

A photograph of Mario Batali in a kitchen. He is wearing a dark blue jacket over a white shirt and a red apron. He is holding a white bowl with a yellow interior and is pouring something into it. In the background, there is a stone wall and a window. The text "MARIO BATALI" is written in large, bold, orange letters, and "ITALIAN GRILL" is written in large, bold, red letters below it.

MARIO BATALI

ITALIAN GRILL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEATRIZ DA COSTA

**MARIO BATALI
ITALIAN GRILL**

with Judith Sutton

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**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
LEO, BENNO, AND SUSI,
THE HOTTEST COALS ON MY GRILL**

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INTRODUCTION

The words “Italian” and “grilling” go together like the verse and refrain in a love song by Lennon and McCartney—they seem as if they were made for each other. Anyone who has spent any time at all in the real Italy knows that many of the most evocative and fragrant moments are sniffed at someone’s house, or in a vineyard, or at a trattoria where something delicious is cooking on a grill over hot coals. The kiss of the fire and iron grate can transform even the most quotidian vegetables or meats or fish into that hauntingly elusive perfect bite where the flavor of the natural product is enhanced, not masked, and the garden or the sea or the butcher shop and the flame unite to create an aria of flavor that renders worthy any effort it takes to get to the very point of enjoying it.

Yet America is a wild world of grill experts. We practically invented the backyard cookout, and we certainly invented the complex national fabric of real barbecue in its infinite permutations across our back roads and small towns from the Carolinas to California, from Texas to Toronto. Everything from weenie roasts to clambakes forms the vernacular of the American grill and the regional variations that make it our specialty. We all know how to grill—we were born with it; it is ours.

Still, Italian grilling is not so different from ours in its intention. The Italian grill is all about nuance and minimal interference with the flavor of the primary ingredient. There is no thick sweet barbecue sauce, no sweet-and-sour glaze, nothing kicked up a notch or two, and minimal basting (if any) in the Italian kitchen. Marinades are important, but they are lighter and certainly have no soy or teriyaki, or Tabasco and buttermilk baths. There is rarely anything more to them than good olive oil, citrus, wine, herbs, garlic, and hot chili flakes.

The recipes I offer in the following pages are not exactly 100 percent Italian. I celebrate the idea of the American mastery of the backyard grill, and I do love a kick-ass barbecue sauce. I will use a slightly sweet glaze on porchetta, that Italian icon, and there is a little zip in the dry rub for my rib eye. But the true Italian ideology is neither obfuscated nor watered down. What you will find here is my take on the Italian grill, just as I have always passed the world of Italian cooking through my rose-colored glasses, through my own culinary prism.

ITALIAN WINES FOR GRILLING

BY DAVID LYNCH

Choosing wines for grilled foods offers the wine guy a rare opportunity to be macho. Most of the time we are sniffing for subtleties, cooing over complexity, babbling about balance. The barbecue is a time to be bold—to fight fire with fire, or, as the Italians would put it, *fuoco al fuoco*.

Even when he isn't grilling, of course, Mario brings the heat. When I was the sommelier at Babbo, I once had the temerity to request less chili flake in a pasta dish to make it more wine-friendly (hot spices amplify the heat of alcohol and tannin). I don't remember his response exactly, but I think he threw a pinch more *peperoncini* into the pan, planted a defiant fist on his hip, and let loose a menacing cackle, like a pirate.

The lesson? Be bold, or stay out of the way. This is how I've come to approach most wine-and-food pairings, but it is an especially good mantra when firing up the grill. Whether it's a blast of lemon juice on a swordfish steak or some serious fat marbling in a rib eye—not to mention the smoky, sharp taste of char, which is to be your constant companion as you work through this book—the typical grill preparation has strong flavors and textures, and the wine should offer the same in return.

Let's start with *vini bianchi*. Grilling presents an opportunity to break out some fatter, barrel-fermented Italian whites—a “super-white” Friulian blend, perhaps, or maybe a big-name Chardonnay from Tuscany or Piedmont. You may have been saving such wines to show off at a fussier, more “special” occasion, but they might actually show their best around the grill. Think of how well a big Chardonnay-based white such as Antinori's Cervaro della Sala or Joe Bastianich's Vespa Bianco would complement the toasty, bready flavors of grilled polenta or pizza. You'll also crave some vinous viscosity with richer seafoods like lobster, salmon, and especially monkfish. These days it's fashionable to dismiss oaky wines as being overpowering, but add some grill char and other big flavors to the equation, and suddenly a little wood toast and weight is just what you need.

