



**Wood-Fire Grill Q&A with  
Senior Executive Chef Michael LaDuke**

**Q: Why is wood grilling an art?**

**A:** Wood grilling involves balancing the pure, simplistic palate of seafood and the natural wood flavor while using quality ingredients to complement the dish. It is the harmony of careful preparation, natural flavors and great ingredients that will produce a delicious dish.

**Q: How does wood grilling differ from standard grilling methods?**

**A:** Wood grilling has a very high level of heat -- 550 to 600 degrees – which is 100 degrees higher than a traditional grill. Therefore, you must take more care on the wood fire itself to ensure proper cooking levels. Products cook more quickly on wood grills, so you need to pay close attention throughout the entire cooking process.

**Q: What are the benefits of using wood grills over standard grills?**

**A:** Wood is a cleaner, more natural source of heat than charcoal, and it also adds natural wood flavor that pairs wonderfully with the flavors of fresh seafood.

**Q: How does wood grilling enhance the flavor of fresh fish and seafood?**

**A:** Fresh fish and seafood are delicious in their purest form, and wood grilling actually enhances those natural flavors without overpowering the dish. It adds a slightly woody flavor which makes for a simplistic, healthy dish that doesn't need heavy sauces or seasonings.

**Q: What kind of wood does Red Lobster use in the restaurants?**

**A:** We use oak, both for its burning qualities and for the crisp, clean flavor it provides. Oak burns hot and, unlike other types of wood used for smoking and BBQ, oak enhances the natural flavor of seafood rather than altering or overpowering it.

**Q: How do you train and certify Red Lobster Certified Grill Masters throughout the country?**

**A:** The culinary team worked with our restaurants to develop a comprehensive training program for every manager and crew member who works on our grills. Through hands-on training, testing, and a four-step validation process by restaurant managers, each Red Lobster restaurant has four to five highly skilled crew members who are Certified Grill Masters. They are the only people who cook food on the grill for our guests.

We have also developed and implemented an ongoing training program for almost 40,000 servers, ensuring that they are Certified Seafood Experts. This program includes in-person, video and online training and regular testing and certification to guarantee that they maintain current knowledge and can answer our guests' questions about wood-fire grilled seafood. The content ranges from the basics, such as how to crack a lobster to information on the benefits of Omega 3 fatty acids in seafood.

We also support each of our servers with more information about seafood than they have ever had before. This includes constantly updated materials and our new Seafood Expert encyclopedia –

an interactive proprietary tool that allows Red Lobster servers to look up information any time a guest may have a question for which the answer is not readily available.

**Q: What are some of the new wood grilled specialties Red Lobster is offering?**

**A:** We are offering 14 Wood-Fire Grilled menu items, eight of which are newly developed items. Among my choices are Peach Bourbon BBQ Shrimp & Scallops (my personal favorite), Wood-Grilled Lobster, Shrimp & Scallops and Wood-Grilled Sirloin & Shrimp. Guests can also choose “wood-grilled” as a preparation for any of the five to eight daily fresh fish species available on our Today’s Fresh Fish menu.

**Q: How does wood-fire grilling fit into Red Lobster’s overall re-branding?**

**A:** This is the latest initiative in our three-phase plan to grow Red Lobster profitably and sustainably. Throughout our history, Red Lobster has been the leader in bringing innovative and original preparations of seafood to America. No other seafood restaurant has our scope in terms of guests and number of restaurants to do that. Wood-fire grilling is the most contemporary preparation technique in the restaurant industry right now and it provides a strong quality cue for our guests. The investment we’ve made in the Wood-Fire Grill initiative positions the brand well for the future because this cooking platform best appeals to the way guests want to eat today.

**Q: How can home chefs learn to master wood grilling?**

**A:** You can visit [www.redlobster.com/woodfiregrill](http://www.redlobster.com/woodfiregrill) to view beginner’s tips for wood grilling and find some great recipes to prepare at home.

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