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Just in time for Memorial Day: grilling tips from Chicago's top steak chefs

By Metromix and Chicago Tribune staffs

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As we're occasionally reminded by a gravelly voiced commercial pitchman: beef, it's what's for dinner.

And as we've recently been reminded after consulting our checking accounts: beef, it's one of the few small luxuries we can still afford.

There's no better time to indulge than this weekend. With Memorial Day a right around the corner, the unofficial start to grilling season is upon us. And if you're to believe the headlines, there's a glimmer of economic hope on the horizon. (Sometime near the end of grilling season, so best to act now.) Whether you're doing the grilling in your back yard or letting a professional do it for you in a restaurant, you'll want to make sure you spend your money wisely.

We asked three Chicago chefs who know a thing or two about steaks to stop by the Tribune offices, share some tips and grill some steaks (they all grilled bone-in rib eyes). Here's what we found.

Rick Gresh, 33, executive chef at [David Burke's Primehouse](#)

Best steak he's ever ordered

A 40-day dry-aged wagyu New York Strip at Craftsteak New York. "It was just one of those steaks that had a ton of flavor. It was super-rich. it brought every bit of the wagyu."

Orders that make his eyes roll

"Anytime someone orders a 75-day rib eye extra well done. It's a piece of meat that's been aging for nearly three months developing all this flavor and you cook the living [heck] out of it. You might as well not order that piece of meat."

Thoughts on steak sauce

"It has its place. It's up to the individual. I'm more of a fan of a bearnaise or one of our mousses. We offer a couple steak sauces. It's more just as a service. Not everyone wants it."

What to drink

"A big red wine. There's always the classic pairing of a [cabernet sauvignon] or a syrah. With some of our extra-aged steaks, pinot noir goes really well. Or a really hoppy beer."

What to do with steak leftovers

"Don't try to reheat it and eat it like a steak. Cut it up into smaller pieces and put it in a pasta, risotto or stir-fry. You usually don't have enough for a full meal, so you can stretch it by putting it in other dishes."

What he grilled

A prime 55-day dry-aged bone-in rib eye

Preparation

Seasoned with kosher salt and ground black pepper before grilling. Brushed liberally with the restaurant's own "beef love" (rendered dry-aged fat, garlic, thyme, peppercorn, parsley stems and bay leaf) while on the grill.

Tasting notes

Kathleen Pratt, Metromix dining producer

The complex, earthy flavors that dry aging brings out had me swooning. This is the kind of meat I want my server to set in front of me when I go out and pay top dollar for a restaurant steak. The extra layer of richness the brushed-on "beef love" added really put this one over the top.

Kevin Pang, Tribune staff writer

The dry aging process makes the beef remarkably tender, about one level removed from fork tender. It also gives it a natural truffle-like hint in the meat. Love the garlicky, fatty "beef love" that the chef bastes the steak with.

Monica Eng, Tribune staff writer

This steak was well cooked and simply presented to really bring out the woody, mushroomy and earthy flavors that develop with the dry aging. As far as steak flavor and character, this was the best tasting steak of the bunch.

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