

Pan-roasting the Best Steak

My wife and I have pretty much stopped ordering steak when we go out, since I seem to be able to cook it better than they can, for less money... granted, I can't say how my steak compares to the really expensive steak houses. They probably have access to better cuts of meat than I can get, so they might have an edge in that department. Still, I'm sure we're saving money, even if it is an extravagant meal, but since I only do it about once a month, it's bearable.

First off, you need to buy the proper steak. It won't do to go to the Safeway, and buy whatever red meat they've got on sale. The cut of steak that you choose is important. It boils down to three, as far as I'm concerned : filet, strip, or ribeye. My wife prefers the filet mignon, but I usually always go for the strip. I'll only buy ribeye if it's on sale, since it's a substantially fattier cut.

You'll also want to find the best butcher that you can. For me, that ends up being at Whole Foods. Look for good marbelling – little lines of yellow fat flowing through the deep red of the meat. I also like to get one that's an inch thick. I'll sometimes go for the dry-aged steak, which costs \$4 more per pound, but most times, I'll just go for the prime. Recent prices peg that at \$17 a pound, with one steak usually coming in at one pound, and one strip steak like this will feed both of us for one meal. Pricey, yes, but if you went to a fine steak house, there's no way we'd both eat for \$17.

45 minutes to an hour before you're ready to start cooking, take the steak out of the fridge and to let it start coming to room temperature. 20 minutes before you start cooking, set your oven to 300° and let it preheat. 5 minutes before you start cooking, turn a burner on high, and put a cast iron frying pan on it, and let it start getting hot.

Meanwhile, unwrap the steak, and dry the surface off with a paper towel, then liberally coat the steak with salt and fresh ground pepper. You can also put a couple drops of canola oil on one side, and rub it all over that side.

Now turn on the exhaust fan, and open a window a little bit, because there may be a little smoke. Put the steak(s) in the pan, oiled side down, and let it cook for 4 minutes. Then turn the steak over, and cook another 4 minutes. Then move the pan into the oven, and let it roast. The amount of time you let it roast really depends on how thick the steak was. I've found that for a 1 inch thick steak, roasting it another 8 minutes seems to give a good medium-rare.

There's a way to tell how your steak is cooked by touch. Hold your left hand out, relaxed, and feel the section of skin at the base of your thumb and forefinger. This is how a rare steak will feel when you press it. Now flex your hand, stretching your fingers and thumb out. Press your finger at the fleshy base of your thumb near the palm. This is how a medium steak will feel when cooked correctly. (I can't tell you how to figure out what a well-done steak feels like because I've never done it, and think it's a bit of a sin.)

Once your steak is of the proper doneness, you're still not ready to eat. You have to let the meat rest. Let it sit on a plate for 15 minutes, loosely covered with foil. This lets the piece of meat relax a little, and allow all the juice that's been forced into the center of the cut to redistribute.

Bonus : You can do this same method on a charcoal grill. Follow the instructions for preparing the meat, but instead of preheating the oven and the pan, prepare your charcoal grill as you normally would, but keep the coals only on one side of the kettle. (In a gas grill, if you only light one element, you should be able to replicate the same cooking conditions.) Grill the steak over the hot side, similar to above, at 4 minutes a side. (You could even cook it 2 minutes, then turn

the steak a quarter turn, and cook it for another 2 minutes. This will give you those professional looking grill marks.) Once that's done, move the steak to the cooler side of the grill, and put on the lid. There's no telling how long you'll want to cook it this way, since it really depends on how hot your coals are. You can try telling by touch, or by using an instant read thermometer.

On an instant-read thermometer, your rare steak should read about 110° in the center, before resting. Medium rare, 120°, and medium, 130°. If you must eat your steak well done, you'll be ok if you get it up to 145°.