

Interview with Alex Burakovsky from Grill-Easy.com

Scott: Welcome, everybody. This is Scott from OutdoorCookingMagic.com and I'm glad to have you with us here tonight. I'd like to welcome our guest today. This is Alex Burakovsky from Grill Easy at Grill-Easy.com. Welcome Alex.

Alex: Good evening Scott. Thank you for having me.

Scott: How are you doing tonight?

Alex: Great! How about yourself?

Scott: Good! Doing really well. So, I thought what we would do to get started is have you tell my audience about yourself and about Grill Easy and about the product that you created and that you're selling.

Alex: Sure. So as you mentioned, my name is Alex Burakovsky and I am one of the co-founders of Grill Easy. Right now, we have one product. It's called the Grill Easy FireQube and basically it's a single-use, all-natural solution to firing up a grill. And basically it's all 100% lump charcoal in a box. The box contains an innovative kind of a chimney inside and a little grate which the charcoal sits on. The way it works is that you basically light the wick, you place the box inside the grill, you light the wick, the box burns away and in about 15 minutes the lump charcoal that's inside is ready to be grilled on.

Scott: Yeah, it was awesome. So Alex actually sent me a sample to try and you can see the review of that and a video that I did of using it over at OutdoorCookingMagic.com if you just go there and in the search bar enter "grill easy", you can find that easily. You know it worked great for me. I think I showed you in the video that I put it down on a pan that didn't allow the airflow and once I got that rid of that it really took off and did a great job. I love grilling with lump charcoal. You know it's been awhile since I've done that. So was that key to what you wanted to create--something with lump charcoal in it?

Alex: Well, we are all very passionate about grilling and to be honest the way it all started was, Mike and Daniel and myself have been friends for very long time, close to 15 years and we've always had this kind of annual tradition where we would go camping every year. And Mike, one of the co-founders, is like a little MacGyver when it comes to grilling. He does a lot of his own tinkering and comes up with cool little chimneys and different little devices to help with grilling and one of the things that we're also known for is grilling kebabs and so we designed our own makeshift grills to accommodate grilling on skewers for example.

Scott: Right.

Alex: So anyway that's kind of how-- we've been very passionate about grilling. We love cooking over an open fire and lump charcoal was kind of a no-brainer. We've always grilled over lump charcoal. We prefer lump charcoal. We prefer the taste that you get from grilling over lump charcoal. I think if people compared directly lump charcoal to briquettes, side by side, I think they would choose lump charcoal over briquettes every time.

Scott: Yeah, I think I agree with you. It's easy to get caught in the habit, I think, of using the regular charcoal briquettes because they're so easy to find, they are a little bit cheaper and they may have a little bit more consistency to them but the flavor is so much better with lump charcoal. It makes a huge difference.

Alex: Correct and if people knew what the briquettes were actually made up of I think they would look at it a bit differently.

Scott: So right now if I remember right, the FireQube has hickory, is that right?

Alex: No.

Scott: Oak?

Alex: No, it's maple.

Scott: Oh, it's maple!

Alex: It's Canadian Maple.

Scott: OK. Any thoughts of adding to your line and having other flavors at some point?

Alex: Absolutely. That was actually one of the things we were currently discussing. We launched the product late last summer. We were trying to rush to market because we came in really late in the season. We got our prototype finished late in the summer so we wanted to basically just get it out there and start having people trying and using it and give us feedback, so we weren't really concerned about the marketing. We weren't really concerned about the messaging. We just wanted to get a workable product. Now that our first batch, which was close to 1000 boxes, we went through that. We got enough feedback from either industry people or just consumers telling us that, "Hey this is a cool product. We like it." Then we started to sit back and say ok, now let's think about the marketing, let's think about the message and that's how we came up with this name, FireQube. So this new batch of boxes that we are actually hopefully getting next week because we have several big orders that we're trying to fulfill is going to have our new messaging and is going to have the FireQube and one of the things we were discussing is adding original flavor which, hopefully down the line, will allow us to add other flavors.

Scott: Awesome.

Alex: So this would our original one and then hopefully we'll have other ones down the line.

Scott: So was FireQube a recent thing, the name?

Alex: Yes, it is.

Scott: Because I don't remember seeing it on a website when I was reviewing it and getting ready.

