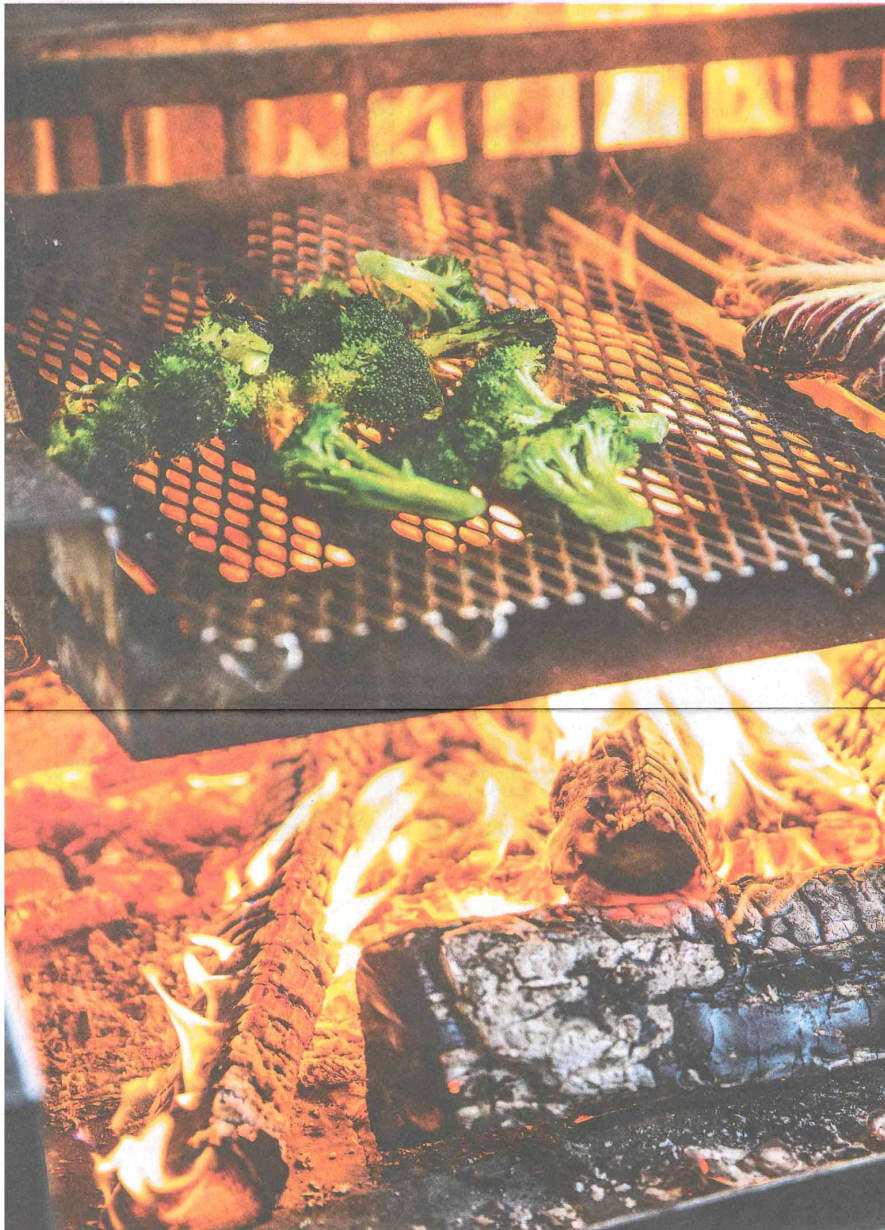


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TONY CENCOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Rekindling the Flame

Fire is primal, powerful, a little scary. But as the weather warms, its crackle and roar become a call to pleasure and freedom. The grill urges us to come outdoors and play, to let the smoke, heat and aromas work their magic on a meal. Here's advice on improving your summer cooking — over wood or charcoal, a gas grill or a campfire — and inviting a whole new guest list of ingredients and dishes.

How To Play With Fire



USE YOUR GRILL LIKE AN OVEN

Plunk a skillet over the flames and roast a chicken.

BY MELISSA CLARK



FOLLOW THE EXPERTS

Advice from pyromaniac chefs: Throw everything onto the grill.

