

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 24: Cooking Out of Doors

(Brief intro music)

Rachel: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Rachel.

Leah: And I'm Leah.

Rachel: So...we were looking at different topics to discuss for this episode, and whenever that's the case we tend to peek at whatever monthly celebrations are coming up. Listen: I don't know if every month is as loaded with food-related celebrations as May, but I was surprised! On top of being National Barbeque Month and National Hamburger Month, May also recognizes such days as International No Diet Day, National Eat What You Want Day, and a bunch of others. Foodies are joined by alcoholic beverage connoisseurs, too, for both Cosmopolitan Day on May 7th and Wine Day on May 25th. In the spirit of possibly the best season for backyard grillin', picnics, and campfire cookin', Leah and I are going to talk about dining out of doors. We have many excellent cookbook recommendations covering all sorts of dietary restrictions—as well as some cool recipes to share—so, let's get started!

Leah: You guys, summer is almost here! Can't you just feel the heat and sunshine? Almost smell the fresh cut grass and taste the beautiful delicacy that is backyard grilling? I sure can. Don't get me wrong, in my house we pull out the grill year-round, even with snow on the ground. I'm sure of you guys can relate to that, too. But summer grilling has its own special place. It's a hallmark of summer, of gatherings, sunshine, and happiness. And what can't you grill? It's this whole exciting avenue of cooking and creativity that you might not explore year-round. I won't get bogged down too much in the whole debate about charcoal and propane. Personally, I love the charcoal-y taste you just don't get with propane, but I'll happily take a nice medium-rare steak off of whatever grill you want to cook it on. It's more about the meat and the cook for me—and the seasoning. Speaking of seasoning, I grabbed Oak Creek's copy of a book called "Praise the Lard."

Rachel: (laughs quietly)

Leah: Which is a cookbook by Mike Mills and Amy Mills. There's loads of really great information in the book, as well as a few memoirs about how they got their restaurant, 17th Street Barbecue. They walk through many aspects of mostly barbecue, that low and slow amazing method for cooking meat. What stood out to me in the book—something that I might actually use in my cooking—were the dry rub recipes. The spice blends. I love a good spice blend, y'all. It can make or break a meal, so I'm always looking for new blends or ideas. You can regularly find me haunting Penzey's stores, or the website, as of late. So, this whole little

section in the book had a whole bunch of blends to literally and figuratively spice up your meat. Get it?

Rachel: I get it. (laughs)

Leah: Anyways, one of the mixes they spell out is called “Pure Magic,” and boy, I can’t wait to mix up a bit of that blend. I can just tell that a lot of the spices in there are going to hit my taste buds just right. In case anyone else is just as curious, the blend consists of sweet Hungarian paprika, salt, sugar, garlic, chili powder, cumin—I love cumin!—dry mustard, black pepper, and cayenne pepper. I’m very interested to mix that up and see what it’s like not just on meat but veggies, too! Another blend is their “Steakhouse Shake” that touts itself as being good on hamburgers, steaks, brisket, and beef ribs. That one consists of dry mustard, garlic, black pepper, sweet Spanish paprika, thyme, and cayenne pepper. Side note: if anyone is curious about the differences between Hungarian paprika and Spanish, I was, too! According to a post from TheKitchn.com written by one Emily Han, all paprika can come in sweet, mild, or hot. Hungarian paprika is more well known, but Spanish paprika typically has a less intense flavor. I also learned that Hungarian paprika comes in eight different grades, all with different properties. I had no idea that researching for this episode would lead me down such a paprika-filled rabbit hole.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: So, you’re welcome if this makes you curious about that same paprika journey. I haven’t wondered this much about a spice since I learned about the cinnamon controversy a few years ago. To spark your interest there...most folks in the U.S. have only had “cassia” cinnamon, which is what is sold at most stores as ‘cinnamon’. But there’s a whole type, “Ceylon” cinnamon which is labeled as ‘true’ cinnamon. In Europe, you’re most likely to have Ceylon cinnamon if something says it contains cinnamon. Anyways, this isn’t a cinnamon rabbit hole—back to paprika! Wait, maybe let’s get back to grilling.

