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Credit: Reviewed / Betsey Goldwasser

HOME & GARDEN

THE BEST CHARCOAL FOR GRILLING OF 2024

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BEST CHARCOAL FOR GRILLING
Royal Oak Hardwood Lump Charcoal

[Check Price at Home Depot](#)

The price, the well-distributed chunks, and pleasant smell impressed us enough to pick Royal Oak Charcoal

2



BEST CHARCOAL BRIQUETTES
Kingsford Original Charcoal Briquettes

[Check Price at Amazon](#)

Kingsford always seems to be in stock everywhere and we can't argue with how affordable it is. They're also a known quantity

3



Rockwood Lump Charcoal

[Check Price at Amazon](#)

While we found Rockwood Lump Charcoal a bit difficult to light, we're fans of the material they're made

4



Jealous Devil Hardwood Lump Charcoal

[Check Price at Amazon](#)

During testing, we found that Jealous Devil was one of the hottest in the roundup, achieving a

5



Fogo Super Premium Lump Charcoal

[Check Price at Amazon](#)

Fogo's Super Premium Lump Charcoal comes exclusively with large chunks, which is okay

Lumps as what we'd want in our grills. [Read More](#)

Pros

- + Good assortment of coal
- + Sweet and smokey scented

Cons

- None that we could find

with a fairly high degree of quality control. [Read More](#)

Pros

- + Widely available
- + Has a campfire aroma

Cons

- None that we could find

out of and how uniformly shaped every piece is. [Read More](#)

Pros

- + Made of Missouri oak, maple, and hickory
- + Uniform charcoal chunks
- + Sweet campfire aroma

Cons

- Difficult to light

medium-rare burger in only six minutes. [Read More](#)

Pros

- + Zip lock bag
- + Made from Quebracho Blanco
- + Unique-smelling smoke, almost a medicinal scent

Cons

- Pricey

for a variety of grilling, but it does bump up the price point. [Read More](#)

Pros

- + High heat and long burn
- + Good versatility

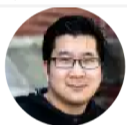
Cons

- Expensive

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Written by **Jonathan Chan**, senior manager of lab operations with a decade of experience testing products.

Updated May 16, 2024

Nothing screams summer more than the smell of a backyard cookout wafting from a charcoal grill[(<https://reviewed.usatoday.com/home-outdoors/best-right-now/best-charcoal-grills>)]. Cooking with charcoal dates back to the Stone Age, but a lot has changed since then. With an overwhelming amount of brands and styles available today, it can be hard to determine which charcoal is the best for you. Do you go with charcoal briquettes made from Vietnamese coconut shells, or natural hardwood lump charcoal from Missouri?

To determine which is the best type of charcoal for grilling, we gathered eight highly recommended brands and put them to the test.

We judged each charcoal on a variety of metrics, including how much they cost, how well they cooked, and how well they burned. After weeks of testing, we found that **Royal Oak Lump Charcoal (available at Home Depot for \$17.97)** is the best charcoal for most casual grillers, but others came in close behind during testing..

Whether you're a grill novice or a grill master, we've gathered up the best charcoal you can get for the ultimate grilling experience.



We liked the assortment of large and smaller chunks of that bags of Royal Oak Lump charcoal provided.

BEST CHARCOAL FOR GRILLING

Royal Oak Hardwood Lump Charcoal

When it came down to it, Royal Oak Lump Charcoal ended up being our favorite after testing. While it didn't win hands-down in every category, we think it's the best charcoal for the average griller, and were impressed with the overall quality.

When you open the bag, you'll find a fine assortment of chunks of charcoal. This is a good thing for beginner grillers, because a mixture of easy-to-light charcoal starter pieces as well as pieces that burn for a long time makes a better bed of coals for grilling.

After lighting this charcoal, a sweet and smoky scent greeted us. It was strong enough to be distinct but subtle enough not to overwhelm the flavors of what we were cooking. From the time of placing the burger on the grill, it took seven minutes until the center burger reached 130°F. That's to be expected for only using two pounds of charcoal and was further proof of this charcoal being easy to light and still having longevity in the kettle.

Compared to other lump charcoal, Royal Oak charcoal burned an average amount of time. We did find a lower percentage of large chunks included in the bag. So as time goes, you may find that you're burning through charcoal at a quicker rate. But that isn't a problem if you're simply making a meal for your family.

Royal Oak Lump Charcoal is made of 100% natural hardwood that imparts food with a sweet, smoky flavor that we liked. If you're planning on grilling for more than a few hours at a time, there are better options.

Overall, the price, the well-distributed chunks of charcoal, and pleasant BBQ smell impressed us enough to pick Royal Oak Charcoal Lumps as what we'd choose for our grill at home.

Pros

+ Good assortment of coal

Cons

- + Sweet and smokey scented
- None that we could find

\$17.97 from Home Depot

\$14.97 from Walmart



We found Kingsford charcoal to have a fairly high degree of quality control during testing.

