

B OOTY UILDING

> **Britain's leading female trainer Michelle Brannan explains how to build perfect glutes.**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
CHRISTOPHER BAILEY

THE GLUTES ARE NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT to target and develop. They are made up of three parts: the gluteus maximus, minimus, and medius. To get a well-balanced, rounded backside you need to target each area with exercises that not only isolate the glutes, but also work the body at slightly different angles. • Many believe the squat is the best glute exercise. Squatting has its place, but many isolation exercises force the glutes to work harder and often yield better results. Compound exercises such as squats rely heavily on your technique and recruitment patterns so don't depend on them too much. Here are what I believe to be the most effective exercises.

HIP THRUSTS

Hip thrusts should be a staple part of any glute programme. They're great for improving hip extension and strengthening the glutes, and they are nowhere near as technical to perform as squats, so almost anyone can do them. You don't have to go heavy; this exercise really is about focussing on the movement and isolating the glutes. Position yourself in front of a bench with a barbell resting on your thighs. Lift your shoulders and upper back onto the bench for support then, keeping your knees bent, thrust your hips up, pushing through the heels and squeezing your glutes. At the end position, your hips should be up in the air, your knees bent at a 90-degree angle and your feet directly

beneath your knees. Hip thrusts can also be done from the floor and with a weighted bag or weight plate instead of a barbell. If you feel your hamstrings taking over the exercise, stretch them before starting.

CABLE KICKBACKS

Kickbacks are one of the best butt exercises. They completely isolate the glutes, so they're perfect for people who want to train this area but don't want to increase the thickness of their legs. Strap one of your legs into an ankle attachment that is fixed to a low cable pulley then stand in front of the machine and, leaning slightly forward, extend your leg backwards. You can hold onto the cable frame for stability. The glutes activate at the top of the motion, i.e.

when your leg is fully kicked out, so if your range of movement is restricted, stretch your hip flexors before you start. The kickback movement can be executed straight or diagonally with a straight or bent leg. You can also use ankle weights instead of a cable for variation.

FIRE HYDRANTS

This is a great exercise for the glute medius and minimus and for strengthening the hip abductors. Start by kneeling on all fours with your stomach facing towards the floor. Lift one leg up and to the side of the body while maintaining a 90-degree bend in the knee. You can add ankle weights for extra resistance. This exercise is effective with high repetitions. You can



HIP THRUSTS



CABLE KICKBACKS



also incorporate fire hydrants into your training by doing them to activate the glutes before compound exercises such as squats and deadlifts.

SINGLE-LEG PRESS

The single-leg press targets the glutes more effectively than the more common double-legged press. Select a light weight and focus on pushing

through the heels. Experiment by changing the position of your body to hit the glutes at different angles. Again, higher repetitions work well for this exercise.

STIFF-LEGGED DEADLIFT

The stiff-legged deadlift is good for the hamstrings, glutes, and lower back and can be performed with a



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STIFF-LEGGED DEADLIFT



barbell or dumbbells. Stand with your feet hip-width apart, bend at the hips, and lower the weight towards the floor and slightly away from your knees. Lift back up to an upright position while squeezing the glutes. Always keep your knees soft, rather than locked backwards, as this could lead to injuries. Also be careful not to arch your lower back. I like to vary the stance to hit the muscles slightly differently—narrow, wide or sumo stances are all effective. You can also alter the range of motion, for example, by

only going partially down, which can help you focus on the butt squeeze rather than working the hamstrings.

LATERAL SIDE SQUATS
This is a great variation of the squat that targets the glutes. Resting a barbell on your shoulders, stand with your feet close together, step to the side and squat, then return to the centre and step to the other side and squat. Don't load too much weight—the aim is to focus and isolate. Pay attention to pushing off through the heels to return to the

Try This Glute Circuit
Repeat 3 or 4 times.

EXERCISE	REPS
Barbell hip thrusts	15
Cable kickbacks	20 (10 straight back / 10 diagonal)
Fire hydrants	40 with ankle weights (each leg)
One leg press	20 (on each leg)
Stiff leg deadlifts.....	10
Lateral side.....	20 squats (10 each side)
Bench squats	10

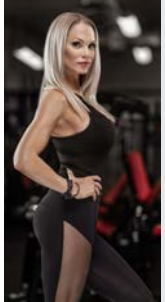


The bench squat really forces your glutes to work: the lower the bench, the more difficult the move becomes.



central position. You can modify this exercise by varying the length of the step. A longer step is more difficult to return to the central position and becomes more like a side lunge.

BENCH SQUAT
Another squat variation that really forces your glutes to work. Start by standing in front of a bench with a barbell on your shoulders then squat down until you sit on the bench. Drive back up through the heels. You can vary this exercise by altering the height of the bench. The lower the bench the more difficult it becomes. This exercise is particularly effective because transferring your weight onto the bench distributes your weight into your heels when you get up again.



ABOUT MICHELLE
Michelle Brannan is an IFBB bikini pro. She also runs a coaching team called Showgirl Fitness and the online training subscription resource BodySculpt Pro. michellebrannan.com.

SINGLE LEG PRESS