Rachel: Maybe. (laughs)

Leah: (laughs) Regardless of propane or charcoal grilling, there’s a whole world of flavor to be explored with wood chips. There’re also various grilling methods—indirect vs direct heat—and even smoking, if you have the right kind of grill. Oak Creek has a few general grilling cookbooks that might be helpful if you’re pretty new to grilling and want some basics. The books also offer recipes and tips. The first I might recommend is “Weber’s Art of the Grill,” which was put out by the company Weber, which if a grill manufacturer, if you didn’t know. The next book is called “Bobby Flay’s Grill It!” and it’s full of recipes developed by Bobby Flay and his team. If you haven’t heard of Bobby Flay, he’s a pretty famous chef and you can always catch him on the Food Network. His book is broken down by the type of thing you’re going to grill, which is nice if you’re looking to use up the lobster you just have laying around. He’s got a great-looking recipe for “Lobster Tacos.” And, as I found out, you parboil your lobster before grilling it for four to six minutes. Who knew?

Rachel: Man, it must be nice to just have lobster lyin' around. That's so fancy!

Leah: Yeah, I don't really just have lobster laying around.

Rachel: (laughs) Okay, so I want to talk about alternative grilling. Back in the day, it may have been difficult to find decent recipes suitable for a vegetarian diet. But it's 2021, and nowadays vegetarianism is a piece of carrot cake. Badum-tiss! Sorry. I'm so sorry. That was so lame.

Leah: No, no, that was good. Keep going.

Rachel: (laughs) What I'm saying is that there are plenty of delicious grilling recipes that don't involve meat. The first book that I found on this subject is called "Simply the Best Vegetarian Barbeque Recipes" by Wendy Hobson. This cookbook is really helpful not only because of its tasty ideas for "Parsnip and Pepper Kebabs," but because it is prefaced with a lot of useful information for people who have never tried barbequing before. Hobson includes a list of basic equipment you will need both for the fire—such as charcoal and a poker—and for the food you'll be preparing—like a basting brush, wire grilles, or skewers. I find adulting difficult at the very best of times.

Leah: (laughs)

Rachel: So, having a step-by-step guide is a must when it comes to new endeavors...especially those involving open flame. To this end, Hobson also provides tips of the trade for keeping your fire lit. It can be harder than it seems. My favorite part of this book, though, has to be the inclusion of marinades, sauces, and flavored butter.

Leah: Mmm.

Rachel: Admittedly, while I myself am not a vegetarian, I am trying to eat more healthily, so I often consult these types of recipes. What I have noticed is that sauces are *muy importante*.

Leah: Oh, yeah.

Rachel: Meat has a lot of inherent flavor, so when you are substituting with alternatives, a lot of the punch comes from getting your ingredients soaked in a marinade. This can take a little extra planning, but the results are well worth it. Properly salting your food goes a long way, too. This is also true for many of the recipes in the next cookbook I want to bring to your attention. In "Vegetarian Grilling: 60 Recipes for a Meatless Summer," author Karen Schulz dedicates an entire section to dips and spices. There are a lot of other recipes, too, of course—I want to try the teriyaki "Tofu and Shitake Mushroom Skewers"—but the dips especially will appeal to wider audiences. If you are hosting a cookout in your backyard, chances are that not everyone you invite is going to be vegetarian. So, it is a good idea to have sauces that can double to compliment meat dishes. Schulz points out, however, that "vegetarian ingredients almost always contain less fat" and "may dry out or even burn if they are not marinated or brushed with...oil." Just food for thought as you fire up your cooker of choice.