BY JEFF GORDINIER



LEARN THE BASICS

A crash course in grilling meat, seafood and more.

BY SAM SIFTON



MAKE IT A HABIT

In South Africa, barbecue is an everyday passion.

BY JULIA MOSKIN



DON'T WASTE THE FLAME

After the meat's done, use the heat to power your pantry.

BY JOHN WILLOUGHBY AND CHRIS SCHLESINGER

Follow the Experts

Grilling means more than burgers. Chefs around the country are throwing everything onto the fire: avocados, carrots, bok choy, tangerines and even fish heads.

By JEFF GORDINIER

Looking to improve your cooking outdoors? One way to start is by listening to the pyromaniacs who do it every day, indoors. In the last few years, a rising generation of chefs has pledged its allegiance to the primal appeal of roaring flames. You can see and smell the evidence — the orange glow of wood embers, the pervasive cologne of smoke — as soon as you step into their restaurants, whether the home fires are burning in Chicago or Seattle or Oakland, Calif.

And while it's unlikely that many home cooks have the elaborate South American-style smoking and grilling equipment that Karen and Quinn Hatfield show off at Odys and Penelope in Los Angeles (not to mention the tidy arsenal of almond and red oak logs piled to the ceiling), these experts have a useful message to impart: Throw everything onto the fire.

Many amateur grillers, long liberated from meat-and-corn convention, have already taken this road. They're out there charring watermelon, radicchio and eggplant.

But keep going, and you'll begin looking at your charcoal grill or wood fire in new ways. Shove ingredients you may never have considered into the fire, above it, beneath it. Avocado? Yes, and we'll tell you how. Cabbage? Absolutely. Tangerines, carrots, leeks, bok choy, fish heads? Why not?

We've all learned to internalize the mantra "fat adds flavor." The same goes for smoke. As soon as you see the fire as a vehicle for charring and infusing ingredients with deeper layers of flavor, possibilities expand.

Andrew Brochu, the chef at a new fire-focused Chicago spot called Roister, has even found himself making ramen at home over the open flame, letting the flavorful smoke scurry across the bubbling broth.

"We just put pots and pans on the fire," he said, remembering one patio experiment with colleagues. "It was funny how shocked people were."

Renee Erickson, the chef at the Whale Wins in Seattle, where vegetables and a wood-fired oven operate in harmony, loves the way an hour or so in contact with the coals transforms whole onions and leeks. She nestles them right on top of the molten

Don't marinate carrots and broccoli. Bake them after they cook.

core of the fire and waits until the skin blackens and the bulbs become noticeably juicy and squeezable.

"They get kind of creamy on the inside, and you peel the outside off," she said. "Onions turn into onion pudding."

Scop out that smoky, creamy center, give it a dusting of good salt and a few glugs of olive oil, and you already have a side dish. Or, as Ms. Erickson recommends, convert the cooked-down interior of a leek into a sauce or a dip by whipping it into aioli or yogurt.

Or do what Nick Anderer does at Marta, a Danny Meyer restaurant inside the Redbury New York hotel on East 29th Street. "We don't have anything but fire here," Mr. Anderer said the other day. "We're forced to think in different ways."

Tear off hunks of bread, tossed with a generous pour of olive oil, "then just let them sizzle in a warm part of the grill," he said. ("They require some babying," he cautioned.) Now you have the makings of a next-level panzanella salad.

Cook some sturdy nebrodini mushrooms until the grill marks show, and slide them right into a bowl of lemon juice, mustard greens, olive oil and thyme for a salad. Roast florets of broccoli before letting them "get bloomed," as Mr. Anderer describes the process at Marta, in an apricot puttanesca with black olives and pickled chiles. When they're still hot, they're more likely to soak up the sauce than if you marinate them beforehand.

He always wants to bring the smoke to a piece of fish, but home cooks may fear that a fillet will stick to the grill or fall apart in the heat.

So here's a tip: Start by placing the fattier, skin-covered side of a fish on the grill, keeping a pan at room temperature at the ready. When the skin side is done, after six minutes or so, "flip it like an over-easy egg," Mr. Anderer said, onto the unheated pan and allow the flesh to cook from its own residual heat. That way you get the smoke without worrying about the stick.

