even faster than fish. To grill them, place them in a wire basket on the hottest part of the grill. They're done when the shell opens up.

5) How do I know when my food is done?

Touch the fish. If it feels:

- **Squishy** — it's still raw in the center
- **Soft and yielding** — it's rare
- **Gently yielding** — it's medium-rare
- **Firmly yielding** — it's medium
- **Firm** — it's well done

The basic rule to remember is to cook fish eight minutes per inch of thickness, or 10 minutes per inch if it's a whole fish. Check it two minutes before you think it should be done, keeping in mind that everything will continue cooking for a few minutes after it leaves the grill. Fish is best when it just starts to flake off with a fork.