

## **Recommendations for selecting your: Beef, Pork, Chicken, Turkey and Seafood**

### **Beef:**

When we refer to beef or steak, this is a general statement and a personal preference. We prefer different cuts of beef for different meals, different types of cooking and cuisine themes. Beef is graded by the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), for quality and as a minimum buy a “choice” grade of beef. Above the choice grade there is prime, which only 1% of all beef is graded prime. There are also specific breeds of beef cattle that are marketed, along with the USDA grading and buying the “Black Angus” breed of beef is always a good bet and normally graded “choice”. If you have a ton of money and/or obsessed with beef then buy prime grade and/or grass fed. Upscale markets will have a small supply. The Wegman’s grocery stores in our area carry “prime” grade of beef. For your information, the grading of beef (pork, chicken, fish are not graded) has to do with the amount and intensity of fat marbling in the “eye” muscle or meat. When you see prime graded beef you will definitely see the difference. The intensity of the fat marbling is quite obvious. In culinary terms: fat equals flavor. The more fat, the more flavor, period. In a health conscious society, we try to limit the amount of fats we consume, particularly animal fats, as they are the only fats that have cholesterol. Everything in moderation, we preach.

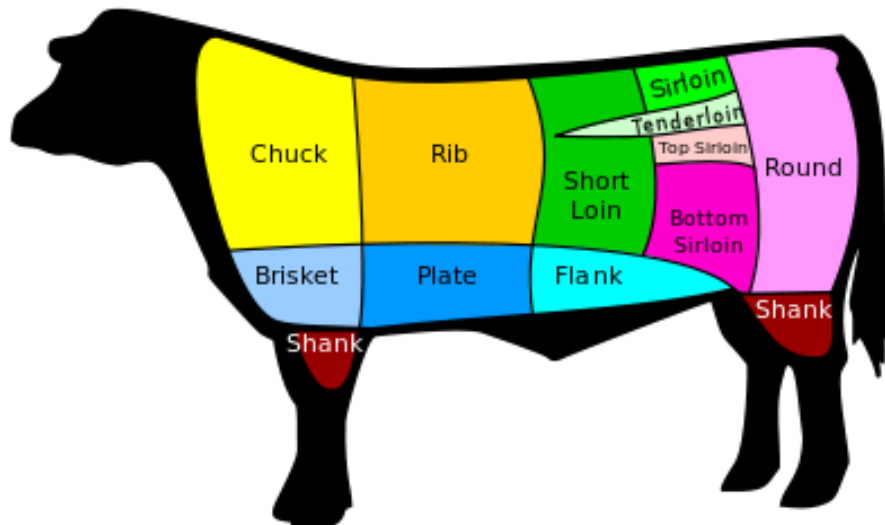
If you have the option, try to buy “local” products as well. Again the local Wegman’s market we shop at also carries “local” beef. It’s good for your local economy, local farmers, its fresher and it reduces your “carbon footprint”.

Here are our American cuts of beef recommendations:

- New York steak (also known as striploin or New York strip) for individual portions grilled. Cook this quickly at high heat (grilling or sautéing) to your desired doneness. Use the Cowboy Red-Eye Rub, Fajita Seasoning, Kansas City BBQ Rub, All-American BBQ Rub, Texas BBQ Rub, Southwest BBQ Rub or the Santa Maria BBQ Rub. This cut comes from the top of the “short loin” area. See the chart below.
- Skirt Steak for grilling, particularly authentic for fajitas, but great beef flavor and tender. Use the Fajita Seasoning, Kansas City BBQ Rub, All-American BBQ Rub, Texas BBQ Rub, Southwest BBQ Rub or the Santa Maria BBQ Rub. This cut of beef comes from the diaphragm of the animal in the Plate section.
- Sirloin Tri-tip – Great cut of beef for slow roasting, with the Santa Maria BBQ Rub, which is the classic! This is a well-marbled, coarse grained, tender cut of beef that has great beef taste. Slice this against the grain for optimum tenderness. This comes from the Bottom Sirloin section.
- Brisket – This cut of beef needs long slow roasting to breakdown the muscle and make the meat tender. You can oven roast or smoked roast this for 8 to 12 hours depending on the size of the brisket. Cook this at 225 to 250 F. until the internal

temperature reaches 190 F. Basic rule: The slower you cook it, the juicier and tenderer it will be. Use the Cowboy Red-Eye Rub, Fajita Seasoning, Kansas City BBQ Rub, All-American BBQ Rub, Texas BBQ Rub, Southwest BBQ Rub or the Santa Maria BBQ Rub. This cut comes from the “Brisket” area obviously.

