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It's no secret that I love eggplant and, over the years, I've gotten every preparation under the sun down cold—with one glaring exception. With no space at home for a grill and a strong aversion to turning on my oven in the summer, grilled eggplant has remained my culinary white whale. Until now. My new favorite eggplant technique comes courtesy of Kris Yenbamroong, the head chef at NIGHT + MARKET in L.A., whom I follow on Instagram mainly for his amazing cooking stories. In his recipe for Paolo Eggplant, he uses a genius trick I'd never seen before: Instead of salting the eggplant and frying it in quarts of oil, he tosses raw, totally un-prepped slices into a salted pan with no oil at all. The cooked eggplant slices get layered with copious amounts of olive oil, garlic, chili flakes, and herbs, like a lasagna. Obviously, I had to try it. Late last year, I found myself at a crossroads. After ten and a half years, I was getting real...Read moreThe first time I attempted this technique, all I had on hand were a couple of sad, mushy eggplants that had been hanging around my fridge for over a week. Even those janky old specimens tasted phenomenal via this preparation—and the second batch, which I made with super-fresh eggplant for the purposes of this article, was even better. As I learned the fun way when I brushed the excess off a hot piece of eggplant, sodium chloride crystals retain heat like crazy; any moisture coming off the eggplant evaporates when it hits the hot salt. The surface stays relatively dry, which goes a long way toward deep, even browning. It's no charcoal grill, but the results are every bit as smoky and sweet as the best grilled eggplant I've had, and with a silky texture to boot. The technique itself is very simple. Just cut an eggplant lengthwise or crosswise into slices 1/4-1/2 inch thick. Heat a nonstick skillet (or a very well-seasoned cast iron one) over medium-high heat. When it's hot, scatter a pinch or two of table salt (or fine sea salt) in the pan. Lay the eggplant slices on top. After a couple of minutes, flip 'em over. When they are charred to your liking on both sides, transfer them to a bowl or dish. Repeat until you run out of eggplant, adding salt by the pinch as needed. Now for the fun part: Seasoning. Since you haven't used any oil yet, the one mandatory element is a flavorful oil of your choice—if it'll keep the eggplant tender and juicy, rather than leathery. Besides that, there are no wrong answers. Even the way you assemble the dish is up to you: Layer the eggplant with oil and aromatics like Yenbamroong does, or chop it up and mix everything together like a salad. If you already have a go-to combination of flavorful oil, alliums and herbs, use that. If not, here are a few suggestions: Sesame oil, garlic, ginger, scallions, gochujang and rice vinegarOlive oil, lemon juice, garlic, capers, olives and parsleyPeanut oil, fish sauce, lime juice, sweet chili sauce, cilantro and crushed peanutsYogurt, olive oil, dill, lemon juice and garlicHomemade chili oil, soy sauce, chinkiang vinegar and sesame seedsOlive oil, sliced ripe tomatoes, basil and balsamic vinegarThe proper quantities and ratios will vary depending on your preferences and how much eggplant you cooked, so taste as you go. Once it's seasoned perfectly, you can eat the eggplant right away or let it mellow in the fridge for a couple of hours. Either way, you'll have a ridiculously flavorful vegetable dish perfect for serving alongside meats, with bread and cheese, over rice or all on its own. We purchased the Ninja Foodi 5-in-1 Indoor Grill so our reviewer could put it to the test in her kitchen. Keep reading for our full product review. Multi-functional cookers are all the rage, but their designs can be bulky and require dedicated storage space. We, like most home cooks we know, only give up precious kitchen real estate for appliances that are truly worth their salt. When the opportunity to review the Ninja Foodi 5-in-1 Grill presented itself, we didn't hesitate to make room for it. We've heard impressive things about this indoor grill, which can also be used to air fry, a process that uses very hot circulated air to brown and crisp like a deep fryer but without the use of oil. It can also be used to dehydrate fruits, vegetables, and meat. Plus, it has roast and bake settings to mimic oven functionality—a useful feature if you find yourself in need of extra oven space for parties and holiday meals. Ninja claims this indoor grill is powerful enough to rival the cooking power of an outdoor grill and can even handle cooking from frozen for perfectly chargrilled steaks and burger patties. We admit that the ability to grill year-round without having to step foot outside or worry whether the propane tank is close to empty sounds too good to be true. We threw the cover over our outdoor grill and set to work testing the Ninja Foodi Grill's functionality from the comfort of our kitchen. Here are our findings. The Spruce Eats / Sharon Lehman There's not much involved in getting the Foodi Grill up and running. We simply removed the packaging materials, gave the cooking pans and grill grate a quick hand wash, plugged it in, and we were ready to get cooking. With an all-black and stainless steel exterior, the Foodi grill should fit right in most kitchens. Its size, on the other hand, may be tough for some kitchens to accommodate. It's big and boxy, measuring about 17 inches long by 14 inches wide and 11 inches high. At first glance, we weren't sure there was enough space to clear our cabinets with the lid open; it did, but barely. Weighing in just under 15 pounds, it's hefty enough that we wouldn't want to lift it out of a cabinet, so we'd recommend keeping it where you plan to use it if space allows. The cooking accessories—cooking pot, grill grate, and crisper basket—are ceramic nonstick-coated and free from potentially harmful PTFE/PFOA chemicals. The cookware pieces feel quality-made, durable, and heavy-duty—especially the grill grate. The heat is extremely powerful and cooks food very quickly, so you can't really set it and forget it. The Foodi packs some serious heat that enables it to mimic the cooking results you'd get from