

barbeque

The sun is out, the sky is blue...it's time to bring out the barbecue

I confess to a soft spot for barbecuing. As a child, ours was one of the first families in the street to get into cooking al fresco. My mother's sister was dating an Australian and Neighbours had just aired for the first time when my father, in a rare spirit of adventure, declared he'd build us a barbecue.

He wasn't brilliant at DIY my dad, but credit where it's due he produced something akin to an outdoor cooking facility without too much swearing. Lighting the darn thing was another matter. I recall a news item from the same era involving some hapless individual who managed to burn down several acres of the New Forest with a carelessly discarded soggy cigarette end. Our barbecue on the other hand resisted ignition with half a can of paint stripper and a blow torch.

We did get it going eventually and our garden was filled with excited children and billowing black smoke in equal measure. Food from our barbecue tended to be burnt black on the outside and raw in the middle. How none of us ended up in casualty remains a minor miracle.

I remember my mother, eyes streaming from smoke inhalation, squinting at one of dad's less recognisable offerings through the haze. "What are you looking at?" I asked. "If it doesn't move

in the next minute I'll assume it's food and not something just passing through" she sighed.

Of course nowadays things are very different. The British have become a nation of barbecuers in spite of our less than perfect weather.

The gas barbecue could have been invented for us. The immediacy of gas means that any break in the weather can be taken advantage of.

Modern gas barbecues produce authentically flavoured food too.

Obviously, purists will insist on a traditional charcoal grill and there are many different styles to suit all tastes and pockets. It's worth asking for eco friendly charcoal as it's estimated that 40,000 tonnes of barbecued charcoal used every year in the UK originates from unsustainable sources.

There are tongs and tools for every task, funky unbreakable plates and 'glasses', not to mention lighting and patio heaters to extend your barbecuing experience into the evening.

Butchers have cottoned on to our love of outdoor dining too and stock ready made kebabs and marinated meat to take the hard work out of preparation. So grab a steak and a couple of sausages this month and let's get barbecuing.

Scrumptious Sausage Glaze: Brush sausages generously with English mustard blended with a few drops of balsamic vinegar then sprinkle with sugar. As the sausages cook, the sugar caramelises ... delicious!