And don't stop there, said Russell Moore, a leader of the pyro vanguard at Camino, in Oakland. After grilling a fish fillet, Mr. Moore may go back and get the remaining head and spine of the fish and put them on the fire for a quick browning. He uses those smoked leftovers as the base for an intensely flavorful fish stock.

With a fire, it's crucial to remember that just as there's good stuff going up (waves of heat and wisps of smoke), there's good stuff going down: the tastiness that melts from meat.

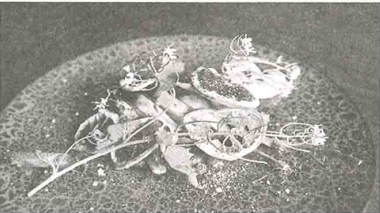
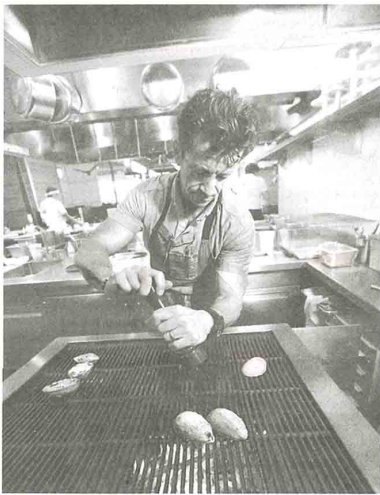
By placing a bowl beneath whole roasting ducks, Mr. Brochu, the chef at Roister, discovered that he could collect the fatty drippings for a meaty vinaigrette to brush on roasted stems of fennel. (He mixes two parts of drippings with one part Banvuls vinegar, then adds a little sugar, salt and dried orange and lemon.)

By slicing oranges into thin disks, threading wires through them and hanging the slivers a few feet over the dying embers overnight, Mr. Brochu found he could create "beautiful, delicious citrus chips that we haven't manipulated in any way."

Thinking differently about fire means thinking differently about time. The perfect moment to make baba ghanoush is when you



Russell Moore, above, a leader of the pyro vanguard, grilling vegetables at Camino in Oakland, Calif. Below, Robbie Wilson peppering grilled avocados at Bird Dog in Palo Alto, Calif., and, below that, the finished dish, with ponzu sauce filling the cavity. Second from bottom, Renee Erickson of the Whale Wins in Seattle peeling the charred outer layer of onions roasted at home. Bottom, the hearth-roasted lemel at Roister in Chicago, where Andrew Brochu used fatty duck drippings for a meaty vinaigrette for the fennel.



GRILLED ARCTIC CHAR WITH HORSERADISH CREMA

ADAPTED FROM NICK ANDERER, MARTA, NEW YORK
TIME: 30 MINUTES
YIELD: 4 SERVINGS

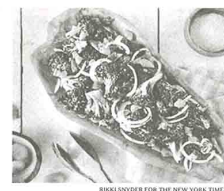
- 2 ounces fresh horseradish, peeled and coarsely grated (about ½ cup)
- 1½ cups sour cream
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped chives
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill, plus more for garnish
- 2 to 3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice, plus wedges for garnish
- Salt
- 4 (6-ounce) arctic char fillets (or use salmon)
- Olive oil

1. Make the horseradish crema: Peel horseradish with a vegetable peeler and coarsely grate. Combine grated horseradish with sour cream, Dijon, chives and dill in a medium bowl and mix well. Season crema with lemon juice and salt to taste. (Crema can be made in advance; chill until you are ready to serve.)

2. Heat grill to medium-high heat if you are using gas; if you have a charcoal grill, you want a nice hot bed of coals.

3. Coat fish well with olive oil and season with salt. Set fish on the grill skin side down and cook, covered, until the flesh of the fish begins to turn opaque and the skin is crisp, 3 to 5 minutes. Use a grill spatula to carefully flip the fish and finish cooking to medium, about 2 minutes more.

4. Spread horseradish crema on a serving platter or individual plates and place cooked fish on top with the skin side up. Garnish with dill and lemon wedges. Serve extra crema on the side.