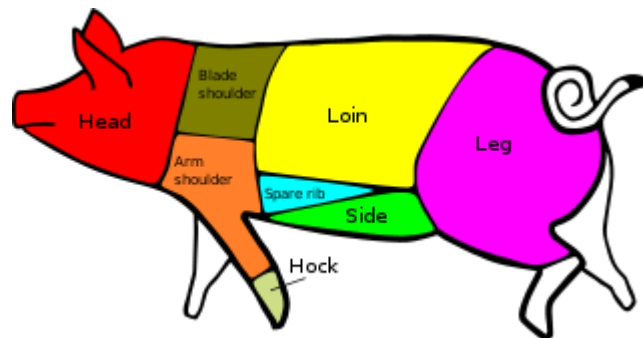
- Hanger Steak (also known as Bistro or Butcher’s Steak) – This cut of beef comes from the diaphragm area also, near the kidney’s. It is a “V” shaped piece of meat, that average 1 to 1 ½ pounds each, with a tough thin membrane running through the middle of it. It is great for high heat quick cooking and has a very strong beef flavor. This cut comes from the Plate section.
- Beef Ribs – This rib cut comes from the rib section, behind the “prime rib roast”. This beef rib cut needs slow cooking to tenderize the tough but flavorful beef between the ribs. All of the BBQ rubs will work great with these ribs.
- Beef Boneless Short Ribs are the boneless part of the lower portion of the beef ribs. They can be a lot of fat layers running through it, which makes for a lot of flavor. All of the BBQ rubs will work great with these ribs but they must be cooked quickly at high heat to medium temperature or slow cooked and allow the fat to melt and the meat to tenderize.
- Flank Steak – This not surprising comes from the Flank section. It is a fairly thin course grained muscle and is tender if cooked quickly and cooked past medium or it can be slow roasted to allow time to break down the muscle fibers. Flank steak must be cut against the grain of the muscle or it is tough. This cut is sometimes used for Fajitas, although the Skirt Steak is the best cut for that. It is also sometimes called a London Broil, which is method of preparation, jot a cut of beef and is also a slice of Top Round 1 ½” to 2” thick. It id marinated and then quickly grilled and cut against the grain, by no surprise.
- Beef Tenderloin – This is a very tender cut of the beef, as it is an unused muscle in the animal. It has a fine muscle grain, but not my favorite cuts of beef, as it lacks a good beef flavor kick. It is the most expensive cut of beef and the most desired, thus it high cost. It is very lean and is best not cooked past medium.
- Beef Chuck and Beef Bottom Round - These are cuts we like to use for braising, as in beef stews and pot roasts. They are well used muscles so they need long slow moist cooking to tenderize them, generally for 2 to 3 hours.



## Pork:

With pork, unlike with beef, there are only a few cuts that are used. Pork is also not graded, like beef. Here are the cuts that are normally used:

- Boston Butt (Shoulder Butt) – This cut of pork is the most common for barbecuing and used for pulled pork. It can contain part of the shoulder blade bone in it. It is also the perfect ratio of fat to meat for making pork sausages. The name comes from Boston where they originally cut the pork shoulder this way. It comes from the upper shoulder or “Blade Shoulder”.
- Picnic Shoulder – This is very similar in usage as the Boston Butt. This cut contains the forearm. This comes from the “Arm Shoulder”.
- Baby Back Ribs – Which are the pork ribs of choice for all Southern barbecue. They come from the top part of the loin section just under the loin muscle. They don’t contain much meat but are tender and curved in shape.
- St. Louis Ribs – These come after the baby back ribs have been cut and are larger meatier rib section, with flatter bones. They generally have the rib tip cut off and are “squared up”, to a rectangle in shape. These are the ribs that we prefer as they have much more meat on them.