More than anything else, however, what you'll need from whites is acidity. There's a lot of citrus in these recipes—Fennel with Sambuca and Grapefruit, Baby Octopus with Olive-Orange Vinaigrette, Lobster with Lemon Oil—so while it's nice to have a wine with big flavor, it can't be flabby. It needs to have grip, if for no other reason than to battle all that lemon or other citrus juice, and, of course, there's a difference between a white wine that is simply acidic and one that has actual flavor and structure. When I'm looking for bold flavor combined with a good backbone of acidity, I look to Vermentino di Sardegna (lots of pungent green-herb notes for all the mint and thyme

you'll find in these recipes); Pinot Bianco from the Alto Adige (a nice, rich, almost Chardonnay-like feel, but usually without the oak); Tocai Friulano from Friuli (great minerality and Sauvignon-like grassiness, perfect for the likes of Calamari Spiedini in Lemon Leaves and the Warm Shrimp Salad, among others); and Fiano di Avellino from Campania (also a little minty and herbal, with a jolt of citrus).

On the red side, my go-to barbecue wine is Montepulciano d'Abruzzo. It's big and bold, with a satisfyingly deep color and tons of rich fruit, yet the tannins are nice and soft, so as not to fight with the char—or the black pepper, or the chili pepper flakes, or whatever heat-inducing item Mario chooses to throw at you. Although there are many instances where I'd go with some blunt-force tannins—what else but a burly, tannic Brunello di Montalcino with *bistecca alla fiorentina*—there are plenty of big, meaty Italian reds with softer contours. If you haven't yet turned on to the tarry Teroldegos of Trentino, or to the exceedingly funky Lagreins of Alto Adige, there is no better time to do so than when you're grilling meat; these wines actually taste a little charred around the edges (I'm not kidding).

Other good all-purpose grilling reds would include Carignano del Sulcis, from Sardegna (I'd pair this rustic red with the Spit-Roasted Leg of Lamb and sit down in the grass and eat like a Sardinian shepherd); Barbera d'Alba, from Piedmont (a little more acidic tang and brightness and thus workable with lots of the poultry preparations); and any number of bold, fruity *rosatos* from all over the boot, which are great for taming peppery heat but counterpunching with flavor. (Mario's wife, Susi, is partial to the fey, copper-colored rosés of Bandol in France, and she has hated every single gutsy Italian rosé I've served her over the years, but I remain undaunted in my support for Italian *rosato*, especially in this char-broiled context!)

Is there ever an instance where you wouldn't be bold? Well, if you've got a lot of chili heat in a preparation or a generous coating of black pepper, your best wine may be the less assertive one: go with something crisp, soft, cooling, something that's content to clean up after the dish rather than engage it in a debate. With whites, opt for no oak, bright acidity, low alcohol—and there's plenty of squeaky-clean, high-acid Italian juice out there when you decide to “stay out of the way.” With reds, choose lower alcohol, softer tannins, refreshing fruit. Some of the more easygoing choices would include non-riserva Chianti Classico from Tuscany, a Cerasuolo di Vittoria from Sicily, and maybe a Valpolicella from the Veneto.

In the end, your best bet is to think big and throw caution to the winds. Maybe toss the Brunello on ice to tone down its tannins, then let 'er rip! It's a barbecue—don't be such a wine geek.

GRILLING BASICS

Grilling over hot coals or embers is as timeless as cooking itself, in Italy and the world throughout. For the purest, most unadorned, and primordial experience, it's the grill. The uniquely satisfying seasoning and delicious flavor that the smoldering fire and its smoke create is quite simply unattainable with any other method of heat transfer. This chapter covers what I consider the few but crucial basics for making well-informed decisions about your own grilling style.

CHOOSING A GRILL

The big decision, of course, is gas versus charcoal. The obvious advantage of a gas grill is convenience, and gas grills now outsell charcoal grills in the United States. The fire will be ready in 10 to 15 minutes, as opposed to the 25 or 30 charcoal takes, and it will burn for as long as you leave the grill on. Cleanup is easy, and a gas grill is also more economical in the long run. And because it's so easy, if you have a gas grill, you may find yourself grilling throughout much more of the year, even when it starts to turn cold.

