

Safety Tip of the Month: May

SIZZLING SUMMER FUN

Grill Clean-Up Takes Only Minutes

Spring means the start of another barbecue season. The majority of backyard chefs choose gas grills over charcoal because of their ease, lower operating costs and environmental friendliness. If last year's grease and grime is still on your grill, however, it is important that it be cleaned and maintained to guarantee safe, enjoyable cookouts.

The National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) recommends that gas grills be cleaned at least once a year. The supplies necessary for cleaning include warm, soapy water, a brass-bristle brush, a soft cloth, cotton swabs, toothpicks, sandpaper, and the owner's manual.

Step one: Clean the burner and tubes. Grease drippings can clog the burner's gas ports and short out the ignition flame. Spiders and other insects escape the winter cold by hiding in the gas tubes (these might be called Venturi tubes in the owner's manual). These problems can make the grill difficult to start or cause an uneven flame.

After making sure the gas tank is turned off, remove the briquettes and cooking grids and set them aside. Following the instructions in the manual, unfasten the burner, slip the Venturi tubes off the gas lines and remove the unit as a whole. Clean off any dirt or grease accumulation by using a soft cloth and soapy water, then towel dry the unit. When it is dry, clean out each gas port on the burner unit with toothpicks. Clean the Venturi tubes by soaking in warm, soapy water. When finished, the entire assembly should be set aside.

Step two: Clean the grill housing. To check for corrosion and prevent grease build-up, the inside and outside of the grill should be cleaned. Before you start, cover the gas orifices beneath the control panel with aluminum foil to prevent corrosion. Scrub the grill's inner and outer surfaces with a brass-bristle brush and soapy water. Rinse thoroughly with a garden hose and towel dry. (Do not forget to remove the aluminum foil.)

Take a good look at the paint for any chips or scrapes. Most grills are made of cast aluminum, which is virtually rustproof. Moisture can corrode and weaken the grill, however, if paint chips are not repaired.

Sand or scrape the chipped area on a cold grill until the metal beneath it is shiny and white. Apply a coat of primer; then touch up with paint specifically made for high heat. Once the paint is dry, reattach the burner, Venturi tubes and igniter.

Step three: Check the fuel supply system. Always check the gas line, connections and propane tank before restarting the grill. Propane tanks with minor corrosion can be handled in the same way the grill housing was fixed. Dented or seriously rusted tanks must be replaced immediately.

Next, reconnect your propane cylinder tank to the grill. One of three types of connection devices may be used: a POL fitting (which uses rubber O-rings), a quick disconnect or Type 2 (which uses a spring-loaded sleeve on the valve) and a quick connect or Type I (which has large threads

on the outside of the valve and a large plastic coupling nut that screws onto the valve threads). Refer to the manufacturer's instructions if you have questions.

Test the connections for leaks by brushing soapy water on them, and then turn on the gas. If bubbles appear or the distinctive 'rotten egg' smell of gas is present, turn off the gas and tighten the connections. Do the test again. If the bubbles or smell continues, shut off the gas and call your local propane supplier.

Step four: Clean the briquettes and cooking grids. Unlike charcoal, the briquettes do not burn but transfer heat from the burner. Continual use of the briquettes leaves the cooking grids coated with grease. For cleaning, flip the briquettes so the greasy side faces the burner and place the grids in their usual place. Light the grill, close the lid and set the flame on 'high' for 15 minutes. The heat will burn the grease off the briquettes and grids.

After the barbecue grill cools, remove the grids and briquettes. Using the brass-bristle brush and some warm, soapy water, scrub the grids clean, rinse and towel dry. As a precaution against corrosion, lightly coat the grids with liquid cooking oil (but not an aerosol spray).