- Pork Loin – This is a lean long muscle that is best roasted or grilled to no more than 155 F. There is very little or no internal fat marbling, so it will dry out quickly, if even slightly over cooked. Obviously the “pork chop” is the pork loin with the bone still attached.
- Pork Tenderloin – This is a smaller muscle that is very tender, just like the beef tenderloin, but has very little flavor and generally needs a good marinade to bring it to life. Not a recommendation.
- Boneless Pork Ribs – These are a nice fat marbled and fat capped cut. Good for grilling and roasting and you could also slow roast or braise it.

## Chicken:

Purchase organic chicken, whenever possible. Free range and natural mean nothing, except marketing ploys. We buy whole chickens, bone-in skin-on chicken breasts, bone-in skin on leg quarters and wings. The skin and bones protect the meat during cooking from the high heat and add flavor to the meat as well.

## **Turkey:**

Purchase organic turkey whenever possible. We buy bone-in, skin-on turkey thighs and turkey breasts throughout the year and reserve the whole bird for special occasions. The skin and bones protect the meat during cooking from the high heat and add flavor to the meat as well.

## **Seafood:**

Only purchase fresh seafood, period, end of statement! Nothing frozen, except shrimp, which you will rarely ever find fresh. You might find live or fresh shrimp on occasion in some high end grocery stores or large Asian markets.

Wild caught fish is always better than farmed fish, because it is caught in its natural habitat, eating its natural foods. Farmed fish are generally not recommended by the two most well-known environmental seafood groups: The Environmental Defense Fund and the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch. The old adage: you are what you eat holds true for fish too! Farmed fish are generally raised in crowded pens and fed manufactured foods.

Choose "line caught" if possible, as the fish was caught using fishing lines not nets, which catch too much by products (other fish) unnecessarily.

### **Fin Fish Recommendations:**

- **Salmon** – The most popular of all fish and there are many type available. Again follow the statement above, wild caught is best.
  - Chinook (aka King) Salmon – largest and generally most expensive.
  - Sockeye Salmon – Probably the best eating salmon. They have very red meat from eating the orange krill in the ocean.
  - Coho (aka Silver) Salmon – Have a bright red flesh and have a more delicate flavor than the Chinook.
  - Atlantic Salmon – Used for farmed salmon. Buy them wild if possible. The most common salmon all over the world.
  - Steelhead – Are ocean going rainbow trout.
  - Arctic Char – Are a cold water lake and costal water salmon. They are smaller and have a flavor between trout and salmon.
  - Pink and Chum – Are both often sold canned or frozen and are the least desirable of the salmon family.
- **Catfish** – Mostly farm-raised is available. Catfish is a mild white fish, generally breaded and fried, but often pan sautéed or grilled. Buy the wild caught if you find it.
- **Tilapia** - A very mild, fresh-water white fish, generally available in boneless/skinless filet form or as a whole fish. It is found almost entirely as a farm-raised fish. Not one of my favorites, but very adaptable to spices as seasonings as the fish is very mild in taste and very versatile.
- **Swordfish** – Is classified as an "oily fish", as they contain up to 30 % oil in their meat, similar to Salmon, Trout, Mackerel, Tuna, Anchovies, Sardines and Herring. The dense steak-like texture of Swordfish, makes them great for grilling and used to

make grilled fish skewers. I have placed a Swordfish steak on the grill and it flared up like a steak of beef would! Don't overcook it as it will dry out. One word of caution, Swordfish tend to absorb mercury in their flesh and are not recommended to be eaten by young children or pregnant or nursing women. As always, everything in moderation.

