



Grilling Gadgets

New gadgets from innovative manufacturers make it easier for outdoor chefs to cook a wider array of foods with a greater range of techniques.

Manufacturers and retailers alike are taking barbecue accessories more seriously and giving the category the respect it deserves as a true profit center. Accessory products are moving well beyond the standard tongs-spatula-fork sets. Offerings now include cookware specially designed for the grill, ethnic cuisine-inspired implements, well-designed, high-quality tools, charcoal-lighting products, gourmet rubs, sauces and seasonings, and even gift-perfect gadgets.

“The use of accessories in grilling is rising rapidly,” says Sean Tegar, vice president product marketing at Weber-Stephen Products Co. “In fact, one-third of Americans report using grilling accessories more now than they

did in the past. We believe this trend will continue to grow as more people are using their grills for a wider array of foods – like seafood, fruits, vegetables and pizza. As a result, consumers are looking for the proper grilling tools, and dealers who carry a broad range of accessories are seeing a tremendous amount of sales success.”

Manufacturers are paying attention to cooking trends and translating them to fantastic barbecue accessory products that have consumers returning to the retail store for the latest gear to keep on top of new grilling recipes and techniques.

Tools from Grillfinity.



The SavorRest Meat Resting Blanket by GrillTenders.

your indoor oven without heating up your house,” notes Hamlin. “And it’s good to have on hand in case of a power outage, too. We’ve had people tell us they were able to cook every meal despite a long power outage.”

SavorRest was developed out of frustration over meat getting cold during the recommended resting period before carving. At her husband’s request, Sally Wait-



BBQ Hooker.

ley searched for a thermal insulating blanket to cover meat to keep it hot until serving time. When she couldn’t find one anywhere, Waitley, a seamstress, stitched one up herself and before long all the couples’ friends wanted one too. Believing this was a marketable concept, they formed GrillTenders and began manufacturing and marketing the SavorRest meat resting blanket.

SavorRest is currently available in five attractive fabrics and three sizes, including an extra-large blanket that’s perfect for competition barbecuers and for keeping food warm during retail cooking demonstrations. According to the company’s Johnny Williams, a turkey

covered by the SavorRest lost only five degrees of heat while “resting” in a recent study. “Foil doesn’t do the job alone,” Williams explains, adding that the consumer response to the product has been tremendous, frequently selling out during demos. “The concept is so simple,” he continues, “but it solves a problem and makes food taste better.”

The name may inspire snickers, but the BBQ Hooker is a very handy four-in-one tool incorporating a hook for turning meats, a spatula, a serrated knife-edge and a bottle opener. “This simplifies your cookout,” says co-owner Cynthia Schultz. “You only have to clean one tool, and there’s less to store. From a woman’s perspective, that’s important.”

If your store caters to hunters, campers or fishermen/women, consider carrying the CanCooker. The lightweight aluminum cooker, which looks like a miniature, old-fashioned milk can, sits on a grilling grid, camp stove or propane burner and cooks food by steaming or boiling it inside the closed can. According to national account manager Sonja McGinn, it’s great for fish boils, clam bakes, brats boiled in beer or other one-pot meals.

The latest products from DiversiTech, makers of the Original Grill Pad, a mat that sits beneath a grill or firepit to protect the deck from grease stains and sparks, have nothing to do with grilling at all. Yet, predicts national sales manager Ray Shelor, they should still be of interest to barbecue dealers looking for a good way to boost counter-seasonal profits.

The Christmas Tree Stand Mat is a 30-inch reversible red and green mat made out of breathable fiber materials and a protective barrier that safeguards floors from tree stand water spills. The smaller Holiday Surface Saver is ideal for protecting floors and furniture from staining, scratches, condensation rings and more caused by poinsettias and other decorations.

“Both these products answer a need and will be compelling impulse purchases for consumers this fall and holiday season,” Shelor explains.

How to Sell More

To beef up accessories sales, the experts suggest taking advantage of manufacturers’ display systems to showcase the breadth of your accessories department. You want to make a clear statement on your sales floor that you are in the accessories business.