Alex: Correct. We actually don't yet have the boxes having the FireQube name on them, so we'll be updating them. The name should already be reflected on the website.

Scott: Yes, it is.

Alex: However, we don't yet have stock photos for them so we'll be updating that, hopefully in the next week or two.

Scott : I just wondered if I had missed something, but apparently not. It's new.

Alex: Yes it's very new and it's even new for me. This might be the first time I'm actually throwing it out there myself.

Scott: Okay, great! So you talked about how you gys do an annual camping trip and a lot of tinkering and this idea grew from things that were tried and done as part of that camping. Did I understand that right?

Alex: That's correct. One of the biggest issues that we saw when we would go camping is that a lot of times we would not use the entire bag and then there was this headache of "Well,

what we do we do with the rest of it?". The bag is already open. Dust is escaping. No one wants to bring a half-open bag back to the car. Moisture gets in and there are so many issues with unused charcoal. So we were thinking about it because usually these trips would be two or three, they would be a weekend trip and we might be grilling twice during that entire weekend, so a large 17 pound bag was a waste. So we basically just started thinking about what is there. So first the thought was maybe could come up with just a smaller bag, smaller design, single use bag and after doing some research we discovered that there are products out there that are similar in nature in terms of smaller bags, single bags, but everybody has been--the reviews that we've seen and read were extremely negative. For example, Kingsford has a single use bag and one of the biggest issues is that, A-- it doesn't really work and B--well, it's briquettes. And you know so. So we were basically thinking, well let's see if we can come up with a solution. So we started off with a bag and then the other thing is we decided that, we got some help from other people in terms of engineering, in terms of really getting to the final working product. But it ended up being a box at the end and I think we made the right decision. I guess time will show, in terms of going with a box versus a bag. The one thing that we've gotten as positive feedback from retailers at least is that this is a stackable product and the like that.

Scott: That makes sense.

Alex: One of the issues with bags is obviously it's very inconvenient and takes up a lot of space.

Scott: Right, well, I think the box gives a little more surface area and meat to allow it to light it and get it going too. I would that that is the case as well.

Alex: Correct, yes, more air flow.

Scott: Right. So tell people how it works. As I remember there's a strip you pull off at the bottom.

Alex: Yep. So I'm actually going to throw in another term out there. We also know came up with a name for the actual technology. The technology that is inside is called Smart Light.

Scott: Smart Light. Ok.

Alex: And basically the idea behind it is there's a little grate, it's perforated grate inside the box that the charcoal sits on and that is actually one of the things I was a little bit surprised about that you said that even though you had no air flow in the grill. The charcoal actually sits a bit elevated so it should have added a little bit of air flow, but, of course, if it's completely solid on the bottom it would be not as effective.

Scott: Right, and to be fair, it did start. It wasn't that. But I noticed that it was generating a lot of smoke and I thought, I wonder if I'm cutting off the air flow a little bit so more is probably better so I took the pan off and it just really took off at that point.

Alex: Correct. So there is a couple of things are a little bit different with this product that the consumers might not be used to. One is the smoke and the smoke actually comes from two reasons. One, it is the type of charcoal we use. It's a pretty dense charcoal which actually results in the charcoal burning at a much higher temperature sheet so you can cook more stuff than you can with charcoal. So it adds a bit of smoke. But also, it's kind of the inner workings of a chimney, so the oxygen and again I'm not 100% sure about all that terminology, because I'm not an engineer myself, but basically the idea is that the air gets trapped inside the box. And until the air escapes, you are going to see a lot of smoke.

Scott: Aaah. OK. So perhaps I was a bit premature in thinking it was because it was sitting on the pan

Alex: Correct.

Scott: Well, awesome. It lit up pretty well, maybe a minute past the 15 minutes but I attributed that to my slow start. That makes sense.

Alex: But that's great feedback and one of the things that we are trying to do right now is come up with an instructional, a better instructional video addressing these issues because it is a little bit of a learning curve.

Scott: Yeah, but it worked great and, like I said, it was hot, I love cooking steaks over it because the flavor is just so much better than with the briquettes, So it worked great. So one of the things that I noticed and I know some of the other reviewers mentioned is that obviously the cost is a little bit more expensive than if you're going to buy a bag and I think that you're paying for the convenience and, as you mentioned, if you are not going to use that whole bag there might be some waste with it, so, is that fair to say?

