



Ah, late spring/early summer.

The nights are still cool, the days heat up, the mosquitoes start to swarm and the flies provide untold hours of amusement for my dog.

It's time once again for that most cherished rite of warm weather: Grilling out.

It's not just that the weather is nice and cooking out is a treat. It's not just that the stars are bright and the tea olives exhale a perfume more intoxicating than the finest of wines.

No, the only words I can possibly use to describe it are the following: MMMMM....FIRE GOOD!

Grilling out is not just about good eats, although certainly that's a major unintended consequence. No, for most guys the act of building an inferno and roasting marinated meat is more of a Zen ritual, devolution from corporate boardroom to lichen covered cave. This is because it involves all of our favorite things, in mass quantities and in the following order: Beer, fire, meat, beer, more beer, more fire, and more meat.

Generally, a guy's kitchen, at one time or another has been declared a biohazard by the government. It's not uncommon for a guy, say, to clean congealed hamburger grease off the floor with the same spatula he will use to cook the next hamburger. And the standard mantra, "Baby, I'm just going to let this pot soak a little while," guarantees that pot will remain in the sink for days, even months on end, until it has to be disposed of by a HAZMAT team.

During the one summer break I wasn't in summer school, I lived and worked at the beach. Three of us rented a trailer near Garden City. I had a crock-pot we used to make all kinds of concoctions we could eat on for days. Then like all guys, we got tired of leftovers and just left it sitting out on the kitchen counter for about a month. Bear in mind this was in July with three college guys living in a barely air-conditioned single wide trailer at the beach. By the time anyone got around to doing anything about it, the inside of the crock pot looked like it needed a shave and the stench was so bad one could probably eat a hoagie in a Honeybucket with less olfactory discomfort.

I finally bit the bullet, or rather, wrapped a wet towel around my head and removed the thing from where my roommates had shoved it under my bed, then took it to the nearest car wash and cleaned it out with one of those super powered pressure hoses. I think I used the "tire cleaner" setting.

But we're not that way with our grills.

Once you have given the grill its annual Blitzkrieg spring cleaning – which in some cases also calls for a surreptitious trip to a car wash – you have the added pleasure of knowing that all you have to do to keep it clean is build an inferno to burn off the remnants of the last meal cooked there. But pay attention: last spring I cranked up the gas to start the cleaning process, and then went into the house on some other errand. As is often the case, I soon got distracted. About an hour later, I remember thinking, "Gosh something smells good. I wonder who's cooking out in the middle of the day."

Three hours later, I was on my way to the store to get a new propane tank, my wife's pointed statements sticking out of my backside like porcupine quills.

There are other factors to consider as well. For one, unless you really don't like having

eyebrows, you probably shouldn't stare closely at a smoldering pile of fuel-soaked briquettes as you drop a match on them. Those fireballs that blast up like atomic explosions when you shoot lighter fluid on a low fire might give you a cheap thrill, but ruining good steaks by adding Gulf Lite to the flavor profile will not.

Like most things, use common sense and you'll probably do okay. At least, you'll probably survive, just like our caveman ancestors.

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