

# Choice Cuts



Steaks of another sort bring rich flavor but lower cost on the Fourth

By **Amelia Levin** | SPECIAL TO TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

The Fourth of July's grill fests often include the usual suspects when it comes to steak: fillets, strips and sirloins. While those standbys are fine, your local butcher or favorite chef will let you in on some other goodies for the grill that are anything but usual.

Take hanger steak. Chef Rick Tramonto, author of the recently released "Steak With Friends" cookbook, prefers the richness and tenderness of that cut, which "hangs" from the diaphragm of the animal. A less expensive cut, it is popular among butchers and chefs, so it may be hard to find, Tramonto said. You may have to call ahead to order.

Hanger steak, or hanging tender, as it often is called, can have an oblong shape with varying degrees of thickness. Tramonto suggested pounding the steak three or four times to create uniformity and tenderize it slightly. He likes marinating the steak in balsamic vinegar or another acid for six to 24 hours before searing quickly on a high-heat grill.

"I like balsamic vinegar as a marinade because it breaks down tissues well, and it brings in a sweetness," Tramonto said.

Stanley Lobel, a fourth-generation butcher and president of Lobel's of New York, a century-old butcher shop, likes the richness of hanger steak so much that he even grinds it with regular chuck meat to perk up burgers. (Note: Many butchers will grind different cuts fresh for burgers upon request.)

When using it as a steak, "it's important to ask your butcher to remove the large vein running through the cut, which can be very chewy and interfere with the whole steak-eating experience," Lobel said.

The flat-iron, from the shoulder, is another lesser-known cut that has become trendy in the last few years, thanks to a lingering economic recession. Weighing 2 to 3 pounds, the steak, once marinated, cooked on a hot grill and sliced against the grain, can feed up to eight people for a better bang for your buck. That's great for Tramonto, whose three hungry teenage boys have been driving most of his shopping decisions as of late.

Leaner cuts include the tri-tip, a triangular cut weighing in at 2 or more pounds (from the upper part of the animal toward the rear, or round). As more consumers look to trim their waistlines, its popularity has grown across the country, Lobel said.

For some leaner cuts, such as the tri-tip or the flank steak (part of the inside skirt), cooking hot and fast is the key, Tramonto said. "You still need a clean, hot grill that's well-oiled to start with. Then, let it sear, close the hood and let it caramelize. You should only have to turn it once, maybe twice if it's a bigger cut."

Other lean cuts require just the opposite — longer, more indirect cooking. Brisket, once thought of as a braising-only chunk of meat because of its toughness, also makes a good daylong barbecuing steak when cooked at lower temperatures.

When in doubt about what cuts to grill, just ask questions, Lobel said.

"Don't be afraid to have your butcher do things for you, or make recommendations," he said. "Even if you're at a grocery store, knock on the window and ask the person inside to remove that vein, or grind something fresh for you."

Tramonto agreed. Just like

the farm-to-table movement, it's also time to get back to basics when it comes to meat, and that means seeking out local butchers and finding those who really care about the meat they serve and sell.

And then, when it's time to grill, Tramonto suggests, "just leave the steak alone. Put it on the grill, close the hood and let it do its thing."

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When grilling any cut of steak, try not to turn it too often.

# Grilling unusual cuts

Butcher Stanley Lobel and chef Rick Tramonto shared some of their suggestions for less familiar cuts for grilling:

NAME	COW PART	COOKING INSTRUCTIONS
Hanger	Upper skirt/diaphragm	Pound 3-4 times to uniform thickness; marinate 3 hours to overnight; cook 2 minutes per side on a well-oiled, hot grill; let rest 5 minutes before serving.
Flat-iron	Shoulder plate	Marinate 1-2 hours (optional); season with salt, pepper and/or spice rub; cook 2-3 minutes per side on a well-oiled, hot grill; let rest 5 minutes; slice against the grain.
Flank	Inner skirt	Marinate 6 hours to overnight; season with salt and pepper; cook 2-3 minutes per side on a well-oiled, hot grill; let rest 5 minutes; slice against the grain.
Tri-tip	Bottom sirloin	Marinate or rub with seasoning spices; cook over direct, high heat 3-5 minutes; flip, cook 5 minutes (6-10 minutes total). Or cook slower, over medium-high heat, covered about 20 minutes total, flipping once. Let steak rest 10 minutes. Cut steak into a diagonal along the divide separating the two sides with varying grain direction; slice each against the grain.
Brisket	Breast or lower chest	Marinate 12 hours or rub with seasoning spices 30 minutes before cooking; cook, fat side up to start, over indirect heat (225 degrees or lower) 2-3 hours (about 1 hour per pound), or until temperature reaches desired doneness, turning once. Let rest 15 to 20 minutes; slice against the grain.

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