Gas grills are fueled by either a natural-gas hookup or a small propane tank. If you use propane, be sure to have a backup tank ready and waiting (store it in a cool, shaded place outside, away from the grill). Older gas grills had only two side-by-side burners. Now many models have three burners, and their configuration varies widely. If you often grill for a crowd, you may want a big three-burner grill, but a good-sized two-burner version is more than adequate for most purposes. While it's true that gas grills tend to burn less hot than a charcoal fire, they are becoming more powerful. And instead of the ceramic briquettes or lava rocks used in older grills, many newer models include features designed to add to the grilled flavor, such as metal slats positioned between the burners and the grate to catch the juices from the grilling food—as the juices drip onto the hot metal and caramelize or evaporate, their smoky perfume fills the grill.

Many hard-core grill dogs and barbecuers disdain gas grills, insisting that food cooked over a gas flame doesn't have the same flavor as that cooked over live fire and that turning on a gas grill just isn't "real" grilling. It's true that building a live fire is a more hands-on experience, and that a steak cooked over a real hardwood fire will have more char flavor than one cooked on a gas grill. But in reality, most people use charcoal briquettes, and even if you use hardwood lump charcoal, the difference in flavor is likely to be minimal. The main disadvantage of a charcoal grill is the limited

window of grilling time. For foods that take longer than about 20 to 30 minutes to cook, you can add more coals to the fire (20 or so at a time) as it burns, but you have to keep your eye on the fire and the time.

Kettle grills are the most popular type of charcoal grill. They have two racks, the grill grate and another one for the coals. A disadvantage of most kettle grills is that the grill rack has only one position, so you can't lower or raise it to change the heat level. Square or rectangular charcoal grills may not have a separate grate for the coals, but they usually have at least two positions for the grill rack.

Portable grills can be handy for picnics or tailgating. Both gas and charcoal versions are available. Portable charcoal grills include tabletop models and the familiar hibachi.

If you grill a lot and have the space, you might want to have both a gas grill and a charcoal one. Or, for the real experience, get either a gas or a charcoal grill and then build a wood-burning brick oven in the backyard—like the one I have at my summer house.

LIGHTING THE FIRE

If you have a gas grill, all you need to do is turn it on or ignite the flame. Always have the lid of the grill open when you turn on the fuel, or gas could build up and cause an explosion; also check to make sure that all the burners have ignited before you close the lid to allow the grill to preheat. Let the grill preheat, with all the burners on high, for 10 to 15 minutes, then adjust the burner heat if necessary, depending on what you are cooking.

The easiest way to light a fire in a charcoal grill is to use a chimney, a simple metal cylinder with a wire grate toward the bottom and four vent holes. Crumple a few pieces of newspaper and stuff them into the bottom of the chimney, set it on the bottom grill grate or the bottom of the grill, and fill it with charcoal. Open all the vents in the bottom of the grill, light the newspaper through the vent holes in the chimney, and watch to make sure it has ignited the charcoal—you should see flames reaching up through the briquettes (if not, replace the newspaper and light it again). Wait until all the coals are ignited, usually about 15 minutes, then carefully pour them out into the grill and let burn until they are all covered with grayish-white ash.

Electric coil starters, available at hardware stores, are another option for lighting a charcoal fire. Place the starter on the bottom grill grate or the bottom of the grill, carefully pile the charcoal on top of it, and plug it in. Once the coals have ignited, after about 10 minutes, carefully remove the starter and set it on a heatproof surface (somewhere safe, where no one might touch it) to cool down. You can add more coals to the ones that have ignited if you want a larger fire. Then let them all burn until covered with ash.

You can also use paraffin starters, available at most hardware stores, to ignite the charcoal (these can replace the newspaper in a chimney starter). Simply follow the instructions on the package. But avoid lighter fluid at all costs. It smells terrible and it can add its unmistakable flavor to the food. Avoid self-igniting briquettes for the same

reason.