Leah: The next topic for this episode is cooking while you're camping. While you're out in nature, doing nature things. Listeners may or may not know how much I adore the aforementioned nature things and camping. In case you don't, it's near and dear to my heart. Any camping trip starts with the idea to go camping, reservations, and then menu planning. And the menu certainly will vary depending on the kind of camping you're doing. For instance, if I'm planning a backpacking trip, the menu needs to be tight and light so you're not carrying anything extra. Every ounce matters! If I'm setting out with a travel trailer, well, I don't need to do quite as much planning. There are grocery stores along the route, and more supplies can be easily acquired. So, the first thing that popped into my head when I thought about this topic was a book called "Lipsmackin' Vegetarian Backpackin'" by Christine and Tim Conners. Now, we don't have a copy of this at Oak Creek, but Central Library has one if you're curious. Eleven years ago, when I went on my first backpacking trip with my best friend, we used a bunch of recipes out of that book because she's vegetarian. I remember testing out different recipes in her backyard to find the ones that were the tastiest. There are also very vague memories of something that was incredibly, horribly a vivid-green color...

Rachel: What?

Leah: (laughs) Which, for the life of me, I can't think of what caused that color.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: I do recall it was relatively tasty, because it made the cut to go on our trip.

Rachel: Huh.

Leah: My next thought, when I go on a backpacking trip in the Boundary Waters, is we always have a really amazing, heavy breakfast the first day. We make egg McMuffins.

Rachel: Mmm.

Leah: And they're so amazing! The eggs travel in our backpacks already cracked into a container, and summer sausage travels safely in its casing. We're very careful with our English muffins, and the cheese rides in frozen. By the next morning, it's thawed. We fry up eggs and slices of sausage on the griddle, and even toast the English muffins. It all comes together in the most delicious of ways. And guys, I was so excited to sit down and tear through some camping cookbooks to find some new recipes. I have so much camping planned this summer, and I'm always up for a new recipe to try. Now, other than my anecdotal recipe and memories, Oak Creek Library does have a few books that talk about cooking while you're camping. What's nice about cookbooks dedicated to this type of cooking is that there are typically steps you take at home for prep, and then steps you take while you're actually camping. You certainly could figure out how to tweak a favorite recipe at home and make it work for the trail, but it's nice to have a lot of that thought taken care of for you. One book in particular, entitled "Dirty Gourmet" even has it's chapters broken down by the type of camping you're doing. This book is written by Aimee Trudeau, Emily Nielson, and Mai-Yan Kwan. As I said, backpacking will vary

wildly from car camping or a travel trailer camping. One recipe I'll be grabbing from this book is for "Campfire Grilled Corn" with ancho lime mayo and cilantro.

Rachel: Ooo.

Leah: It sounds so good! Next up, "Feast by Firelight" by Emma Frisch. Loads of great recipes, information on the "nuts and bolts" of a camp kitchen, plus some fire fundamentals, and she provides some menu plans at the back of the book, too. They're nice examples of what a camping menu can look like. And, after reading, I found an even more delicious-sounding Chile-lime festival corn with feta and cilantro recipe. Basically, this one has cheese, which to me makes it superior to the previous corn recipe. But I think it's safe to say I better get some corn at the store ASAP and try one of the recipes on the grill. And my final book, "The Campout Cookbook" by Marnie Hanel and Jen Stevenson. My first note: I love the feel of this book—literally! The cover is really soft and textured and has a really nice feel in your hands. It's filled with really cute illustrations, and the first 40 pages—or the entirety of chapter one—covers everything from cast-iron care to how many uses they could think of for a thermos. Hint: it's 99 as of the publication date in 2018. Who knows how many more there are now? Another standout idea from this book is about a humble baked potato. I never previously considered par baking potatoes at home. This book suggests doing exactly that then wrapping them in foil. Then you just need to finish them off, still in the foil, in your campfire coals. Genius. and they'll finish about the same time as a steak. All in all, this book was cute, helpful, and full of great ideas. I liked it well enough that I might purchase a copy of my very own to have in my camping arsenal.

