

## [How to Choose a Barbecue](#)

Choosing a barbecue means spending money on something that you are going to be using on a fairly regular basis with high expectations for the end result. So it's important to make the right decisions early on in order to avoid disappointments later.

### Not All Barbecues are the Same

In fact, if you are relatively new to them, you could be forgiven for thinking that there is a bewildering array of all shapes and sizes, each with its own particular features and, in some cases, eccentricities. But the truth is that, when you get right down to it, there are really only two basic designs; the flat, grill type, which cooks food by the application of direct, and the round kettle as designed by Weber that cooks food by utilizing both direct and indirect heat sources.

The hybrid version of the barbecue grill that also has a hood is still only a flatbed with a hood. It is the positioning of the heat source that makes the true difference between the two types. Let's look at them separately.

### Barbecue Grills

These range from small single burners to massive ranges designed to cater for parties of a hundred or more. They may be square, round, oval or any other shape. Their distinguishing feature is that, without exception, food is cooked by being placed directly over the heat source, whether that be charcoal, gas or (more rarely) electricity.

This makes them ideal for cooking large quantities of steak, sausage, hamburger, chicken wings or anything else that you would normally grill. Ideally the food is cooked on a hot plate placed over the heat to avoid flare-ups. This is particularly important when cooking with the hood closed, where one is fitted, since the oily smoke produced from burning grease can often taint the food, making it unpleasant to eat.

Charcoal burning versions are relatively high maintenance, and you may find, if you buy one, that you use it less and less simply because of the work involved in preparing it and cleaning it after use. They can also become expensive since cheaper versions are prone to rust and grill bars, in particular, may need to be replaced on a regular basis.

Using them as an oven is not always satisfactory. Inexpensive models tend to have hoods made of thin metal that fail to hold the steady temperature necessary for good results. Also the direct heat tends to give very uneven results, although in the more expensive models this is often overcome with the addition of a fan, as in conventional ovens.

### Round Kettles

The kettle barbecue is almost synonymous with the brand name Weber, the company that designed and introduced them to a skeptical public some time in the 1950s. They were not an instant success, largely due to the radical design, but quickly gained popularity once the results being produced by them became more widely known.

The key to a kettle barbecue is its roundness, which assists in the circulation of hot air that in turn ensures even cooking of any food placed in it. Coupled with an indirect heat source (the charcoal or burners are placed at the edge of the kettle) this convection causes meat to cook in its own fats and flavors, greatly enriching the end result. And it is this combination of shape and indirect heat that gives the meat its authentic barbecue flavor, regardless of whether charcoal or gas is used.

As an outdoor oven for roasting meat the kettle barbecue has no serious rivals. It does not fare quite so well as a grill, mainly because of its size and shape. Put six medium sized steaks on the grill of a normal, family-sized kettle and it is full to capacity. Direct heat will be needed and this can only really be applied to the center of the grill, owing to the design of the fire baskets or gas burners. In any case a grill plate will be necessary, as in the case of a flatbed barbecue, in order to avoid flare-ups and that, too, will limit how much food can be cooked at one time.

### Conclusions

For a family barbecue, the kettle wins hands down for both economy of purchase and satisfaction in use. What is important is to buy one that is fitted with a stainless steel grill, fittings for indirect heating (these can often be bought separately) and some form of ash catcher. You would be wise, also, to ensure that your barbecue is coated with porcelain or vitreous enamel and that the kettle itself is made from heavy gauge metal.

If you intend to do a lot of entertaining, on the other hand, then the flatbed grill is for you, providing you are willing to accept a certain loss of cooking quality as far as roasting meat goes. Even the hybrids will not give you the same results as a good quality kettle.

In terms of quality, the similar comments apply as for the kettle. A thin hood is worse than useless and should be either of heavy gauge steel, or at least coated with vitreous enamel or porcelain. The grill bars need to be of stainless steel, unless you are content to change them each year for new or spend considerable time in maintenance.

Of course, if you don't suffer from either space or budget constraints, the ideal setup would be to have both in much the same way as you already have in your kitchen. In fact, that is a very good way of looking at your outdoor cooking arrangements. If you use a flatbed grill in much the same way as you do your stove, and the kettle as you would an oven, you will have the best of both worlds, and many happy years of barbecuing ahead of you

### About the Author

Michael Sheridan - The Cool Cook - is a former head chef and an acknowledged authority and published writer on cooking matters. His website at All About Cooking, contains a wealth of information, hints, tips and recipes for busy home cooks, including video based how-to guides.

Source: <http://www.onlineearnings.net>