

Cooking Out-of-Doors Offers Informal Fun

By HAMILTON FISH

Whether you refer to it as a barbecue or a cook-out, there is a lot of fun to be derived from the informal meal cooked and eaten out-of-doors. It is fun for the whole family, as traditionally it is father who cooks outdoors, mother who presides indoors. Although the usual home grill is a far cry from camp cookery, still it smells of the wide open spaces, and this makes the food more enticing.

Any well planned home today has a spacious outdoor living area, or patio. Here is where you gain the extra benefits of living in California, because here you have privacy, beauty, a touch of personalized living on a relaxed scale which is so important in today's rushed pattern.

It doesn't make any difference whether you have an elaborate built in grill complete with fireplace and automatic bun warmer, or whether you have the most primitive brazier imaginable, the fun of the job is there for you to enjoy. Drifting whiffs of meat fragrance, a general slowing down of the nervous system are all evident when you enjoy living in your patio.

Mostly widely used for barbecuing is the portable propane type of grill. Varieties can be so elaborate as to cost as much as an automobile, and seem modeled on the army's portable field kitchen unit. Others are simpler but do have a hood and an electric spit, while the simplest of all is just a brazier with a mesh covering in which you can place coals.

While we term it barbecuing, it is really broiling over coals, and the difference only bothers those recently moved here from the east. In turn, they are the ones who insist on "cook-out" when we know darned good and well what we are doing is barbecuing. So it comes to hands to make a meal.

What you cook and how you cook it is your own business, because when any dozen barbecue enthusiasts get together, there will be at least 12 divergent opinions on everything from how to start the fire to what type of charcoal you use, or is it proper to only burn hardwood down to a bed of coals? But what about a fruitwood fire which furnishes its own inimitable flavor? And do you salvage the charcoal remaining when food is cooked, dunk it in water to put it out, then save it for the next time, or do you just let it burn because you like the glow, enjoy the odor? What arguments can emerge from this group of

idiotcy to sit in a drafty back yard, smothering smoke, eaten alive by flies and mosquitoes to try and eat scorched and tough meat, when inside the house is a comfortable table and chairs, screened away from the wild life, with a full fledged kitchen in which you can so much more easily prepare a meal. Poor souls, they just haven't arrived!

Any outdoor living room must be planned for comfort, and this begins with weather control, insofar as it is possible. You can construct or plant a screen to keep the coolest breezes away. You can build an overhead of wood or wood and plastic to divert even strong winds, to keep off the hottest sun, to keep out rain. And you can plant a background to give you beauty, fragrance, texture, which make being out of doors more fun than ever.

Many of the less expensive cuts of meat are most delicious when quickly cooked over glowing coals. Often just putting them to soak in a marinade will tenderize them, add piquant flavor. And the tantalizing extra touch added by wisps of smoke is an enticing dividend.

For special smoke flavoring, bay leaves or rosemary, freshly cut, can be tossed by the handful right onto the coals, where their freshness will prevent them from burning for quite some time, while the heat working on the volatile oils they contain, expresses the oil as smoke which envelops the meat, giving it a distinctive but not overpowering flavor and fragrance.

Corn-on-the-cob can have husks peeled back, the silk removed, then husks pushed into place, be soaked in cold water, quickly drained and put on the grill with the meat. Or it can be cleaned, rolled in aluminum foil and cooked.

Young eggplant can be broiled right with the meat, basted with the meat sauce for a delicious unusual treat. So can zucchini and some other varieties of squash. Use your imagination and enjoy cooking, in your own patio for your own family and friends. Your friends can always get even with you when it is their turn to entertain, and besides, it is fun.

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