a traditional grill. A top-down heat source produces temperatures up to 500 degrees, and a powerful fan circulates the hot air to cook food quickly and evenly with grill-like results; Ninja calls this combination its Cyclonic Grilling Technology. The grill also features a smoke control system that lets you cook at high temperatures without filling the kitchen with smoke. A metal mesh smoke screen snaps in over the heating element to help contain grease splatter and reduce smoke. The control panel has intuitive, one-touch buttons to power the unit on and off, select your cooking function, and set cooking time and temperature anywhere from 105 to 500 degrees. You can choose between four preset temperatures when grilling: low, medium, high, and max. A cooking guide is included to help you select the best settings for whatever you're grilling, which we used to base all our cooking times and temperatures. The Spruce Eats / Sharon Lehman We've tried other air fryers that promised to sear steak, caramelize, and crisp to perfection, but they left us underwhelmed with mediocre results. We're happy to report the Ninja Foodi Grill did not disappoint. We found it easy to start using without any need to read directions. The control panel was straightforward and, once we selected our time and temperature, the machine automatically began preheating and notified us when it was time to add the food. Preheating took 5 to 8 minutes depending on the setting. We grilled marinated salmon filets, chicken breasts with barbecue sauce, hot dogs, and frozen salmon burgers, and we used the air fryer function to cook frozen french fries and tater tots. Our salmon had crisp skin and was caramelized on top even without flipping, the chicken looked chargrilled, and our potatoes were golden. We didn't notice a trace of smoke during cooking. The food looked pretty perfect, though we'll admit that the first few things we made were slightly overcooked and dry—but that was more user error than a fault of the cooker. The Spruce Eats / Sharon Lehman Although we consulted the included cooking guide to help us select the time and temperature for all our foods, there's definitely a learning curve to cooking with the Foodi. The heat is extremely powerful and cooks food very quickly, so you can't really set it and forget it. We suggest starting with the lowest recommended cooking time and checking for doneness with a food thermometer to avoid overcooking. Because the lid opens up, it's really easy to check and flip foods for even grill marks and crisping. We just used tongs or a spatula to flip our meats and give potatoes a toss without having to touch the hot basket like with other air fryers. The grill grate can hold enough meat or fish to feed a family of four, and the crisper basket is deep enough to fit an entire bag of frozen fries or tots—though overcrowding can interfere with crisping. You can't grill and crisp at the same time, so you do have to plan meals accordingly. As for baking and roasting, the overall size and shape of the Foodi might limit what you can cook, and we'd really only use those functions if our standard oven was overcrowded. Other reviews indicate that the Foodi Grill does an excellent job drying fruit slices, but its capacity is limited, so you can only make small batches, which may not be worth it since the process takes several hours. Our salmon had crisp skin and was caramelized on top even without flipping, the chicken looked chargrilled, and our potatoes were golden. The nonstick ceramic-coated grill grate, crisper basket, and cooking pot can be cleaned by hand or in the dishwasher. Burned-on barbecue sauce and fish skin slid right off when we used the included cleaning brush. We noticed the cooking pans still felt a little greasy after hand washing, but a soak in soapy water or a run through the dishwasher took care of it. The stainless steel exterior is prone to smudges and fingerprints, so be prepared to buff those with a soft cloth. The mesh smoke screen noticeably darkened from a silver tone to, well, smoky hues; although we cleaned it after each use, the hue never returned to like-new. At \$200, the Ninja Foodi Indoor Grill is a bit of an investment. However, we think the excellent indoor grilling performance is worth the cost for anyone who loves grilled food and wants to be able to grill year-round. When you add in the fact that it also does a remarkable job of crisping foods as an air fryer, we'd say you're getting your money's worth from those two cooking functions alone. The Spruce Eats / Sharon Lehman Another popular multi-cooker is Emeril Lagasse's Power AirFryer 360. It's more expensive at \$300 and bigger than the Foodi, with an all stainless steel design that looks and functions like a large toaster oven. Instead of placing food inside of a pot, food is arranged on racks that slide into the cooker, and there are heating elements located in the top and bottom of the cooker. Cooking functions include air fry, toast, bagel, pizza, bake, roast, broil, rotisserie, slow cook, reheat, dehydrate, and warm. Noticeably absent is the ability to grill, but you have the added functions of toasting and rotisserie (a spit is included). In our review, we found it was too large to easily store, very noisy, and produced decent cooking results, but nothing that blew us away. Where the Foodi is primarily marketed as an indoor grill, the Power AirFryer 360 is obviously marketed as an air fryer. They differ in their cooking functionality, so which appliance you choose depends on the type of cooking you plan to do. If you want to grill along with air fry, it's a no-brainer to choose the Foodi. If you have more of a need to toast and reheat, we'd go with Emeril's cooker. Final Verdict Yes, buy it if you love grilled food. While we wouldn't recommend the Ninja Foodi 5-in-1 Indoor Grill just for air frying, baking, or dehydrating, it does make sense for anyone who wants to grill indoors year-round or doesn't have the option of an outdoor grill. It produces impressive grill marks and caramelization in little time without any smoking, and the fact that it can also be used to crisp fries and tots to golden perfection is an added bonus.

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