

Blistered Beet Shashlik with Halloumi

Finally! Dacha shashlik that doesn't forget vegetarians.

By [Jennifer Eremeeva](#)

July 24, 2021



Jennifer Eremeeva / MT

Vegetarianism is on the rise in Russia, of that there can be no doubt. Once unthinkable, today young, urban Russians are eschewing meat like never before for reasons that range from ethics to health concerns. Meatless meals are no longer confined to the forty days that precede Easter, but are becoming integral parts of restaurant fare from the Michelin-starred White Rabbit to the humble workplace canteen.

The one place accommodation for vegetarians hasn't kept up is at the mangal, where shashlik is grilled throughout the year, but most often at the small cottages or dachas, which dot the countryside outside cities. The acrid smoke that rises from these small, wood-burning, boxlike grills is almost always heavily laden with the perfume of seared pork or lamb. Enticing to many, to be sure, but pity the poor vegetarian who must make do with the simple — albeit delicious summer salads and chewy bread that make up dacha shashlik sides.

But it doesn't have to be like this. Grilled vegetables are just as good as grilled meat if you pick the right vegetables. Some do exceptionally well, threaded on a skewer, while others simply collapse on themselves and slide off, and suddenly instead of a skewer, you've got a warm vegetable salad.

So which vegetables do well, and which don't? Shashlik experts know that slices of onion and pepper can add not only color but also tart flavor to any meat shashlik and will hold their shape well under fire. Cherry tomatoes may look great, but if left on the flame too long become almost liquid. Eggplant should be well salted and set to drain before grilling, but don't waste precious space on a shashlik skewer with eggplant! Grilling them in chunks is not the best way to enjoy them. It's better to grill them whole or thinly sliced, coated with some olive oil directly on the grill.

Often overlooked is corn-on-the-cob, which does very well on a skewer if sliced into 1-2-inch chunks. The kernels become delightfully caramelized when they come into direct contact with the heat, and this enhances their rather mild flavor considerably. Zucchini and squash do well, as do new potatoes, and stone fruit, such as peaches, apricots, and particularly nectarines.

One of my recipe development goals this summer was to create a vegetarian shashlik recipe that could hold its own as the star of the show: a complete meal that both vegetarians and carnivores could enjoy. The anchor vegetable suggested itself in the form of a beautiful bunch of baby beets shimmering in the morning sun at a farmer's market, each the size of a large radish and ideal for threading onto a skewer after a quick roast. Halloumi — Greece's irresistible grilling cheese was a logical pairing. When heated, this sheep's cheese does not melt but instead softens inside its charred skin and becomes delectably tart and creamy — the perfect foil for the sweetness of the beets. To this, primarily for color, but also for flavor, I added zucchini and red onion. Well-seasoned with just olive oil, salt, and pepper, and grilled until the cheese is soft, these vegetarian skewers look as marvelous as they taste: the beets take on a new depth from the smoke of the grill, and three or four minutes is enough to have these off the grill and onto the table with a flourish.

Ingredients

6 oz (170 grams) halloumi, warmed to room temperature and cut into 3-centimeter cubes

- 8 baby beets, well-scrubbed (or 4 large beets, which you can then carve into smaller chunks or balls)
- 2 zucchinis sliced into 2-centimeter-thick half moons
- 1 red onion, peeled and cut into squares the approximate size of the zucchini half moons
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 Tbsp vegetable oil (with a high smoke point)
- Fresh herbs to garnish: mint, rosemary, oregano, and dill all work well
- 1 tsp sea salt
- Freshly ground pepper

Instructions

- Preheat the oven to 425°F (220 C°) and line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Wrap the beets in a foil pouch and roast them for 30 minutes. After they have cooled, peel the

skin off. If using larger beets, cut (or sculpt) them down to suitable sizes and shapes to thread onto the skewer).

- Thread the vegetables and cheese onto shashlik skewers be gentle when handling the halloumi so it does not break up. Drizzle the skewers with olive oil and season with the salt and several grounds of fresh pepper.
- Heat a grill or griddle pan to high, then soak a wad of paper towel in the vegetable oil and oil the grill well. Grill the skewers for 3-4 minutes per side until the halloumi is soft and the zucchini and onions are slightly charred.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/07/24/blistered-beet-shashlik-with-halloumi-a74605>