“But it does no good if the display rack is tucked in a corner far away from the grills,” notes Burch. “It’s a good idea to display accessories directly on a grill

“It’s a good idea to display accessories directly on a grill or sideburner to show how they would be used.”

– Joe Burch, *Alfinity USA*

or side burner to show how they would be used.” For instance, showcase a jalapeno pepper rack, a pizza stone or a paella pan on the grilling grid or place a sauce pot on the side burner.

Burch also explains that enlarged or even poster-sized photographs of food being grilled using accessory products can be helpful, as well. “Give people ideas about what they can cook,” he says. “Show a photo of a chicken on a roaster or a colorful stir fry in a topper. Accessories really do make food taste better and give people more variety in what they can cook on a grill.”

According to Burson, one of the most important tricks to selling accessories is to work them into demos. “Talk about the rack you’re using to hold the ribs, the wood chips, the seasoning rubs,” she explains. “The more you talk about accessories and show people how to use them, the more they want to buy.”

Buy indeed. Manufacturers report that, although people still seem hesitant to part with money for a new grill, they are willing to purchase new accessory gear to upgrade their grilling experience. And with excellent margins, accessory products could help dealers survive until the economic tide turns. 🏠



The Splatter Mat by DiversiTech.



Patented Grid Lifter by Big Green Egg.

The entire Big Green Egg accessories line has been updated recently with new packaging. The company also has introduced new display rack systems to help retailers “make a presence” for accessories on the sales floor, according to Burson.

But one of the greatest sales boosts for its accessory line has been the new Big Green Egg cookbook developed and produced by the company this year. The multitude of recipes and dozens of mouth-watering, full-color photos in the book were designed to showcase the versatility of the EGG and show how, with the help of various accessory products, it’s possible to bake breads and desserts, cook casseroles, roast meats, slow-cook traditional barbecue fare, make brick-oven-style pizzas, stir-fry and more on the ceramic cooker.



Looftlighter, a 2010 Vesta Award finalist.

“The cookbook has had a great response,” says Burson. “Dealers have doubled and tripled amounts on reorders. And the secondary success is that it has definitely helped boost sales of the acces-

sory products used in the recipes.”

Just as Big Green Egg built its business exclusively with specialty dealers, Alfinity USA, makers of the Grillfinity line of accessories, hopes to do the same. “We don’t sell to mass retailers,” insists Joe Burch, the U.S. representative for the Hong Kong-based company. About three years ago the company launched a line of premium, professional-quality grilling tools and accessories targeting consumers who appreciate good design, sleek styling, and better-quality products, according to Burch. For example, Grillfinity grill top-pers range from 1 to 1.5 millimeters thick, depending on the style, as compared to a .6 millimeter thickness on typical top-pers. “Thicker steel lasts longer and performs better with no warping, burn-out, or other adverse effects from the heat,” he points out.

They have since added a second brand, Thing-a-Ma-Bob, which offers a variety of multi-functional gadgets, including a 6-in-1 topper which combines a grill topper, skewer rack and basting systems in one unit.

Burch says the company has focused as much on packaging as the product, investing significantly in its design. The entire line will have a new look in 2011 as the former black packaging will be replaced with an orange flame and smoke design on a solid white background. “The goal is to be more eye-popping and attract more attention in the store,” he says.

Ones to Watch

Some of the year’s hottest accessories were born out of cool ideas. The Looftlighter, a 2010 Vesta Award finalist for best hearth/barbecue component or control, was invented by Swedish theater director Richard Looft, after a grilled chicken dinner was ruined by the flavor of lighter fluid and he had to order pizza instead. The electric Looftlighter resembles a hair dryer and uses hot air to light lump or briquet-style charcoal quickly and easily without chemicals. With 70,000 units sold over the last three years in Europe, according to Looft, the product has a promising future in the U.S. (It also lights wood fires in fireplaces, stoves and chimineas.)

