

HOME COOKING

BY RACHEL WHARTON

TRIAL BY FIRE

The seven things you need to know about grilling in Brooklyn.

By now, every food magazine in the country worth its (butter and) salt has done their definitive barbecue issue, filled with exposés on fanatical flammers and “best-ever!” recipes for ribs. But mastering the grill in Brooklyn calls for a unique set of hows. Here’s what you need to know.

1. WHERE TO GET A GRILL

Thanks to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, you don’t have to buy a grill at all. You just have to wake up early: At Prospect Park, prospective grillers snag picnic tables and sturdy steel grills before the rest of us have had our cuppa Joe.

“We came at nine in the morning,” said Delmi Restituyo, who was grilling adobo-spiked beef and green onions one summery Sunday.

Another method—like that of Park Slope artist Lucy Horvath, who arrived well after lunch—is to mosey in after other grillers have vacated a table. You’ll often be blessed with leftovers: a still-smoking hot grill.

Of course, plenty of Brooklynites have backyards and stoops (see #5), while others lug their own grills to the park.

(Although you’re not allowed to grill willy-nilly in any spot you choose. Open flame is only allowed in specified areas of four parks: Coffey, Kaiser, Prospect and Manhattan Beach. For locations, see nycgovparks.org).

While stoop sales, hardware stores and even Duane Reades sell little kettle grills and hibachis, a trip to the barbecue fantasy showrooms of Home Depot (550 Hamilton Ave. in Gowanus, 718-832-8553 or 585 Dekalb Ave. in Bed-Stuy, 718-230-0833) or Lowe’s (118 Second Ave. in Gowanus, 718-249-1151) is required for serious grill browsing.

At Lowe’s, you can also pick up our favorite grill for park grilling, the 21½-inch Meco Walk-a-Bout 4200. It folds up, has sturdy wheels and at \$49.93, is eligible for free shipping if ordered online.

2. WHERE TO GET REAL CHARCOAL

You can find briquettes at any bodega, but scoring the authentic stuff—what’s known as “lump charcoal”—can be trickier. These rough-hewn black clumps are made from “totally pure” charred wood, rather than coal dust and chemicals pressed into briquettes, says Don Crace, owner of Cowboy Charcoal in Tennessee. While briquettes might cost less and burn a little longer, lump provides more of that campside flavor, burns hotter for better searing and you can add pieces straight to the fire.

In fact, Sheepshead Bay barbecue master and blogger Robert Fernandez (check out whitetrashbbq.blogspot.com), often finds his charcoal at the Turkish restaurants along Ave. U and Ocean Ave. and Jethro, the Gowanus warehouse grocery store (566 Hamilton Ave., 718-768-0300). We’ve also found it at local Pathmarks, the new Red Hook Fairway (480-500 Van Brunt St., 718-694-6868) and Lowe’s.

3. HOW TO CHEAT

Yes, you can have someone grill for you. Lots of Brooklyn restaurants fire up the barbie come summer. Here’s a sampling of our favorites: They do burgers and hotdogs to order at the Gowanus Yacht Club (323 Smith St., 718-246-1321), a bagel shop patio-cum beer and burger bar in Cobble Hill.

At Queen’s Hideaway in Greenpoint (222 Franklin St., 718-383-2355) seasonal American chef Liza Queen has been known to stoke her backyard smoker on many a warm afternoon.

Most of Brooklyn’s Caribbean restaurants (like S&D Jamaican Bakery at 667 Washington Ave. in Prospect Heights, 718-622-3160



to name just one), have an old drum grill on the sidewalk, perfect for taunting passersby with the spicy-sweet smell of charring jerk chicken.

And at Sadie Mae's Cafe (131 Sixth Ave., 718-636-4270), a new soul food restaurant in Park Slope, three shiny silver charcoal grills that are a must for grilled chicken and ribs, says the South Carolina-born chef Dianne Brown, share space with tables on the back patio.



5. HOW TO BE A LAW-ABIDING CITIZEN

New York City's Bravest—the members of the New York Fire Department—thank you for not using a propane grill on a balcony, terrace, stoop or roof, and for only using a charcoal grill on a balcony, terrace or stoop when there is a 10-foot clearance from the building and an immediate source of water, meaning a garden hose or a four-gallon bucket of water.

6. WHERE TO GET THE BEST MEAT, FISH AND FOWL

Here in Brooklyn we're blessed with plenty of pork stores: butcher shops like Park Slope's AS (274 Fifth Ave., 718-768-2728) that still make their own sausage, grind beef for your burgers, butterfly your whole free-range chicken, sell you a steak they cut themselves and provide advice free of charge. (For a beginner's list of pork stores, see our mozzarella story on page 20.)

For grilling or smoking large cuts—like 15 pounds of brisket or pork butt—Robert Fernandez heads to Jethro. Greenmarkets also have meat these days: The widest variety is found Saturdays at Park Slope's Grand Army Plaza, where you can find beef, turkey, pork, chicken and



all kinds of grillable aquatic life (whole fish, shark filets, tuna steaks, clams) from Long Island's Blue Moon Fish. (See page 36.)

Another great Brooklyn spot for whole fish is the Emmons Ave. boardwalk in Sheepshead Bay. Near Ocean Ave., you can buy flounder, striped bass or porgy for a few bucks right from the decks of the fishing boats when they come home from their Atlantic Ocean fishing tours. A few of the fishermen will gut the fish, scale it, wrap it in newspaper and toss it to you from their boats, putting on a burly Brooklyn pirate show the whole time.

7. HOW TO GRILL CORN

It's easy—if you buy the right corn. The Midwest may be the corn belt, but magnificent varieties are grown right in our backyards—meaning Long Island, rural New York State and New Jersey. And since everyone knows corn should be eaten as soon as possible after picking—thanks to its sugars converting to starches, say food science gurus—get your ears from farmer's markets, a community supported agriculture drop-off (justfood.org, though you needed to join last winter, d'oh!) or supermarkets that buy local, like that spanking new Fairway, which gets two North Fork farms, says third-generation owner Howie Glickberg, to grow Fairway's sweet ears.

With good corn (see above) you won't need thyme-inflected butter, salt or a bit of crumbly Mexican *queso fresco* and a squeeze of lime to make it taste good, although none of those will hurt. Just prep it correctly: Open the husks, remove silks, twist the husks back into place, tie with twine if necessary, and soak in water for about 20 minutes, if you're worried the husks might burn. (If your corn is really, really fresh, you probably don't need to soak it all.) Then grill, turning once or twice for about 20 minutes or until your sweet, fresh tri-state ears are fragrant with the unsurpassed smell of summer outdoor eating. Who needs the 'burbs? □