Regular charcoal briquettes are made of pulverized and compressed hardwood charcoal and chemical binders. The more expensive brands tend to burn longer than the generics. Hardwood charcoal, called natural lump charcoal or charwood, is made from various hardwoods, including hickory, mesquite, and oak, and contains no additives. It burns faster and hotter than charcoal briquettes, and it is more expensive, so use it for cooking steaks and other meats where you want a good sear and the cooking time is relatively short.

WOOD CHIPS AND CHUNKS

Wood chips or chunks are an easy way to add a smoky flavor to grilled meats such as pork tenderloin and steaks. Mesquite, hickory, and oak chips are the most widely available, but other hardwoods are used as well. Soak wood chips in water for at least 30 minutes before using, chunks for at least an hour. If using a charcoal grill, just scatter the wood over the hot coals. Some gas grills come equipped with a smoker drawer or a metal chip holder. If yours doesn't have one, wrap the chips or chunks in heavy-duty foil and poke some holes in it; set the packet directly on one of the burners. You can also flavor meats with strong herbs such as rosemary (see [Ribs Italian-Style](#)). Stalks of dried wild fennel are often thrown onto the fire in Italy and other parts of the Mediterranean, as are grapevine cuttings.

GRILLING TECHNIQUES

Cover the grill! You may be tempted to keep a close eye on that big juicy steak as it cooks, but, in a word, don't. With the exception of thin fish fillets, sliced vegetables, and other foods that cook very quickly, almost everything should be cooked with the grill lid down, to keep the heat and flavorful smoke inside. You could think of covered grilling as roasting over coals. And remember that there's no need to keep turning and moving the food around as it cooks, except to avoid flare-ups (you'll notice in fact that many of my recipes say to "cook, unmoved, until ..."). When searing meat, give it a chance to develop nice dark grill marks. No matter what you are grilling, it will cook more evenly and more quickly if you leave it alone—turn it only once, or as directed in the recipe.

Some of the recipes in this book tell you to oil the grill before putting the food on it. You can use a long-handled basting brush or a clean rag dipped in oil to do this (you may want to hold the rag with tongs). Lightly oil the grate just before putting the food on it. In some cases, you may need to brush the food with oil too—or oil the food instead of the grate.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT GRILLING

Although a hot fire is essential for many recipes, not everything should be grilled over high heat. And some foods, such as big cuts of meat and whole birds, should be grilled over indirect heat so they can cook to the desired doneness without incinerating the outside. Some recipes use both direct and indirect heat: a piece of meat may be seared over the hottest part of the grill, for example, then moved to the cooler part to cook through.

Grilling over direct heat means cooking the food over the hottest part of the fire. It's what you want for thinner cuts, for fish and shell-fish, cut-up chicken, sliced vegetables—i.e., food that cooks quickly. Cook over direct heat when you want to sear the food, giving it great color and a delicious flavor. For direct cooking on a gas grill, after preheating the grill, leave all the burners on high, put the food on the grill, and cook as directed. For a charcoal grill, leave the coals in a mound for very intense heat, or spread them out a bit if you need a larger cooking area. Have all the vents open so there is plenty of oxygen to feed the flames.

For indirect cooking on a gas grill, preheat all the burners on high, then turn off the center burner if you have three, or one of the burners if you have two. If the recipe calls for it, turn the other burner(s) down. Put the food over the cooler part of the grill to cook—and be sure to cover the grill. There are various options for cooking over indirect heat in a charcoal grill. The simplest is to move all the hot coals to one side of the grill and cook the food on the other, cooler side. Or divide the coals and mound them on two opposite sides of the grill, leaving the center bare, and cook over the center part. In either case, it's a good idea to put a drip pan filled with a little water under the cooler part of the grill to prevent the drippings from burning. A third option, if you are cooking something like chicken thighs (such as [Chicken Thighs with Snap Peas and *Peas and Agliata*](#)), is to leave the hot coals in the center of the grill and arrange the food around the cooler perimeter.

CROSSHATCHING

If you've ever wondered how chefs make those beautiful patterns of grill marks that adorn grilled salmon fillets and fish steaks, chicken breasts, and other cuts, it's actually really easy. Put the food on the grill and let it sear or cook long enough to get well-charred grill marks. Rotate it 90 degrees and cook a few minutes longer, and you will have that distinctive crosshatch pattern. Turn the food over and continue cooking as directed.