BEST CHARCOAL BRIQUETTES

Kingsford Original Charcoal Briquettes

There's a reason that Kingsford has stayed in business for over 100 years and is one of the most recognizable names in grilling. Over the past century, Kingsford has had time to refine their charcoal formula. Kingsford briquettes have become smaller and more compact over the years. This leads them to burn hotter and longer due to the denser material.

When the briquettes started to glow inside our chimney, the air filled with a campfire aroma. We found that the average cook time for some quarter-pound beef patties was around nine minutes. Amongst the briquettes we tested, that places this charcoal in second place.

It is worth noting, however, that Kingsford Original was outclassed by the Weber Briquettes in terms of longevity and heat.

Even still, Kingsford Original always seems to be in stock everywhere and we can't argue with how affordable it is.

Pros

- + Widely available

+ Has a campfire aroma

Cons

— None that we could find

Buy now at Amazon

\$16.58 from Walmart

Other Charcoal We Tested



Rockwood Lump Charcoal

There's a lot to like about Rockwood charcoal, which is why it smoked its way through our tests.

First, all the wood is harvested with eco-friendliness in mind, and is taken from leftover timber. This mixture is made entirely of Missouri oak, maple, and hickory. We also like how uniformly the charcoal chunks were hewed. The plank-like shape allows you to pack quite a bit into a grill chimney.

We did find it was harder to light than the Royal Oak, which is why it didn't take the top spot. The Rockwood charcoal required two attempts. Originally, we wanted to chalk this up to the 18 mph wind, but two other charcoals we tested that day lit up just fine under the same conditions.

Once the coals were lit, the Rockwood shined, and the smoke smelled like a campfire with a hint of sweetness. We lit up 2.1 pounds of charcoal and it cooked our burgers in 11 minutes.

There's a lot of love out there for Rockwood among grilling enthusiasts. It's even the **Naked Whiz's highest user-rated charcoal**. You'll probably impress grill nerds by getting this well-regarded charcoal, but you'll also pay an above-average price for it.

Pros

+ Made of Missouri oak, maple, and hickory

+ Uniform charcoal chunks

+ Sweet campfire aroma

Cons

— Difficult to light

Buy now at Amazon

\$56.11 from Walmart



Jealous Devil Hardwood Lump Charcoal

Jealous Devil proved itself to be useful if you're looking for a charcoal of convenience. The zip lock bag is the first feature you'll notice, allowing for a no-fuss, no-muss access to the charcoal without having to rip a bag open.

Upon opening the bag, we saw a very uniform lump size, with few large chunks. Plus, we also noted a lack of useless dust and annoying chips.

During testing, we found that Jealous Devil was one of the hottest burning charcoal options in the roundup. In just six minutes our burger was cooked to medium-rare. As we grilled our burgers, we noticed that Jealous Devil had a unique-smelling smoke that to us smelled almost medicinal.

A little research revealed that Jealous Devil is made from Quebracho Blanco, a South American tree known for its hardness. Fortunately, the unusual odor did not translate to an off-putting taste.

If you're looking for a way to get a quick meal, you can't go wrong with this Amazon's Choice charcoal.

Pros

+ Zip lock bag

+ Made from Quebracho Blanco

+ Unique-smelling smoke, almost a medicinal scent

Cons

— Pricey

\$37.61 from Amazon

\$37.61 from Home Depot

\$39.38 from Walmart



Fogo Super Premium Lump Charcoal

When it came to the Fogo Super Premium we had to make a tough decision. So much so, that we created additional testing just to get a better sense of how this charcoal performs.

First off, the Super Premium is large chunks only. Having only huge pieces of carbon made it harder to light, but translated to high heat and a long burn. It also jacked up the price—the Fogo is more than double the price per pound than the Royal Oak.

Expenses aside, our testing showed that the Fogo excelled when it comes to versatility. On a large charcoal grill, a high heat source allows you to boil water, use a Dutch oven, or, in our case, roast marshmallows.

We know most people won't move their entire kitchen outdoors, which is why we decided not to award it a top spot even though the Fogo Super Premium displayed some impressive numbers. For camping and hardcore grilling, where you're slow cooking a lot of food the Fogo may be the way to go.

Pros

- + High heat and long burn
- + Good versatility

Cons

- Expensive

Buy now at Amazon

\$37.95 from Walmart



Royal Oak Classic Charcoal Briquets

Royal Oak Briquettes landed in the middle of the pack. We had more trouble lighting them than other briquettes in this roundup, which is surprising because the bag advertises that it "starts faster." It took a total of about 11 minutes to cook up our quarter-pounders. That puts in slightly below average compared to other briquettes.

We really can't gripe too much. A shopping trip online showed us that this is one of the more affordable charcoals out there. On the plus side, the briquettes still carry sweet notes like the lumps.

