



ANNA SHEPARD

My year of living sustainably

WEEK 25: AN ECO BARBECUE

For an activity that enhances your appreciation of the outdoors, barbecuing doesn't exactly have an ecofriendly reputation. According to research highlighted in the Royal Society's exhibition *Take a Bite Out of Climate Change*, a typical barbecue for four is likely to be responsible for more greenhouse gases than an 80-mile car journey, mainly due to the food miles, fuel and packaging.

But if you're mindful of how and what you cook, the benefits of alfresco grilling can certainly outweigh its carbon footprint. I've been trying to up my barbecue's eco credentials recently. We have an ancient kettle-style barbie that's been dragged through enough house moves to justify its existence, but I've now got my eye on a LotusGrill. It's portable, fast cooking (with an in-built fan) and only needs a small amount of charcoal.

I try British charcoal from sustainable woodland (oxfordcharcoal.co.uk) too, which costs more than my usual brand, but it burns for longer and we think the food tastes better. There are also Big K Cocoshell briquettes, made from waste coconut shells.

I avoid single-use barbecue trays too – last year, more than a million ended up in landfill. For something space saving on the go, I've got the Swedish torch from ecogrill-uk.com. It's a log filled with charcoal that leaves nothing behind. We'll be taking a couple to a Welsh beach this summer to toast marshmallows. We may even cook on them.

I now rely on Rukmini Iyer's *The Green Barbecue*, which has led me to grill skewers of gnocchi and jerk-marinated cauliflower wings, among other plant-based treats.



Illustration: Amelia Flower/Folioart



Illustration: Alex Green/Folioart

MY WEEK

Alvin Hall



Nature connects us to something greater than ourselves

Summer has always meant an awakening of the senses for me, a renewed connection to nature and friends. Because of the pandemic, my pals and I have spent almost no time together these past two or three years. However, this week, I am finding particular delight in continuing to plan and think about visits to friends.

Reconnecting in person feels more meaningful this summer. Few words are said when we meet – we just look at each other, so full of joy that it feels giddy. Our hugs are longer and tighter. It is satisfying to see how easily and quickly we fall back into familiar patterns. We share personal stories about serious and funny incidents during morning coffee. We plan the mid-morning outing to farm stands that have the best seasonal produce, so we can make fresh pasta sauce (chopped ripe tomatoes, crushed garlic, salt, pepper and a great olive oil), as well as the peppery okra, tomato and corn (cut freshly off the cob) stew.

We decide the recipes we'll make based on what we find. And we select the evening's cocktail. These activities give our days structure, so we don't feel too lazy as we lounge around reading, relaxing and – my favourite – napping. Our long walk-and-talks remain special times for us. My friends and I don't stroll. We move along expeditiously, partly driven by the need for a bit of rigorous exercise, but also by the need to reassure ourselves that we can still manage. We talk about our interests,

careers, plans. And we laugh about having reached the age where we can easily lapse into 'organ recitals' – going on too long about the afflictions of different body parts.

Communing with nature is a significant part of each outing. It gives us a sense of being connected to something greater than ourselves. Three weeks ago, in The Berkshires mountains of Massachusetts, a group of friends and I were surrounded by bright white, rich purple, deep red and glowing magenta rhododendron blossoms – and every now and then, we caught a bewitching whiff of fragrant honeysuckle. This past weekend, as a friend and I walked along the Maine coast, we marvelled at how blue and clear the sky was, how rugged and fascinatingly abstract the landscape remains and how elemental the waves feel as they crash onto the rocks.

When on Fire Island or in the Hamptons in the coming weeks, the early risers (I am one) will go for a 7am walk along near-empty expanses of beach surrounded by the sound of the changing tide. Here, the conversations always seem to be about fresh starts, renewal and the cyclical nature of life. We try not to let nostalgia dominate these reflections – we stay focused on the wisdom we're carrying forward instead. My friends and I talk about the rich memories and the quiet, sustaining joys of our many shared summers – our morning coffee and meals together, our walk-and-talks, our amazing sightings in nature and our deep camaraderie. But there are few, if any, photographs of our gatherings. I don't know why it never crossed our minds to take a few, just as keepsakes. But we never have, even today with the ever-present mobile phone.

What we do have is our collective memories of the sensory experiences of our being together – the sounds, the smells, the tastes, the sights and the touches. All of these are made fresh again, and added to with each stay during the cycle of my summer visits.