Rachel: To balance things out, I have just a couple more vegetarian-centric recommendations. There's "Charred: The Complete Guide to Vegetarian Grilling and Barbecue" by Genevieve Taylor. This was published last year and seems very chic, as far as recipes go. It includes separate sections for kebabs, burgers and fritters, as well as smoked, stuffed, and wrapped foods. My husband and I have a wood pellet smoker at home. It uses indirect heat to grill as opposed to an open flame, so I am all about that low and slow technique you mentioned earlier, Leah. That's cooking at lower temperatures across longer periods of time. Even if you don't have a smoker, you can still use this technique by using either whole wood logs or smoking chips. Keep in mind that the type of fuel you use will affect the flavor, and you can even buy flavored pellets or chips like hickory, apple, or cherry. It works for meats and vegetables, so feel free to experiment and find the exact flavor profile you desire. I like this cookbook by Taylor in particular because it includes a key that will let you know if the recipe you are reading can be cooked on the barbecue, in a griddle or a frying pan, in the oven, or by other means. If you become a fan, then I also recommend "Fire, Smoke, Green: Vegetarian Barbecue, Smoking and Grilling Recipes" by Martin Nordin. This title was also published in 2020 and gives you plenty of options. Barbecue straight on your charcoal, gas, electric, or hybrid grill; use indirect heat; or throw cast-iron and clay pots directly into the fire! I haven't tried that method, because it seems a little intense, but at some point I might get adventurous and give it

a whirl. No matter your chosen technique, Nordin advises that you check the core temperature of your vegetables. This makes sense for meats in order to make sure that they aren't undercooked and therefore dangerous to your health, but...vegetables? Turns out, they also have ideal internal temps to bring out the best flavor and texture. For example, potatoes should exceed 200 degrees Fahrenheit while zucchini and asparagus are better around 170 degrees. How do you measure this accurately? Speaking from experience, it is worth investing in a digital thermometer. These devices have metal probes that you stick into the densest part of the meat or vegetable, and you can then close the lid of your grill, smoker, or whatever so as not to lose any heat. The probes register to a digital read-out and, in some cases, an app on your smartphone. My husband is an aficionado and uses the app to track the heat on a graph during slow roasts so that we can see if there are any weird dips...or something. All I know is that everything he cooks in our smoker tastes amazing, so credit where credit is due: the tools of the trade play a big part in a successful cookout.

Leah: I didn't realize veggies have recommended internal temperatures. That's so interesting.

Rachel: Isn't it?

Leah: The next book I want to mention deserves its own spot, because it discusses so many techniques and cuisines for grilling. It even has "Grilled Salad" sections, and in it I found the most amazing sounding "Grilled Watermelon Salad" with arugula and queso fresco. I mean, doesn't that sound amazing?

Rachel: It totally does.

Leah: I wanna eat that!

Rachel: Right? (laughs)

Leah: I wanna make that. Anyways, this recipe is in a book—"Project Fire" by Steven Raichlen. On PBS he's known as the "Shakespeare of Barbecue" and hosts "Project Smoke," "Primal Grill," and "Project Fire." His grilling cookbooks have won awards, and I see why. Amazing directions, and very thorough. I also really liked the way he linked various recipes together. For instance, his BLT salad calls for grilled bacon. He includes that you can find how to grill bacon on page 50. Easy to find! But boy, for new grillers and anyone looking to grill a little bit more, his chapter "The Seven Steps to Grilling Nirvana" covers so many things. Types of grilling, specialized smoking techniques, safety—even where the optimal point is to insert that aforementioned thermometer probe is. It's just loaded with info. Even the recipes include more than I expected. There are "Insider Tips," shopping tips, and a little bit of applicable history. I was just really impressed with this book. Highly recommend if you're interested in grilling.