Alex: That's absolutely correct. There is a bit of a premium that you pay, as like you said, for the value add of the convenience. We try not to compete directly with large bags because, as you know, charcoal is a commodity. We're not really selling charcoal. That is one thing that we're trying to and that's one of the reasons we came up with the name for FireQube. We're not selling charcoal. We're actually selling a way to light, to help with lighting charcoal. We're selling the actual, what's the best way to describe it? It's almost like we're selling a convenience

Scott: Right, yeah. That's how I saw it. And I thought if you are going to go down to the park, or if, I live close the mountains, so I like to head up the canyon and something like that, it's perfect because you can just toss or put it in the back of the car. You don't have to bring it home, there's nothing to bring home at that point, you just light it, it's all taken care of and done and you have something great to cook on.

Alex: Exactly and the bottom line is if you're buying a big, if you are doing backyard barbecue and you do this on a regular basis, then, yes, I would probably say this is not the ideal product for that in terms of cost. If you are doing it once in a blue moon and you don't want to mess with the usual things that associated with lighting charcoal--if you are using briquettes most likely they are covered in lighter fluid-- already, that's a big negative point. And if they're not covered in lighter fluid then you're probably going to cover them yourself and if you are using lump, well, lump is even harder to start if you don't have a chimney or if you don't have knowledge of really how to start fires.

Scott: Right, yeah, I agree. It sound like that's who this is best suited for, somebody who's going to maybe grill occasionally or is going to go to the park or somewhere else and they just want to take something and be able to use it and be done with it. It will work great for them.

OK, great. Hey, I was just on your website and I noticed that you've got a contest, a drawing that's going on, that's still going. Do you want to talk about that for a little bit?

Alex: Sure! So the contest is pretty simple. It's basically we are just generating awareness on Facebook. The idea behind it is, it's been running for three months now and we've we issuing, sending these grills once a month to just the people who get randomly chosen. You visit our Facebook page which is [Facebook.com/GrillEasy](https://www.facebook.com/GrillEasy), or you can just go to our website and navigate to the Facebook page that way. Click the Like button and we get notified and you get entered into the contest and I think we'll be continuing to run this for the time being.

It's been pretty successful for us.

Scott: Great. I'll make sure to note that in the post that I'll put up with this interview.

Alex: Thank you.

Scott: Let's see, anything else? Oh, tell people where they can find this, where can they buy it if they are interested.

Alex: So the company is based out of Boston, Massachusetts, and right now we are distributing it regionally. We are in talks to potentially be in a couple of national retail chains but at this point the only brick and mortar places are in Massachusetts and you can find those stores we are in on our website. But you can also pick one up online. We are running a special now for free shipping, up to four boxes, so you don't have to be in Boston to pick one up for yourself and try it.

Scott: And if I remember right, what's it going for right now? About \$8 or \$9?

Alex: Yes correct, it's \$8.99 per box .

Scott: \$8.99. Yeah, great. OK, well, anything else you'd like to share with us about this product, the FireQube from Grill Easy, or anything else related to grilling?

Alex: Well this is the time to get out there. I mean, there's nothing like getting outside and grilling up a couple of delicious steaks with your friends.

Scott: I agree. One of my mottos is that "It always tastes better when it's cooked outdoors." and like you said, we are just starting into the grilling season. Memorial day is coming up here quick and that's kind of the traditional start so if people haven't used lump charcoal they definitely ought to do that and a great way to start doing that is by getting a box of FireQube (that's what it's called now!) from Grill Easy.

Alex: Thanks, Scott.

Scott: Well, Alex, I appreciate you coming on and talking with us tonight. I hope you have lots of great success in getting your product out and available. Anywhere else-- you've mentioned the website and the Facebook page--anywhere else people ought to go to find out more about you?

Alex: Well, definitely make sure to follow us on Twitter. That's where the latest and greatest news about Grill Easy is, is on Twitter.

Scott: What's the Twitter handle?

Alex: [Twitter.com/GrillEasy](https://twitter.com/GrillEasy)

Scott: GrillEasy, ok. And the website is Grill-Easy.com and you've got a [Facebook page](#) as well. Awesome. Well, again, I appreciate you being here with me tonight. Thank you.

Alex: Thanks, Scott.