Pros

- + Affordable
- + Sweet aroma

Cons

- Difficult to light
- Below average cook time

Buy now at Lowe's



Cowboy Hardwood Lump Charcoal

Cowboy Brand charcoal landed pretty low on the list because it didn't show consistent quality. Going through the bag, we found bits of wood that didn't look fully charred. Think of it like charcoal that's underdone or raw.

We looked online and found **plenty of reviews** of people finding plastic, rocks, and uncharred wood in their bags.

When we did assemble about four pounds of good lumps, we were underwhelmed. It cooked burgers in nine minutes and produced a smoke that wasn't memorable. Even though our experience was unremarkable for the most part, we cannot discount the number of negative reviews.

Pros

+ None that we could find

Cons

— Fair amount of un-charred wood

Buy now at Amazon

\$11.99 from Target

\$13.37 from Walmart



Kingsford Match Light Charcoal Briquettes

Kingsford Matchlight came in last in our roundup. It's not terrible, just terrible-smelling. We assumed from the outset that having a lump of charcoal doused in lighter fluid was a bad idea, but we had to know for sure.

Because we wanted to keep our methods consistent, we disregarded the instructions to light the briquettes in the grill and placed the Matchlight into our chimney. The end result was a pillar of flames nearly 3 ft. tall.

We like things *en fuego* but that's a little too much. Matchlight's chemical smell did get in our food. Perhaps it was just stuck in our noses, but either way, we did not enjoy our experience with this charcoal.

Pros

+ None that we could find

Cons

- Off-putting chemical smell
- Flame height was almost 3 ft. tall

Buy now at Amazon

\$10.92 from Walmart

How We Tested Charcoal for Grilling



Credit: Reviewed / Betsey Goldwasser

We decided to use volume over mass to test charcoals.

- **Step One:** Upon opening each bag, we placed enough chunks or briquettes to cover the charcoal grate of a **Weber Original Kettle Grill**. We then placed the charcoal into a chimney, taking care to place in as much as possible. In the instances not all the charcoal could fit, we set the extra charcoal aside and placed it into the grill on the edges.
- **Step Two:** We used four sheets of newspaper to light our chimney and left to heat up for no more than 10 minutes. If a contender failed to light properly, we gave it a second chance but made sure to reduce its ranking.



During testing we spread the charcoal out to see how evenly it could heat.

- **Step Three:** After we poured the red-hot coals into our grill, we gave ourselves no more than 10 seconds to even out the coals a bit. During this time we made note of the smell each charcoal produced while burning.
- **Step Four:** To test the overall grill temperature, heating evenness, and burn time, we placed three, quarter-pound beef burgers across the fire grate. We inserted a ThermoWorks Pro-Series temperature probe attached to a smoke monitor in each patty.

ThermoWorks is a well-regarded brand when it comes to outdoor cooking, so we trusted it for accurate readings. After placing the probes, we measured how long it took each burger to get to 130°F—the temperature for medium-rare beef.



We used ThermoWorks thermometers to take temperatures during testing because of their accuracy.

Weather plays a role in how a charcoal briquette burns, so we made note of the ambient conditions and factored it into our results.

The tests took place on days that were between 42°F and 56°F. There were days of high winds, up to 22 miles per hour. In the event of rain, charcoals were given a mulligan and tested again.

When the burger test finished, we replaced the fire grate and waited. We checked the grill periodically to see if it was still hot. Eventually, when the grills cooled, we measured how much ash they produced.

The final tests revolved around checking out each bag for distribution of the chunk sizes, looking for any defects in the product, and inspecting the bags themselves. A good bag should be easy to store and be durable enough to survive a summer in the garage.

How to Choose the Best Charcoal for You

What is Charcoal?



Credit: Reviewed / Jackson Ruckar

Did I design the s' mores test so I could get paid to eat s' mores? Maybe.

Charcoal is wood that's been heated up in a low-oxygen environment. The process cooks off excess water and sugars to create a product that is mostly pure carbon. People cook with charcoal because it burns hotter and longer than regular wood fires.

How Do You Start a Charcoal Grill?

There are multiple methods when it comes to lighting charcoal grills, but the chimney starter method is regarded as the best. A chimney is like a charcoal pitcher. Place charcoal inside the chimney and put two to four sheets of newspaper into the bottom.

Light the paper and place the chimney on your grill. Let the chimney heat up for 10 to 15 minutes or until the center coals glow orange. When that happens, you should dump the lit charcoal into the lower grate. Replace the fire grate and now you're ready to start grilling.

Which Type is the Best Charcoal for Grilling? Lump or Briquette?



Credit: Reviewed / Betsey Goldwasser

Lump charcoal is on the left and briquette charcoal is on the right, but which is right for you?

These are two types of charcoal, lump and briquette. Briquette charcoal is made of compressed sawdust and lumps are cooked chunks of wood. Briquettes typically burn slower and produce lower temperatures. Lumps have greater variability.

A typical bag of lump charcoal contains dust, chips, and huge chunks. Using a mixture of them, you can create a very high

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