Rachel: Next up, I have recommendations for vegans. Yes, luckily there are options for this type of diet, too. According to "Grilling Vegan Style: 125 Fired-Up Recipes to Turn Every Bite into a Backyard BBQ" by John Schlimm, there are many, many options. I have to try the "Edamame Embers." "Crackling Kale," and "Presto Pesto No-Bake Lasagna!"

Leah: Mm!

Rachel: In addition to appetizers and entrees, Schlimm includes a long list of marinades, desserts, and happy hour drinks for adult party-goers. So, if you enjoy alcohol, this has you covered. Otherwise, try “VBQ—The Ultimate Vegan Barbecue Cookbook” by Nadine Horn. With more than just recipes, this cookbook walks you through “the right way to barbeque” vegetables, tofu, tempeh—which is a soy product—and seitan—a kind of wheat gluten. Learn how to grill the likes of pizza, quesadillas, and tacos! If you think you could use more in-depth tips and tricks, Horn goes into a lot a detail. For instance, we now all know that there are charcoal, gas, and electric grills. But did you know that charcoal grills are broken down further into kettle, pedestal and flat top? I didn’t! Or, at least, I didn’t know their different names until doing some research.

Leah: (laughs)

Rachel: See? I’m a newbie, too. Nice and relatable. Which is probably why I recommend Horn’s cookbook based more on the hipster photography than anything else. Something about a random, flannel-clad dude who poses with hands full of charcoal briquettes just sets me in the mood for outdoorsy fun-times. As per usual, remember that you can check out all of these cookbooks for yourself from libraries throughout the Milwaukee County Federated Library System. Conversely, if you would prefer to just drool over high-def pictures of professionally-made foodstuffs that will always turn out better than your own attempts, you can stop by your local library to browse the collection for as long as you want. It may be masochistic, but we all do it. Don’t lie.

Leah: I do have a program I’d like to plug here, one that sort of goes along with grilling. Or, at least with summer. Starting May 17th you’ll be able to sign up for my Take Out program “Refreshing Mocktails.” Kits will be ready on June 28th, just in time for the 4th of July weekend. You’ll receive a little recipe book of different mocktail recipes that don’t have to stay mocktails, if you know what I mean.

Rachel: Wink-wink.

Leah: (laughs) Along with a special surprise. There is a limit of two sign-ups per household for this program, and I think it’ll fill up quickly, so be sure to grab your spot. Those refreshing drinks will be so nice to accompany all the grilled goodies you’ll create this summer.

Rachel: Yes, including beverages on your menu is a very good idea. Especially when paired with grilled desserts! A few of the cookbooks we mentioned do include after-meal yummys, but I found a bunch more online and will include links in the show notes. The site ‘Insanely Good Recipes’ has a list of the “15 Best Grilled Desserts,” including a “Foil Pack Chocolate Marshmallow Banana” that makes me salivate just thinking about it.

Leah: Mmhm.

Rachel: For a healthier alternative, try the “Grilled Summer Fruit Skewers.” There are also “Baked on the Grill Brownies with Strawberries” and “Banana Butter-Pecan Kabobs” that are just...mwah, chef’s kiss. Delish.com boasts “Grilled Pineapple Sundaes,” “Grilled Apricots with Brioche and Vanilla Ice Cream,” and more. Visit Brit.co for “Tropical S’mores,” “Grilled Nectarine Nutella Sundaes,” and a “Summer Berry Sweet Pizza.” Again, links will be added to the show notes. You’re welcome.

Leah: We’ve come to the end. Rachel and I hope that you take time to celebrate some—or all—of May’s food-related celebrations with these recipe recommendations. Check the show notes for information on everything we just talked about, and remember to subscribe and rate the podcast if you like what you hear. You can reach us through Oak Creek Public Library’s website or Facebook page by using the NotYourMothersLibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Rachel and Leah: Bye!

(Brief outro music)