SPIT-ROASTING

If you have never tried spit-roasting because you think it is difficult, expensive, and/or intimidating, you will be surprised to find that it's none of these: it's really easy, a rotisserie attachment is by no means a huge investment, and spit-roasting is lots of fun! The results are delicious, and the technique—and delicious results—will amaze and impress your guests. Some high-end gas grills come with a rotis-serie attachment, and many manufacturers offer an attachment as an option. Relatively inexpensive

models that fit most grills (charcoal as well as gas) can be purchased online or at some hardware stores. In any case, you'll want to buy a well-constructed model with a sturdy spit that can support big birds and roasts. Fortunately we no longer have to turn the spit by hand—nowadays a small electric motor, attached to one side of the grill, does all the work. You simply skewer the food on the spit, securing it with the clamps that are part of the setup, lay the spit over the grill, and insert the end of it into the motor housing. Cover the grill and turn on the motor—that's all there is to it!

You'll need to review the specific instructions for the model you buy (and check your grill manual for additional information), but basically spit-roasted food is cooked over indirect heat in a covered grill. Generally the food should be brought to room temperature before it is grilled, since it will not be cooking at a high temperature. Be sure to set up a drip pan under the center of the rotisserie to catch the juices; you may need to pour a little water or other liquid, such as wine, into the pan to prevent the drippings from burning.

COOKING ON A PIASTRA

Cooking on a piastra is a time-honored technique throughout Italy, especially in Friuli and along the Adriatic Coast. *Alla piastra* essentially means cooking on a flat griddle over a hot fire, and the same method is popular throughout the Mediterranean. Cooking *a la plancha* is a favorite way of preparing fish in Spain, and in Greece, cooking on a *satz*, a sheet of metal, is centuries old. Today the free-form sheets of metal used in ancient times have mostly been replaced by griddles made of cast iron or another metal. You could use a regular stovetop griddle with a smooth surface as a piastra. These are readily available in housewares shops, some hardware stores, and online; a large rectangular griddle that fits over two burners is a good choice. An old-fashioned cast-iron pancake griddle would also work, although these are on the smaller side, or even a quarter-inch-thick slab of slate. But best of all is my piastra (see www.italiankitchen.com), which is made of thin but durable, and remarkably light, granite and, at 10 inches by 14 inches, gives you a generous cooking area.



The advantage of a piastra is that it gives you a very hot cooking surface—hot enough to make mussels dance when they are tossed onto it (see [Mussels alla Piastra with Prosciutto Bread Crumbs](#)). It’s a fun and easy way to cook many foods from [shrimp](#) to [calamari](#). I also use one to “grill-bake” flatbreads such as [schiacciate](#). Just be sure to give the piastra enough time to get really hot—let it preheat, covered, on the hot grill for at least 10 to 15 minutes.

FIRE-ROASTING

Fire-roasting refers to cooking in the hot coals of a wood or charcoal fire. It’s a popular method in Italy, used to cook vegetables while a large cut of meat—or even a whole pig or lamb—cooks slowly over a fire. Whole potatoes, onions, beets, or other vegetables are placed in the coals around the perimeter of the fire to roast in their skins. Big globe artichokes are a natural for this, as the inedible outer leaves char and burn away in the heat of the fire, leaving the tender inner leaves and heart, which will have essentially steamed in their own juices. To cook more delicate vegetables, such as

corn, fennel, or new potatoes, wrap them individually in two layers of heavy-duty foil and place around the edges of the fire. After 20 to 30 minutes or so, depending on the vegetable, they will have an incredible, pure flavor that is almost indescribable. For a variation on the theme, add a few leaves of rosemary, summer savory, or sage and a drop or two of fragrant extra-virgin olive oil to each packet before roasting.

GRILLING YEAR-ROUND

Depending on where you live, you may be able to grill outdoors for most or all of the year. For those who live in cooler climates (and city dwellers without access to a grill when they're not on vacation), note that most of the recipes in this book can be cooked under the broiler or on a ridged grill pan on the stovetop. Timing may vary slightly—just follow the visual clues for doneness in the recipe, and adjust the cooking time as necessary.

EQUIPMENT

Once you've got your grill, you don't need a lot of special equipment, but there are a few things that will make grilling easier and more fun.

GRILL BRUSH A good grill brush is essential for keeping the grill clean. Choose a sturdy wire brush that will stand up to the job; one with brass bristles will not rust.