ONLINE: GREEN ON THE GRILL

The chef Nick Anderer's recipe for grilled broccoli with apricot puttanesca (above).
mycooking.com

GLAZED GRILLED CARROTS

ADAPTED FROM KAREN AND QUINN HATFIELD, ODYS AND PENELOPE, LOS ANGELES
TIME: 35 MINUTES
YIELD: 4 SERVINGS

- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon dark brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary
- ½ clove garlic, cut into paper-thin slices
- 1 teaspoon freshly grated ginger
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, plus more for the carrots
- 10 medium carrots, peeled, trimmed and cut in half lengthwise
- Salt
- 1 green onion, thinly sliced

1. In a large bowl, whisk together vinegar, soy sauce, sugar, rosemary, garlic and ginger until combined. Whisk in 2 tablespoons oil so dressing emulsifies; set aside.

2. Heat grill to low. Coat carrots with oil and season with salt. Grill carrots, covered, turning as needed to prevent burning, until nicely charred and fork tender, 20 to 25 minutes.

3. When carrots come off the grill, toss them immediately in the prepared dressing. Once they're coated, use tongs to transfer the carrots to a serving platter or garnish with green onion. Drizzle a few spoonfuls of the remaining dressing over the top.

already have a hot grill on hand. Mr. Moore, at Camino, suggests putting a whole eggplant on the fire — on the medium-heat coals, not the molten-red ones. You should turn it with tongs now and then to make sure it's evenly cooked, and then let the metamorphosis run its course.

"At some point you can feel it collapse," he said. "It's pretty obvious." Let the eggplant cool down after the core has gone all melty, and you have the raw material of a Middle Eastern dip — even one that you may decide to make the next day.

"It's so easy to make that into something tasty," Mr. Moore said.

Few items could be easier than the bok choy recommended by Bryant Ng, an owner and the chef at Cassia in Santa Monica, Calif. Blanch the bok choy in salted water to tenderize it, then dry it, brush with canola oil (or another neutral-flavored oil), and lay it on the grill until it starts to darken but not burn.

"It really, really absorbs the smoke flavor," Mr. Ng said. "Better than, quite frankly, a burger." Next, dip the stalks in oyster sauce. And if you haven't made any, he said, "buy a jar of oyster sauce."

One signature dish at Cassia offers a case study in using fire creatively: Grilled pigs' tails come out of the raging fire (after just enough time to give them a crispy crust) with such a sticky, meltingly tender texture that they're practically viscous.

"It's actually the easiest thing," Mr. Ng said. He braises the tails for three or four hours beforehand with fish sauce, honey and garlic. "It doesn't have to be pigs' tails," he said. "It could be ribs." The fire is just the final step.

It probably shouldn't come as a surprise that California chefs, with their bottomless bounty of first-rate produce, are inclined to throw fruits and vegetables into the flames. They're also apt to stress the importance of listening to that produce.

At Odys and Penelope in Los Angeles, the Hatfields are fond of giving carrots a good 20-minute char before splashing them with a glaze of brown sugar, soy sauce, ginger, garlic and balsamic vinegar. Softened carrots soak up sauce, but there's no point in marinating them in advance. "Carrots are so rock hard, they don't absorb anything until they've been cooked," Karen Hatfield said.

A kind of alchemy occurs when char meets sauce. One of the simplest dishes at Odys and Penelope involves taking cabbage (an ingredient that normally plays a subsidiary role in a backyard barbecue, as coleslaw) and blackening it up (while breaking it down) on the grill. After about 20 minutes on the fire the cabbage is chopped, then smothered with a Caesar dressing.

An avocado, like a head of cabbage, is something rarely associated with grilling, but once you consider it, your world opens up. At Bird Dog in Palo Alto, Calif., the chef Robbie Wilson has been getting a lot of attention for peeling avocados, removing the woody seeds, giving the avocados facedown grill marks and the fragrance of smoke, then filling their warm empty craters with spoonfuls of ponzu sauce.

"That avocado's going to be on my tombstone, but I'm O.K. with that," Mr. Wilson said. "I think it does embody what makes California great."

One of his more interesting tricks involves fire and citrus. He and his team give whole satsumas a spin on the flames, waiting and watching until the outside of the fruit has darkened and the inside has softened. They later slice and cook down the fruit to create a smoked marmalade ("bright orange with little flecks of black in it," Mr. Wilson said) that they fold into other dishes, like a plate of Wagyu beef.

Does that sound too hard? Not if you open your mind, Mr. Wilson said: "The home cook can't be afraid."