

Barbecues

NEED TO KNOW

It may only be April but if the looming bank holidays are unusually fine, you might want to start the barbecue season early. Your first choice is fuel: charcoal or gas.

CHARCOAL vs GAS

Choosing a gas or charcoal barbecue is partly down to personal choice.

Charcoal models offer the more traditional outdoor-cooking experience and give food that authentically smoky barbecue taste.

Gas models tend to have more features, such as side burners, warming racks and drip trays, and are easier to use and to control. They ignite almost instantly and don't take as long to heat up. Although some charcoal barbecues have air vents to help control flames, gas barbecues have dials to adjust the temperature. Some gas models have flavourisers which help give food that authentic barbecue taste. See 'Flavourisers', p48.

PORTABLE MODELS

These are ideal for taking on holiday because they're compact enough to fit into your car boot and light enough to carry to a park or beach.

However, because they're smaller, they don't have as many features or controls. Overall, the portables we tested cooked food as well as other models but their grill size limits how many people they can cater for.

BEST ON TEST

1 European Outdoor Chef CHARCOAL

BEST BUYS

All our Best Buys are good to cook on, produce great-tasting food and have a number of handy features. And they're also straightforward to assemble, simple to use and easy to manoeuvre.

CHARCOAL

Best on test is the **European Outdoor Chef (1)**, a kettle model with a circular wire grill. It cooks evenly, particularly with the lid closed. However, at £159 online, it's no cheaper than gas models.

A central half-funnel catches drips of fat and channels them into a tray.

This helps to control excess flare-up. The hood has a built-in thermometer, which can be used to check the temperature of the grill or your food, and all controls are easy to use.

The grill and warming rack are too big to fit in a dishwasher or a bucket, so it's quite tricky to clean.

The cheaper **Argos (2)** costs £70 from Argos and includes a warming rack and a shelf. The barbecue cooks quickly and evenly and when fat drops on to the hot

charcoal below, the resulting flare-up helps give food an authentic smoky barbecue taste. A raised grid for charcoal helps encourage air flow and makes the barbecue easy to light. Adjustable air vents in the hood help to control flare-up and you can add more charcoal through a handy trap door.

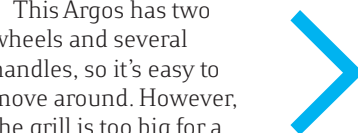
This Argos has two wheels and several handles, so it's easy to move around. However, the grill is too big for a

COOKING HOODS

Cooking hoods can be used to roast or smoke food. This European Outdoor Chef's hood is fitted with a removable thermometer, used for measuring the temperature of the grill or your food. This is particularly useful because it's more difficult to judge and control the heat of a charcoal barbecue.

DRIP TRAY

Most gas barbecues have drip trays for excess fat. This European Outdoor Chef is the only charcoal barbecue we tested with a similar feature. It has a small funnel at the base of the grill to catch drips and channel them into a tray (below). This helps to control excess flare-up which can result in burnt food. There's also a large funnel which gets very hot and vaporises grease and juices to help improve the food's flavour.



dishwasher or bucket, so it can be tricky to clean.

GAS

The **B&Q (8)**, £120, is the joint best on test gas model. It has a large, porcelain-coated cooking area and a flavouriser (see 'Flavourisers', below) which gives food an authentic barbecue flavour. It scored top marks in our taste test and cooks food evenly. All controls are easy to use, the flame

ignites right away and it takes just five minutes to heat up. It has lots of features including a warming rack and drip tray. The grill splits into three sections which fit into a large sink, so it's easy to clean. It's the heaviest we tested but, unusually, it has four wheels so doesn't take much effort to move around.

The **Landmann (9)** costs £150 from Woolworths and is joint best on test with the B&Q

(8). It scored good marks in our taste test but because it doesn't have a flavouriser, the food lacks a barbecue flavour. However, lava rocks are provided (see 'Flavourisers', below), which can help. Its solid hotplates can be used to cook delicate or small food items which could fall through the grill. All controls are well positioned and easy to use and the lid doubles as a windshield.

Cleaning is a doddle but it has only two wheels and takes a bit of effort to move around, particularly over soft or uneven surfaces such as grass.