- **Cod** – Classically used for “Fish & Chips”. A flaky, mild flavored, dense white fish. Good for pan or oven roasting. Not a good grilling fish, as it falls apart too easily. Young Cod is often called Scrod.
- **Pollock** – A member of the Cod family, but generally not as good as Cod or Haddock, but cheaper.
- **Haddock** – Another member of the Cod family. It is used in cooking the same way as Cod, but not salted, as in Salt Cod. It is often smoked in many European cuisines. Like Cod, young Haddock is often called Scrod.
- **Trout** – Is a member of the Salmon family and a mild and very popular fresh water fish, generally available whole or as skin-on filets. The filets are very thin, thus cannot be grilled, but whole trout could. Rainbow Trout (the most common variety) that spend time in salt water are called Steelhead. Trout are generally baked or pan fried.
- **Red Snapper** – A member of the Snapper family and Red Snapper is a great firm flavorful white fish, good for grilling, pan frying or roasting.
- **Rockfish** – Rockfish on the East Coast of the US is a type of Striped Bass and the Maryland State fish. On the Pacific Coast Rockfish is known as Rock Cod or Pacific Snapper. This is a highly prized, lean, firm, mild white fish. It is very versatile and can be grilled, roasted or pan fried. It is usually sold as skin-on filets
- **Tuna** – This is a big popular group of fish. There are two basic species: Bluefin and Yellowfin tuna. The most popular is the Albacore tuna, generally used for canned tuna, although fabulous if you can find it fresh. This is another one of the “oily fish”. Other Bluefin tuna are: Southern Bluefin, Bigeye, Pacific and Atlantic. Yellowfin tuna are: Blackfin, Longtail and Yellowfin. Tuna are most popular used in making sushi. Tuna is generally grilled or pan-fried as a cooking method.
- **Striped Bass** – It has a medium firm texture and a mild flavor and large flakes. It is very versatile and can be grilled, fried, pan-fried or roasted. It is generally sold in boneless filet with the skin-on.
- **Grouper (Red and Black)** - Is from the Sea Bass family. It is a firm, mild large flaky fish with a sweet unique flavor. It can be grilled, fried, roasted or pan fried.
- **Mahi-Mahi** – Is also known as dolphinfish or Dorado. It is generally sold in boneless filets with the skin-on. It has a dense meaty texture although not a thick fish. It has an off-white color and can hold up to grilling, pan frying or roasting. It has a mild flavor but it works well with bold flavors.
- **Chilean Sea Bass** – It is the Patagonia Toothfish and is a species of Cod Icefish. It is found deep in the Southern Hemisphere. It has a wonderful rich sweet flavor and high oil content. It is very white meat and is tender “melt in your mouth” taste. This is a chef best resource fish for catering. You can cook it and hold it hot for hours and it will not dry out!!! Expensive but an amazing fish in texture and flavor.

- **Halibut** – The largest of the “flat fish” and right-eyed flounder. It is found in the North Atlantic and Pacific. It has a mild, clean taste, a firm dense texture and low in fat content. It too is rather expensive, but an excellent fish
- **Skate wings** – Skate is a member of Rays and the “wings” are the part that is sold, boneless/skinless or the whole skate wing. It has a sweet taste similar to a scallop, but a denser texture with white flaky strands. It is rare to find in the stores or on a menu, but if you do see it give it a try.

There are obviously many other species of fin fish, but these are the most common and readily available, depending on the season/time of year and your location.

## Other Seafood Recommendations:

Here is the seafood philosophy that I use when eating or buying seafood: “The colder the water the seafood comes from the better it is”!

- **Lobster** – Maine lobsters, as we know them or clawed lobsters are not closely related to the non-clawed lobsters like the spiny or slipper lobster. Clawed lobsters from the cold waters of the Atlantic North Coast are the highly prized crustaceans. Their closest relatives are the reef lobster and fresh water crayfish. Like all seafood and shellfish, lobster don’t like high heat. The most common way to cook lobster is to steam or boil them in salted water. Cooking guidelines: Steam for 7 minutes for the first pound and then 3 minutes for each additional pound. Do not try to over crowd the pot. The best lobster are the smaller ones, also known as chicks. They weight around 1 ¼ to 1 ½ pounds. As they get larger or even huge, they are impressive to look at, but get tough as they age.
- **Clams** – There are a couple of different types:
  - Atlantic Hard shell clams of which there are (smallest to largest): Littlenecks, Topnecks, Cherrystones, Chowders and Geoducks. The smaller the more tender and delicate. They have a fairly round shell.
  - Soft Shell Clams: are called Steamer or Ipswich clams. The shells are more oblong, brittle and lighter in color. Generally they are steamed or fried. They can be sandy.
  - Manilla Clams: Are originally from China but are now cultivated in Washington State. They are a small clam with a very hard shell. These are delicate and only need to be steamed for 3 to 5 minutes!
  - Razor Clams (Pacific and Atlantic); These are long thin clams and are generally fried.
  - Surf Clams: Also known as Bar Clams or Skimmers. These clams are generally fried, as they are larger and not as delicate.

