



WOOD PRODUCTS AS FLAVOR ENHANCERS

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Flavor Enhancing Using Wood and Wood Products

When using wood products for flavoring food it is a **MUST** to use only hardwood logs, sawdust, chips, planks, biscuits bits, or pellets. Be careful, when buying sawdust, as it is not always 100% hardwood. Storing wood products off the ground in a dry sheltered place will season and also dry it. So it is necessary to sometimes soak some products in water to provide more smoke and fewer flare-ups.

Of all the heat sources available for your cooker/grill/pit only wood can smoke flavor your food. Any smoke generated from gas, electric or charcoal is coming from your food; you are basting your food in the smoke created from its own drippings. That's why food tastes virtually the same when cooked on gas, electric or charcoal without flavor enhancers.

Smoke flavor enhancers from wood and wood products are added **AFTER** the gas, electric or charcoal cooker/grill/pit is heated and ready to cook on, and right before the food is placed in the cooker/grill/pit. As the flavor enhancer is consumed in the fire, it releases smoke, which flavors your food. Smoke from wood logs (that also supply the cooking heat) will flavor enhance the food for entire time they are burning

Flavor Enhancers:

Wood Logs: Can provide a heat and smoke source. If you starve wood of oxygen as you heat it, it smokes rather than burns. Sometimes bark is removed for a milder smoke. This flavor enhancing smoke will flavor the food since the smoke will continue to be produced as long as there is not too much air.

Wood Chunks: Not usually used to produce heat but added to a heat source to provide smoke. The smoke is then used to flavor food. For the best results always use wood that is sized properly for your smoker. Wood chunks are small cut especially for the smoker oven type of smokers but also works well with pits and smokehouses.

Wood Biscuits / Pellets: Some smokers such as Bradley's burn biscuits, while other smokers use pellets, which feed automatically to create clean, cool smoke. Unlike wood chunks or sawdust, biscuits and pellets are made to exacting standards using controlled pressures and densities. This process ensures that they will not burst into flame and will provide the slow, low temperature burn required for a true cold smoke. Biscuits can also be used in a pan over a burner to produce a steady flow of clean smoke for 20-30 minutes without tending. Simply place a biscuit in the pan and add more when needed.

Sawdust: When using sawdust it is sometimes desirable to add water to facilitate more smoke. Also, soaking your chips in water will allow for fewer flare-ups and more smoke and a slower burn. Sawdust is the most economical way to induce smoke into meats and is used primarily in smokehouses where the need for heat is supplied in other ways. Sawdust produces dense smoke. It should be. A pan over a hot plate will work fine, use a vented lid to control the air supply so it smolders instead of burns.

Smoke Bags: These are cloth bags filled with sawdust. They come in several popular flavors. Soak in water for a while prior to placing on a heat source. Add when your cooker/smoker/grill is up to temp.

Wood Bits: This product is very coarse sawdust much like the sawdust produced by chain saws. It can be put in chip boxes or aluminum foil pouches to provide smoke.

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Pellets: Pellets are a unique form of natural wood, made of compressed sawdust. When pellets are made, all of the air within the cellular structure of the wood is evacuated, thus concentrating the wood into a very dense form, much denser than the natural tree. As compared to other wood flavor enhancers, pellets will yield a more intense smoke more quickly which seals the food, locking in natural moisture and adding smoke flavor exactly when it's needed. Since pellets have been processed from sawdust by pressure, which generates heat, any contaminants present in the wood are eliminated. This process produces a smoking wood product of consistent quality. Pellets are easy to use since you do not soak in water prior to use. It's easy to blend wood flavors with pellets and easy to repeat successful cooking results.

Some grills have a dispenser that feeds from a storage hopper to a burning box at a controlled rate. This rate is adjustable based on whether you want a high temperature for grilling or a low temperature for smoking.