If you want a barbecue with plenty of features, the **Argos**

(10) is the one for you. It's only £90 from Argos but it has a handy gas side burner as well as its two-burner grill, a flavouriser, a drip tray and a warming rack. It cooks evenly but is a little slow at grilling. There's more flare-up than on the other Best Buys but you can control this by turning the heat down or moving food around the grill to avoid the flames. It's easy to light and was the fastest barbecue on test to reach cooking temperature. All controls are large, with clear markings, and it's easy to use.

The **Outback (11)** is £100 from Robert Dyas and has a



2 Argos
CHARCOAL



SHELVES

Side, front or base shelves, like those on this Landmann, are handy for setting down plates of food (left) or cooking implements. However, in some cases, base shelves make it more difficult to move the barbecue around.



8 B&Q
GAS



FLAVOURISERS

Some gas barbecues, like this B&Q, have metal bars between the gas and grill called flavourisers (above). They vaporise fat in a similar way to charcoal barbecues

and therefore give food a more traditional barbecue flavour. Lava rocks, used to make sure that the grill is heated evenly, also flavour food but to a lesser extent.

PHOTOGRAPHY: NICK WRIGHT

two-burner grill, two side shelves and a bottom shelf. It cooks evenly, particularly with the hood closed and the heat turned down. But when roasting at a high temperature, some paint on the outside of the lid blistered and flaked off.

There's quite a lot of flare-up as fat drips on to lava rocks below but it's not hard to control and helps give food a more authentic barbecue taste. All the controls are easy

to use and because there aren't too many parts, it takes next to no time to put together. Handles on the side shelves make the barbecue easy to move around and, on the whole, it's well built.

The cheaper **B&Q (12)** is our cheapest gas Best Buy, at £80 from B&Q. It has plenty of features including a flavouriser and a side burner. It ignites straight away, reaches the right temperature quickly and cooks food evenly in a

reasonable amount of time. Flare-up can be difficult to manage but, overall, the controls are easy to use.

This model takes a little longer to clean than other Best Buys but even though it has no handles, it's not too heavy or bulky so is easy to move around.

The portable **European Outdoor Chef (13)** is £89 online and is shaped like a laptop computer. It's compact with a large handle and a

shoulder strap, so it's easy to carry around. It has a griddle plate rather than a grill, which is Teflon coated and reversible; one side is smooth while the other is ribbed – perfect for searing meat or vegetables.

It heats up quickly but cooking is a little slow and, because it doesn't have a flavouriser, food can lack that authentic barbecue flavour. The hinged lid doubles as a



9 Landmann
GAS



11 Outback
GAS



10 Argos
GAS

SIDE BURNERS

Side burners are small hobs alongside the main grill. Cooking with a side burner, as on this Argos, isn't part of the traditional barbecue experience, but it's a useful feature. It can be used to whip up a sauce (right) or a stir-fry.



windshield, which is handy if you're cooking in a wide open space, such as a beach or park.

You can tilt the barbecue to drain off the fat but be careful not to dislodge the drip tray while you're doing it. The barbecue is easy to use but you need a table to rest the

barbecue on, or cooking can be a bit awkward.

The **Weber (14)**, £150 from department stores, independents and garden centres, is the largest portable barbecue we tested but it's still very easy to lift and will fit into any car boot. It comes fully

assembled, including the hood. It doesn't take very long to heat up and cooks evenly and quickly.

There's some flare-up when fat drips through the grill but disposable fat collection trays are included. It's very simple to use and the controls are large and well positioned. Cleaning is a cinch but unless you've a stand to rest it on, you'll have to kneel down to cook, and the grill is too small to cater for lots of people.



SHOULDER STRAP

This European Outdoor Chef can be folded up like a laptop computer. It weighs only 8kg and can be carried around using the shoulder strap and handle (above right), which makes it ideal for taking to the park or to the beach.

Buying fuel

Most gas-powered models use either propane or butane but check maker's guidelines. To fit a cylinder correctly, you may also need a regulator; all our Best Buys except the Outback (11) come with one. Some portables, such as the Weber (14), may be compatible only with disposable gas cartridges.

A 13kg gas cylinder costs around £25 plus around £18 for gas and refills. It should last for around ten to 15 sessions.

Lumpwood, briquettes or instant-lighting are the three

main charcoal types. Lumpwood burns hotter than, but not as long or as evenly as, briquettes, which are cheaper.

The instant-lighting type doesn't need lighting fluid or firelighters. A 5kg bag of charcoal costs £3 to £5 at a supermarket and lasts around three to five uses.

