



Consumer Focus

► courtesy of **Cattlemen's Beef Board** and the **Beef Checkoff**

Tips for summer grilling

If you're looking for a quick, inexpensive and delicious meal option, choose ground beef. It is versatile and can be used in several different ways. Since it is available in several different varieties, you can select the type to be purchased according to how it will be cooked. All products labeled as ground beef are 100% beef and must contain no more than 30% fat.

Types available

Ground beef is available in several leanness levels ranging from 70% lean to more than 96% lean. Choose the leanness level according to how it will be cooked. For some foods, like burgers, any type of ground beef will work. For others, the Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB) recommends certain lean-to-fat ratios.

Regular ground beef (70%-77% lean)

Use this type for burgers and in recipes calling for browning (crumbles) like chili, tacos and spaghetti sauce. When properly cooked, it is moist and juicy.

Ground chuck (78%-84% lean)

This leanness level is ideal for meatloaf, meatballs and Salisbury steak because it holds its shape well during cooking. When properly cooked, it is moist, juicy and has a slightly firm texture.

Ground round (85%-89% lean), sirloin (90%-92% lean) or lean (93%-96%+ lean)

The highest leanness levels are ideal for recipes when you can't drain off drippings, such as casseroles or stuffed peppers. When properly cooked, they have a firm, dense texture.

Smart shopping

How much to buy?

One pound of ground beef will provide 12 ounces (oz.) of cooked beef — four 3-oz. cooked servings or patties, or about two cups cooked crumbles.

Color: Fresh ground beef goes through a number of color changes during its shelf life. These changes are normal, and the ground beef remains perfectly wholesome and safe to eat if purchased by the "sell by" date on the label. When exposed to oxygen, the color of beef will turn from dark red to a bright red. This explains why a package of ground beef may appear bright red on the surface, where it is exposed to oxygen through the permeable plastic wrap, while the interior remains purplish-red.

Storage: Ground beef is more perishable than steaks and roasts. This shorter shelf life is a result of the increased surface area that is created and exposed when beef is ground.

Refrigerate ground beef in the coldest section of the refrigerator. Use it within 1 to 2 days.

Freeze any ground beef that will not be used within 2 days. Label and date frozen ground beef and use it within 3 to 4 months.

To freeze ground beef patties conveniently: Shape patties and place in a single layer on a tray lined with waxed paper. Freeze just until firm, then immediately wrap and freeze completely. Patties can be tightly wrapped individually or grouped together in freezer bags.

Cooking tips

Handle ground beef gently. The secret to moist, flavorful burgers, meatloaves and meatballs is to mix lightly. Overmixing will

result in a firm, compact texture after cooking.

Don't press or pierce patties during cooking. Flavorful juices can be lost, resulting in dry burgers.

Brush brown or red sauces onto ground beef after cooking. Ketchup, Worcestershire, soy and barbecue sauces can change the color of ground beef, making it difficult to judge doneness by appearance.

Season patties and crumbles with salt after cooking. Salt added before cooking draws out moisture and inhibits browning.

Save time when cooking meatballs. Bake in a 350° F oven, until no longer pink in the center and the juices show no pink color, instead of browning in a skillet.

Food safety

Defrost ground beef in the refrigerator.

Allow 24 hours for 1 to 1½-in. thick packages; 12 hours for patties. Cook as soon as possible after defrosting.

Do not eat raw or rare ground beef.

Because surface bacteria are transferred to the interior during grinding, it's risky to eat ground beef that has not been cooked to medium doneness (160° F).

Cook ground beef without interruption.

Partial cooking can promote bacterial growth.

Avoid cross-contamination between raw and cooked beef — during storage, preparation and serving. Wash hands, utensils, boards, counters and plates that have had contact with raw beef and juices, using hot soapy water.

Determining doneness

Cook ground beef to medium (160° F) doneness, until not pink in center and juices show no pink color. The most accurate way to determine doneness of patties and meatloaf is with an instant-read thermometer. Due to the natural nitrate content of certain ingredients, such as onions, celery and bell peppers, meatloaf may remain pink even when a 160° F internal temperature has been reached. Always check the internal temperature using a meat thermometer or instant-read thermometer, making certain it reaches 160° F.

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Turning burgers. Cook times for burgers per size

½-in. thick × 4 in. (4 oz.) — 10-13 minutes

¾-in. thick × 4 in. (6 oz.) — 12-15 minutes

Meatloaf (oven). Shape beef mixture into a 10 × 4-inch loaf on rack in broiler pan. Bake at 350° F for 1 hour and 10 minutes. Brush meatloaf with barbecue sauce; continue baking 5 to 10 minutes, until instant-read thermometer inserted into center registers 160° F.

Crumbles. Brown 1 to 1½ lb. ground beef in heavy nonstick skillet over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes, breaking into crumbles and stirring occasionally. Remove from the skillet with slotted spoon or pour off drippings.

Cooking instructions

Here are a few tips to prepare delicious favorites using ground beef.

Burgers. Many people think of grilling when it comes to preparing burgers, but there are two other ways to create delicious burgers.

▶ **Broiling.** To broil burgers, place them 3 to 4 in. from heat in an oven set to broil.

▶ **Skillet.** To cook burgers with a skillet, heat a heavy nonstick skillet over medium heat until hot. Place patties in skillet (do not crowd).

Whether grilling, broiling or using a skillet, cook burgers uncovered to an internal temperature of 160° F. The most accurate

way to determine doneness of burgers is with an instant-read thermometer. The color of cooked ground beef is not a reliable indicator of doneness.

Extra cooking tips


▶ When mixing and shaping ground beef for burgers, meatloaves or meatballs, handle ground beef lightly. Mix and shape gently to keep burgers juicy and meatloaves from becoming too firm and compact after cooking.

▶ Don't press burgers during cooking; you want to retain those flavorful juices.

▶ Cook extra crumbles and freeze for even quicker last-minute meals.

To reduce the fat content in ground beef

When cooking burgers, meatballs and meatloaf, simply blot the cooked meat with plain white paper towels; these will absorb some excess fat.

To reduce fat content in ground beef crumbles, drain and rinse. Simply drain cooked ground beef on 3 layers of paper towels, blotting the tops with additional paper towels. Transfer crumbles to a strainer or colander and rinse by pouring 4 cups hot (not boiling) water over them, drain for 5 minutes and proceed as recipe directs. 

Editor's Note: *Courtesy of the Cattlemen's Beef Board and the Beef Checkoff.*