Always discard raw clams whose shells do not close when tapped and/or don’t open when cooked, as they are dead.

- **Mussels** – Most of the Blue Mussels in the United States come from Prince Edward Island in Washington State. Clean and remove the “beard” form the mussel before cooking it. They are generally steamed or boiled in white wine, herbs, butter and garlic
- **Crabs** – Whatever part of this country you are from, you have the best crab, right? Sorry, no. The king of crabs (not Alaskan) is the Dungeness crab from the Pacific Northwest. My bias here, being from San Francisco! Nothing is better than a fresh

steamed Dungeness crab, with drawn butter, sourdough bread and Anchor Steam beer. The problem is that the Dungeness crab is rarely found outside of the Pacific Northwest coast fresh. It doesn't travel well fresh and spoils quickly, because of the high fat content of the crab. They are cooked like a lobster. The East Coast and Texas-Louisiana Coast have the Blue crabs, which are fabulous soft shelled fried whole or hard shell crabs dusted with Crab Seasoning. Florida has the Rock Crab and its claw and Alaska has it King Crab and Snow Crab.

- **Shrimp** – As mentioned earlier, most shrimp will be frozen, as they handle the freezing process better than all other forms of seafood. There are three general types of shrimp: Brown Shrimp, White Shrimp and Pink Shrimp, which are generally smaller, commonly called salad shrimp, except the Gulf Pink Shrimp, which are the same size as the White and Brown.

As a general rule, buy the largest size shrimp you can afford. They are sold by the “count per pound”. The most common sizes are: 16-20 count, 21-25 count and 26-30 count. I wouldn't recommend anything smaller than the 26-30 count. Some stores might sell larger sizes like U12 or U8, which means “under 12 count” or “Under 8 count”. These are almost starting to look like small lobster tails! How to buy the shrimp, always raw! The most common choices of buying raw shrimp are:

- P & D (peeled and deveined), tail on
- P & D, tail off
- Shell on
- Shell on and deveined – The shell is razor cut and “deveined”. This is my favorite way to buy shrimp.

The “vein” in a shrimp is on the outer back of the shrimp and is not actually the vein, but the “intestinal track”, thus buy the larger shrimp and devein them, if you don't buy them that way, please.

- **Sea Scallops** – Only purchase fresh “dry pack” sea scallops. This means they were not packed with added chemicals to keep them fresh and white. I know that's gross! There are also smaller Bay Scallops.
- **Oysters** – Favorites? The colder the water the better to me. The Pacific Northwest Coast has my favorites: Kumamoto, Olympia and Pacific oysters, but Belons are up there too! There are also the larger Atlantic Oysters, like the famous Bluepoints and Wellfleets Like Clams and Mussels, they are alive and the shells will close tight is lightly tapped on. Those that don't close, discard, whether you are eating them raw or cooking them. Really good fresh oysters should smell and taste like the ocean, a little salty. What a wonderful treat, raw or cooked!

Oysters are eat raw “on the half shell” with either a wedge of lemon, Mignonette Sauce, Cocktail Sauce or prepared Horseradish. Oyster shucking is not a pleasant task, as the shells are difficult to open and you need a special “oyster knife” to accomplish the job effectively.

Cooked they can be baked, as in Oysters Rockefeller or fried. They are also sometimes used in seafood stews as in Italian Seafood Stew or New England Oyster Stew!