

WOODFIRED LIFE

MY CHURRASQUEIRA



You might be wondering what a Churrasqueira is. To clarify, it's not a Santa Maria grill or an asado-style grill. Instead, a Churrasqueira is a wood or charcoal brick grill that offers a unique approach to cooking food. It is simple to set up for both direct and indirect grilling, and it can be easily refueled with additional charcoal or wood.

In Brazil, a BBQ party is called a Churrasco, and meats are typically cooked using the Churrasqueira. Skewers—often rotating automatically or manually—are commonly used for grilling.

A variety of meats are grilled in the Churrasqueira, including traditional cuts like Picanha (top sirloin cap), sausages, chicken hearts, ribs, and pork. These meats are often marinated with salt, garlic, and herbs. No Churrasco would be complete without a caipirinha or beer, which are traditional beverages served at gatherings.

One of my favorite meats to grill is skirt steak; it only requires some salt and, of course, fire and smoke!





LEARNING FROM A PROFESSIONAL

In 2023, I traveled to Brazil with my family, and while at my aunt's home, we enjoyed an authentic Brazilian Churrasco prepared by a professional Churrasqueiro. In advance of my trip, my uncle had arranged for João, the churrasqueiro, to spend some time teaching me techniques used in Brazilian churrascos. I spent about two hours in a private lesson with him while cooking for my family. The menu included chicken, whole pineapple, picanha, sausages, chicken hearts and several cuts of meat – pork and beef, what a feast!



Brazilian music is always a good and almost mandatory accompaniment during a Churrasco, and throughout the day, we enjoyed wonderful Batucadas, Sambas, and Bossa Nova. My husband prepared the Caipirinhas, which my uncle had taught him how to make during our first trip together in 2008 after we visited a Cachaça distillery. Of course, we couldn't leave without making a stop at the distillery again.

When I returned home, I put all my new knowledge into practice. I am still in touch with João, and we exchange ideas and recipes when trying something new or after seeing an interesting recipe from each other on Instagram.

I am looking forward to returning and showing my family how much I have learned since we last met.

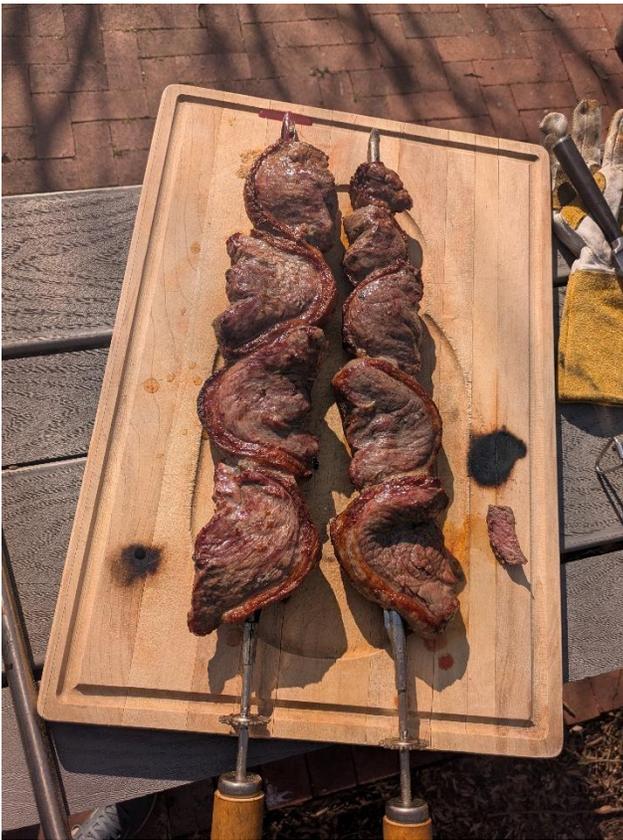


RECIPE

GRILLED PICANHA STEAKS

Recipe by: Vanessa Niño

Picanha, also known as rump cap, is renowned for its exceptional flavor, which is enhanced by the thick fat cap on one side. I recently found an excellent Picanha roast at a Brazilian store. Although the meat is sourced from Australia, this cut is authentically Brazilian, and the flavor is superb. It's best when simply seasoned with Kosher or Maldon salt, which accentuates its delicious taste. You will need skewers (or espetos in Portuguese) for this preparation.



INGREDIENTS

- 1 Picanha roast, sliced into 1.5-inch steaks (approximately 3.75 cm)
- Maldon salt, to taste

PREPARATION

1. Slice the Picanha roast into 1.5-inch steaks. Fold each steak in half into a C-shape with the fat side on the outside, then skewer it through the espeto (or skewer).
2. Fire up your grill and heat it to about 500°F (or 260°C).
3. Place the espeto on the grill and flip it every 2 to 3 minutes to ensure even cooking.
4. Cook to your desired temperature; I recommend medium-rare. Once done, remove the Picanha from the grill and allow it to rest before slicing.

For a more authentic serving, slice the meat directly off the skewer onto the plates.

When I prepare these in my wood-fired oven, I place them over coals, resting the espetos on bricks located towards the far side of the coals and near the door of my oven.