You can also make a pouch of heavy-duty aluminum with just one tiny hole in one side works great to provide smoke in most outdoor cookers. To make a foil pouch, cut a piece of heavy duty aluminum foil 6" by 12" and fold in half making a 6"x6" square. Fold the side edges at least twice, pressing each fold firmly along the entire side. Put 1/3 of a cup of pellets in the pouch and fold the top to seal. Poke a hole in one side of the pouch with a toothpick. Place the pouch on top of your charcoal briquettes or above the gas flame. When the smoke starts coming out of the hole in the pouch, put your food on the cooking grate and close the cover of your cooker. Smoke should last up to 30 minutes depending on the temperature of your cooker.

If you have a smoke box made for chips, restrict the air with foil when you're using pellets. Remember, one hole is all you need.

Natural Lump Charcoal comes from partially burning wood. It is also created by heating wood without oxygen. In doing so, this charred wood becomes carbon. During the process of making charcoal, volatile compounds in the wood (water, hydrogen, methane and tars) pass off as vapors into the air, and the carbon is converted into charcoal.

Natural "Lump" Charcoal is known to be more efficient, healthier and controllable than briquettes or any prefabricated charcoals. Since Charcoal is pure wood carbon, it weights much less than its original state. It is also free of tars (which can contain carcinogenic compounds, like benzo-a-pyrene). Perhaps only traces of volatile components can be found in charcoal. Unlike Charcoal Briquettes, which holds different chemicals, natural charcoal is merely 100% carbon.

There are 2 types of charcoals: the first type comes from natural wood which has been cut and made into charcoal. This is as natural as you can get. The wood comes from trees, branches and scrap pieces from saw mills. The second type comes from using processed scrap wood and turning it into charcoal. Processed scrap wood tend to burn faster since its density is lesser than natural. This is mainly because there is less moisture into the wood at the time it is transformed into charcoals. This wood comes from wood flooring scraps, building material scrap and furniture scraps and others.

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The most popular woods for flavoring foods are hickory, mesquite, pecan, alder, maple, apple and cherry. The best smoke flavor comes from fruit and nut hardwoods.

Wood Type	Characteristics	Pares with
Hickory	Pungent, smoky, bacon-like flavor	Pork, chicken, beef, wild game, cheeses
Pecan	Rich and more subtle than hickory, but similar in taste. Burns cool, so ideal for very low heat smoking	Pork, chicken, lamb, fish, cheeses
Mesquite	Sweeter, more delicate flavor than hickory. Tends to burn hot, so use carefully	Most meats, especially beef. Most vegetables
Alder	Delicate flavor that enhances lighter meats	Salmon, swordfish, sturgeon, other fish. Also good with chicken and pork
Oak	Forthright but pleasant flavor. Blends well with a variety of textures and flavors	Beef (particularly brisket), poultry, pork
Maple	Mildly smoky, somewhat sweet flavor	Try mixing maple with corncobs for ham or bacon. Poultry, vegetables, ham
Birch	Aromatic slightly resinous wood used in East & Midwest	
Cherry	Slightly sweet, fruity smoke flavor	Poultry, game birds, pork
Apple	Slightly sweet but denser, fruity smoke flavor	Beef, poultry, game birds, pork (particularly ham)
Peach or Pear	Slightly sweet, woody flavor	Poultry, game birds, pork
Grape vines	Aromatic, similar to fruit woods	Turkey, chicken, beef
Wine barrel chips	Wine and oak flavors. A flavorful novelty that smells wonderful, too	Beef, turkey, chicken, cheeses
Seaweed	Tangy and smoky flavors. (Wash and dry in sun before use.)	Lobster, crab, shrimp, mussels, clams

Herbs & spices (bay leaves, rosemary, garlic, mint, orange or lemon peels, whole nutmeg, cinnamon sticks, and others) will flavor vegetables, cheese, small pieces of meat, such as fish steaks, fillets and kabobs. They vary from spicy, to sweet, to delicate to mild. Generally, herbs and spices with higher oil content will provide stronger flavoring. Soak branches and stems in water before adding to fire. They burn quickly, so you may need to replenish often.

Over smoking leads to bitter taste by using too much wood or leaking in smokehouse too long. Small cuts of poultry require very little amount of wood. Poultry holds smoke on its skin. Poultry and fish require less smoke than beef and pork

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