TONGS It's handy to have at least two pairs of long spring-loaded tongs for turning and moving foods on the grill; I have a couple of pairs of short tongs too.

BASTING BRUSHES You can buy long-handled basting brushes designed for grilling or just pick up a couple of natural-bristle (not nylon, which can melt) paintbrushes at the hardware store.

DRIP PANS Many gas grills come with their own metal drip pan, and you can buy disposable foil drip pans, to use in either a gas or a charcoal grill, at the hardware store. Foil loaf pans or small foil baking pans, available in any supermarket, also work fine in a charcoal grill.

SPATULA A long-handled wide spatula or pancake turner is handy for turning some grilled foods. Be sure it's metal, not plastic.

SKEWERS Wooden skewers are inexpensive and available in any supermarket; 12-inch-long skewers are best for grilling. Soak wooden skewers for at least 30 minutes before using them. Metal skewers come in various styles; flat ones are generally better than round ones because they help keep the food from flipping around as you turn the

skewers.

SAFETY TIPS

Make sure the grill is on a level surface and away from overhanging tree branches, awnings, etc.—anything that could catch fire. Never grill in a garage or other enclosed space or in a poorly ventilated area, or you risk (deadly) carbon monoxide buildup.

As mentioned above, always open the lid of a gas grill before you turn on the fuel supply, and make sure all the burners have ignited before you close the lid for preheating. If using a chimney or electric coil starter for a charcoal grill, put it in a safe place to cool.

Keep a plastic spray bottle filled with water near the grill to deal with serious flare-ups. Char is good, incinerated is not. But don't soak the food or the fire—often just moving the food away from the flare-up or closing the grill lid (or turning off a gas burner for the moment) will do the trick. To help prevent flare-ups, be sure to trim excess fat from any food before grilling it. And keep a fire extinguisher on hand for emergencies.

Although larger cuts of meat (and anything that will be spit-roasted) should be brought to room temperature before grilling, don't overdo it—20 to 30 minutes should be enough time for most foods, 1 hour max for really big steaks or roasts. Fish should be kept refrigerated until just before cooking, as should any other highly perishable foods.

When marinating, don't allow the food to stand at room temperature for any longer than the time specified in the recipe; cover it and marinate it in the refrigerator if you aren't planning to cook it until later.

If you want to use a marinade for a sauce or serve it as a dipping sauce, you need to heat it, because it will have absorbed raw juices from the marinated meat or fish. Pour it into a saucepan, bring to a boil, and boil for 1 minute. If you are planning to serve some of the barbecue sauce or glaze you are using to baste the food as it grills, it's best to divide the sauce between two containers and use one for basting, one for serving. And, in most cases, wait until the surface of the meat or other food has seared and cooked before you start basting (this way, you avoid contaminating the basting brush—and remaining sauce). For barbecue sauces and glazes that contain sugar or another sweetener, you always want to wait until the food is almost cooked anyway, or the sauce will burn on the grill.

Never put cooked food back on the platter you used to bring it out to the grill. Put out a clean platter before you start grilling, when you aren't distracted by cooking.

When spit-roasting, remember that the spit will be very hot when you take it off the fire. Have someone help you do this if possible, and put the hot spit in a safe place so no one will touch it and get burned.

Finally, relax and have fun!



INGREDIENTS AND TECHNIQUES FOR THE ITALIAN KITCHEN

ALMONDS In Italy, you will find two varieties of almonds: bitter and sweet. Bitter almonds, which contain a toxic acid when raw, are used to make almond extract and amaretto. Only sweet almonds are available in the United States. They can be found raw or roasted; blanched (skinned) or unblanched; salted or not; and whole, sliced, or slivered. They can also be ground into almond flour or used to make almond paste. Almonds should be purchased in the shell if possible; otherwise, select those packed in tightly sealed jars, cans, or bags.

ANCHOVIES These small flavorful fish from the Mediterranean and the southern Atlantic are eaten both fresh and preserved in salt or oil. In this country, we most often see the latter, flat or rolled fillets in oil, but the best anchovies are packed whole in salt. Salt-packed anchovies must be filleted and rinsed before they are used; in some recipes I call for soaking them in milk before using to remove more of the salt. The least desirable anchovies are made into anchovy paste, sold in tubes or sometimes in jars. In some recipes, the paste will do, but for superior flavor and sublime texture, salt-packed anchovies are the ones for me—and you.