Fuel for a barbecue session costs roughly the same for gas or charcoal but exact costs depend on the size of the barbecue, food and number of guests.

Cost per use for charcoal and gas are similar



Barbecues

CHARCOAL

- 1 European Outdoor Chef Rover 570
- 2 Argos Deluxe Oval Trolley
- 3 Barbecook Basic
- 4 Outback Omega 200 (charcoal)
- 5 Weber Go Anywhere
- 6 Brinkman Smoke & Grill
- 7 Landmann 0439 Party BBQ

GAS

- 8 B&Q Winchester
- 9 Landmann 3 Burner Flatbed
- 10 Argos Deluxe 2 Burner
- 11 Outback Omega 200 (gas)
- 12 B&Q Monaco 2 Burner
- 13 European Outdoor Chef Laptop Grill
- 14 Weber Q100 (Baby Q)
- 15 Argos Firenze Portable
- 16 OMC Sterling 1124
- 17 Campingaz Adelaide Woody 2

a Height x circumference (cm) b Diameter



WIN

We've got five European Outdoor Chef Laptop Grills to give away.

See p21 for details



USING THE TABLE

We tested the latest gas and charcoal barbecues (including portable models) from leading manufacturers.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. Prices for other models are a guide to what you should expect to pay. Online prices are in *italics*. **Size** Maximum space required.

Burners Number of gas burners the barbecue has, including those to the side of the grill.

Features

Portable We indicate barbecues designed especially for portable use. **Shelves** Barbecues with side, front or base shelves. **Flavouriser** Metal bars between

the gas and grill on gas barbecues, which vaporise drops of fat and improve the flavour of food.

Warming rack These keep cooked food warm, away from the main grill. **Drip tray** Whether the barbecue has a tray beneath the grill designed to collect fat or a hole that drains it away into an external pot.

Performance

Evenness, Flavour, Look We rated each barbecue for how well it cooks. A ★ means food is evenly cooked, has a traditional barbecue flavour and looks appetising.

Convenience

Assembly, Clean, Overall use We rated how easy each barbecue was to put together and how simple it was to use, including its controls, moving it and controlling flare-ups.

KEY

★ ☆ ○ ● ●

Best → Worst

■ Best Buy

SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:

Cooking performance	40%
Ease of use	40%
Features	20%

Specification			Features					Performance			Convenience			Score	
Price (£)	Size hxxxd (cm)	Grill area wxd (cm)	Burners	Portable	Shelves	Flavouriser	Warming rack	Drip tray	Evenness	Flavour	Look	Assembly	Clean	Overall use	(%)
159	111x70 ^a	57 ^b				see ^c		✓	★	☆	★	☆	○	☆	70
70	108x95x62	83x48			✓		✓		★	★	★	☆	●	○	68
60	75x41 ^a	40 ^b							☆	★	☆	★	☆	☆	62
130	105x119x62	50x36			✓		✓		★	☆	☆	○	●	○	62
55	37x53x29	41x25		✓					☆	★	☆	★	★	○	58
70	87x55 ^a	45 ^b							★	☆	★	○	☆	○	57
70	93x133x60	132x60							★	★	★	☆	○	○	52
120	118x158x66	65x48	3		✓	✓	✓	✓	★	★	★	★	★	☆	79
150	89x135x59	49x32	3		✓	see ^d		✓	★	☆	☆	☆	☆	★	79
90	104x134x68	52x45	3 ^e		✓	✓	✓	✓	★	☆	☆	★	○	☆	77
100	104x121x51	50x36	2		✓	see ^d		✓	★	☆	★	☆	○	☆	75
80	105x134x50	48x35	3 ^e		✓	✓	✓	✓	☆	☆	★	★	○	☆	74
89	42x60x41	47x29	1	✓				✓	★	☆	★	★	☆	☆	70
150	36x68x40	42x22	1	✓				✓	☆	☆	☆	★	☆	☆	70
50	48x90x38	25x29	1	✓	✓	✓		✓	○	☆	○	★	☆	☆	65
175	117x131x54	48x32	2 ^e		✓	✓	✓	✓	☆	☆	☆	●	●	○	64
150	93x122x60	57x40	2		✓			✓	☆	☆	☆	●	☆	○	56

c Includes patented funnel system d Includes lava rocks e Including one side burner