

# 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°.

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## La Cense Mail Order Beef

Last week, the good people at [La Cense Beef](#) sent me a quantity of their products to try for free in the hopes I'd tell you good things about them here. And after trying some of the items they sent, I am certainly impressed.

Their website proclaims that their beef is all natural, hormone free, grass fed beef. The product comes in a styrofoam cooler, deep frozen with a block of dry ice to keep it that way. After allowing them to thaw, my wife and I have sampled two of the items they sent – their steak burgers, and their NY strip steak.

The hamburgers were fine, though not anything really to write about, but their strip steak was delicious. Strip steak is my

favorite cut when I make steak. I usually go for the thick steaks that sell at Whole Foods for similar price, per pound, as La Cense, but they're cut much thicker, and require a bit more care to cook.

The La Cense strip steak was about three-quarters of an inch thick. It arrives in a vacuum package, so the steak was a little misshapen when I removed it from the packaging. (Somehow, during shipping, the packaging on this steak had developed a small hole, so it left a bit of a bloody mess in my refrigerator as it thawed. You'd do well to thaw your steak in some sort of a tray or zip top bag to avoid a similar fate.) The steak displayed a good amount of fat and marbling, and the flesh was deep red.

After cooking the steak in the usual way (warming on the counter for 30 minutes to take the refrigerator's chill off, drying the surface with paper towel, and then generously sprinkling with salt and fresh ground black pepper, I cooked the steak in a hot skillet for 3 minutes per side, putting a lid on the pan for the last 2 minutes of the second side, to cut down on the smoke, and to push the heat deeper into the steak. I then allowed the steak to rest for 10 minutes.) My wife proclaims that this is one of the best steaks I've ever made, better than the dry-aged steaks from Whole Foods.

Since I'm suffering from a head cold, I will have to take her word for it. I thought it fared better than a similar cut from the normal grocery store, but wasn't quite up to par when compared to Whole Foods. Add to that the inconvenience of having to thaw the steak for several days puts it slightly lower in my book. However, if I had ample freezer space (which I don't), I wouldn't hesitate to order several of these steaks to keep on hand.

A 7.5oz strip steak will set you back \$17.49, considerably less than a similar steak from other mail order companies ([Lobel's](#) sells a 10oz. natural prime dry-aged boneless strip

steak for a whopping \$46.99, and [Omaha Steaks](#) normally sells four 8oz steaks for \$69.99, which works out to be exactly the same as La Cense. My local [Whole Foods](#) sells its grass-fed beef for \$15.99 a pound, dry-aged for \$17.99 a pound.)

[La Cense Mail-order All-Natural Beef](#)

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## Cooking a Steak

The first step in cooking a steak is picking the right steak. Part of it comes down to personal preference, and part of it comes down to having the right eye for it. The cut you choose is mostly preference. My favorite cut is the New York Strip. The Ribeye is good – though a little too fatty for my taste. The Tenderloin is extremely tender, and is my wife's favorite, but I think it completely lacks any flavor, and isn't worth the money. (I make it and buy it for her, though.)



When I'm buying a steak, I look for decent marbling. The flavor is in the fat. I also try to get a steak that's at least an inch thick. Usually you're not going to find these in the styrofoam containers in the refrigerated case. You'll need to talk to the butcher.

So here's what I do when I'm gonna prepare steak for dinner. An hour before I'm ready to start cooking, I take the steak out of the refrigerator and let it sit out on the counter, to get closer to room temperature. 30 minutes before dinner, I turn the oven on and get it preheated to 300°. 10 minutes later, I put the cast iron pan onto the stovetop and turn the burner on beneath it to high. I'll also probably turn on the exhaust fan then, too. Then I take some paper towel and dry off the steak as much as I can ... moisture inhibits browning. I'll usually just sprinkle the steak on both sides with a little kosher salt, but I sometimes use a salt/spice mix like McCormick's [Asian or Mediterranean Sea Salt](#) mixes. (Avoid mixes with things that go bitter when they're cooked at high heat ... this includes garlic flakes or paprika.) I'll also dab the steak with a couple drops of canola oil and rub the salt into the flesh.

Depending on the thickness of the steak, I'll cook it in the hot cast iron pan for 3 – 4 minutes on each side. There's usually quite a bit of smoke involved here. After I've seared both sides, I put the steak into the oven, and set the timer for 8 minutes. After that, I check the steak with my tongs. If the steak is still too rare, it'll feel like the fleshy part between your thumb and forefinger when your hand is relaxed. It'll be medium when it feels like the same spot with your thumb flexed. You'll want to undercook it a little, because the heat will carry over a little while it rests, which you should always do – 10 minutes, minimum, on the plate before serving.