

GROUND BEEF BASICS – PURCHASE TO PLATE – page 2

- For food safety reasons, it's important to cook all ground beef thoroughly, including irradiated ground beef. Never eat raw or rare ground beef. Cook ground beef patties to an internal temperature of 160°F (medium) by using an instant-read thermometer to check the internal temperature. Cook until the centers are no longer pink and the juices show no pink color.
- Brush brown sauces such as teriyaki, Worcestershire or soy sauce on the cooked surface of the patties. When these types of sauces are mixed into the uncooked ground beef, it may be difficult to determine doneness.
- Turn ground beef patties with a spatula, without pressing down. Pressing causes loss of flavorful juices and results in dry burgers.

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This food communications program is funded by the Beef Checkoff Program. The Beef Checkoff Program was established as part of the 1985 Farm Bill. The checkoff assesses \$1 per head on the sale of live domestic and imported cattle, in addition to a comparable assessment on imported beef and beef products. States retain up to 50 cents on the dollar and forward the other 50 cents per head to the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board, which administers the national checkoff program, subject to USDA approval.

Producer-directed and consumer-focused, the NCBA is the trade association of America's cattle farmers and ranchers, and the marketing organization for the largest segment of the nation's food and fiber industry.

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Purchasing Ground Beef

- Ground beef packages are labeled according to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) standards and by supermarket preferences. Lean to fat ratios vary. The information on the labels will be expressed % lean, % fat. However, if a package is labeled ground beef, it must be no more than 30% fat.
- Look for fresh ground beef with a bright, cherry-red color. A darker, purplish-red color is typical of vacuum-packaged ground beef or the interior of packaged ground beef. Once exposed to air, it will turn bright red.
- Purchase meat last when shopping to ensure that ground beef (and other meats) stay as cold as possible. Choose packages that are cold and tightly wrapped without tears or punctures. Ground beef is more perishable than roasts or steaks. During grinding, any bacteria that are on the surface are mixed throughout, resulting in a shorter shelf life.

At-Home Storage

- Most labels have a “sell by” date. Ground beef should be purchased on or before that date. Store it in the coldest part of the refrigerator (36° to 40°F); use or freeze within 2 days.
- Ground beef can be frozen in its original transparent packaging for up to 2 weeks. To freeze ground beef up to 4 months, wrap in heavy-duty aluminum foil or place in a food-safe plastic freezer bag. Press out as much air as possible before freezing. Label with the date and weight.

Cooking & Food Safety

- Defrost frozen ground beef in the refrigerator (never at room temperature) to prevent bacterial growth. Allow about 24 hours to defrost a 1- to 1-1/2-inch thick package.
- Wash hands with hot soapy water before and after handling raw meat. Also, wash any surface or utensils that raw meat has touched.
- One pound of ground beef makes four (3-ounce) cooked servings.
- For best results when preparing patties, mix ingredients lightly but thoroughly; overmixing can cause a firm, compact texture instead of the desired moist, juicy results.

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