ARTICHOKES To trim artichokes, remove the tough outer layers of leaves from each artichoke by snapping them off until you reach the pale yellow inner leaves (the larger the artichoke, the more layers you will have to remove). Cut off the top third of the artichoke leaves with a sharp knife. As you work, rub the cut surfaces of the artichoke with a lemon half to prevent oxidation (browning). Trim off the bottom of the artichoke stem and, using a paring knife, remove the tough outer layer from the stem. Using a grapefruit spoon or small sharp spoon, scrape out the fuzzy choke from the center of the artichoke. Pull out the small purple leaves. Put the artichokes in a bowl of lemon water until ready to cook.

Or, if you will be serving the artichokes whole, simply cut off the top third of each one and trim off the stems so the artichokes will stand upright. As you work, rub the cut surfaces with a lemon half to prevent oxidation. Pull off the smaller leaves around the bottom of each artichoke. Put the artichokes in a bowl of lemon water until ready to cook.

ARUGULA Also known as rucola, its Italian name, or rocket, arugula has long narrow leaves and a pleasing bite. Its flavor varies with both type and the season, so some bunches will be more pungent than others. There are several types you are likely

to see in the market; I like them all. Some varieties have big thick leaves, others have smaller, more delicate leaves. Wild arugula has narrow leaves and a sharper taste. Baby arugula, with a delicate flavor, is becoming increasingly available. Arugula is quite perishable; store it wrapped in a damp paper towel in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for no more than a day or two.

BALSAMIC VINEGAR Real balsamic is a deep, intensely flavorful vinegar made exclusively in Emilia-Romagna from the unfermented juice of white Trebbiano grapes. The freshly pressed juice is cooked slowly overnight in copper cauldrons over open fires right in the vineyard, to form a thick syrup called *mosto* or *saba*. The mosto is put into giant wooden barrels and then aged in a series of successively smaller barrels of different woods over a period of twelve years or more to achieve balsamic vinegar's unique and complex flavor. The finished product must be submitted to a consortium for tasting, and if it is approved, it is poured into bottles whose shapes indicate the place of origin, either Modena or Reggio—the only two areas that can legitimately produce the real thing. True *aceto balsamico tradizionale* will cost you at least fifty dollars for a four-ounce bottle and should be used to dress salads only if you own the joint. The supermarket stuff sold in tall green bottles for \$3.99 is a pale imitation of the true thing and contains caramel coloring. It's fine for a change of pace in the salad dressing department but unacceptable in the realm of anointing perfect meats, such as grilled [rib eye](#), or a chunk of Parmigiano-Reggiano, where you want the real thing.

BLACK PEPPER Some of the recipes in this book call for a large amount of pepper, several tablespoons or so. Even if you often use a spice (or coffee) grinder for spices like cumin or fennel seeds, you may never have thought of grinding pepper this way. The spice grinder seems to release even more of the fragrant oils, and it's quick and easy when you need a lot of ground pepper. Pepper should always be freshly ground, whether in a pepper mill or a spice grinder, so it's best to grind just the amount the recipe calls for (though if you do have a bit left over, you can store it in a tightly sealed jar to use within a day or so).

BOTTARGA Once known as the poor man's caviar, bottarga is the salted, pressed, and dried roe of either tuna (*tonno*) or gray mullet (*mugine*). In Sicily and Sardinia, the tradition of preserving seafood is well maintained to this day. There the long, fat roe sacs are salted and massaged by hand over a period of several weeks to preserve them. Then the roe is pressed under wooden planks weighted with stones and sun-dried for one to two months. Both types are salty, but tuna bottarga has a lively, sharp flavor, stronger than mullet bottarga. Bottarga can be shaved, sliced, chopped, or grated, and just a little can add a lot of flavor to a whole range of dishes. I love a salad of bitter greens dressed with fresh orange juice, extra-virgin olive oil, and shaved bottarga (use a Microplane grater to shave the bottarga). Keep bottarga tightly wrapped in the freezer.

BREAD CRUMBS We use bread crumbs in various forms in many dishes at our restaurants, both for coating ingredients before sautéing or frying them and in stuffings