Another pizza order necessitated by



Professional-quality grilling tool-set by Grillfinity.

a spoiled meal on the grill led to the birth of the Grill Innovations grill plate. Creator Ed Hamlin attempted to cook a meatloaf on the grill for the weekly lunch he prepares for his employees every Friday. The disastrous result required a quick call for pizza delivery and inspired a mission to develop a product that would facilitate baking on the grill.

Hamlin’s patented, stainless-steel Grill Innovations grill plate sits on top of the grilling grid and holds baking dishes, roasting pans and even cookie sheets to make everything from roasted potatoes to lasagna to mac and cheese to cook-



Grill Plate from Grill Innovations.

ies. The heat circulates through the base of the plate creating a convection effect, while the dimpled surface and insulating air gap prevent foods from burning. A 16-by-12-inch rectangular unit designed to fit most gas grills is available now, and a round version for kettles and ceramic grills is in the works.

“This product is great because it turns a grill into a convection oven and allows you to cook anything you can cook in



Kabob set and Pizza Stone by Weber.

Mindful of statistics from its “Grill-Watch Survey” showing 10 percent of grill owners have tried cooking pizza on their grill, Weber has introduced the Weber Pizza Stone. The heavy-duty stone sits atop a metal frame so the pizza bakes like it’s in a brick oven, but doesn’t burn. Clever handles lift the stone from grill to table.

The new pizza stone is part of Weber’s new line of grilling accessories with upgraded materials, smart design features and cool looks.



Rotisserie from Bull Outdoor Products.

Another company recognizing the potential of the category is Bull Outdoor Products, which launched a new line of barbecue accessories this year. The “very comprehensive” offering was “designed to increase footsteps in the store,” according to vice president of sales and marketing, Frank Mello. The company also has developed a convenient display rack system that is free to dealers who purchase a minimum amount of product. “Accessories are a key to a retailer’s success,” Mello adds. Napoleon has amped up its acces-



*ABOVE: Steak Station.
RIGHT: Crème Brûlée Set,
both from Companion Group.*

sories line, as well, expanding the selection and upgrading the packaging. Napoleon now offers one of the industry’s most extensive lines of accessory products, including a large variety of gourmet items, cookware, grill racks and toppers, tools, wood products, and even several cookbooks by company spokesperson Ted Reader.

Barbecue guru Steven Raichlen says accessories help backyard chefs accomplish more complex grilling techniques, recreate restaurant trends and prepare ethnic specialties. To that end, his line of Steven Raichlen Signature Accessories, produced and marketed by Companion Group, has added a host of new products this year including a cast-iron, griddle-like plancha for Spanish-style grilling, a crème brûlée set for making the classic French dessert on the grill, a paella pan, a seafood rack for grill-roasting oysters and clams, a panini griller, and slider burger basket kit, among other items.

“We try to make grilling easier, more professional and more fun,” Raichlen explains.

Companion Group certainly puts the emphasis on fun with its own Charcoal Companion brand of accessories featuring nifty gadgets and colorful, attention-grabbing packaging. But the products are practical too, offering relatively inexpensive solutions to everyday grilling issues. For instance, the Steak Station has internal meat probes that register the desired rare, medium or well-done-ness on up to four



different steaks. Smoke in a Cup holds wood chips in a disposable, cupcake-sized aluminum container, making it convenient to add wood smoke flavor to any type of grill. The V-Shaped Smoker Box fits between the flame detector bars on a gas grill, converting it into a smoker. And the TurboQue is a retro-fit fan system that turns a basic, no-frills grill into a professional, convection style cooker.

Big Green Egg launched 20 new “EGGcessories” in 2010 to add to its already extensive line-up. The new intros include “fun, gifty stuff like EGG-shaped corn holders, salt and pepper shakers and candles,” notes Big Green Egg marketing manager Jodi Burson. But the most exciting new accessory products include cookware and bakeware specifically designed for the EGG, such as paella pans, pizza stones, baking dishes, roasting pans and multi-tier grilling grids to expand the cooking surface.



*Rectangular Wok Topper and Pizza Topper
by Napoleon.*