Summer Tastes Better with Campfire Cooking

The height of fine (outdoor) dining: threading an entire meal onto sticks and dangling it over the flames

written by OUR STATE

Cooking outdoors is no picnic. A picnic is merely eating outdoors. The food is prepared indoors, tucked into a stylish wicker hamper, and toted out. To cook outdoors is more than stepping through a door; it's passing through a portal to another state of mind, another approach. To cook outdoors, one needs to pick up sticks and get all fired up.

The key to joyful outdoor cooking is to truly want to cook outdoors in the first place. I've seen outdoor kitchens so elaborate and lavish that it might have been easier and less costly for the cooks to have installed retractable sun-roofs over their homes, like a stadium that peels back its dome for the big game. I suspect that, deep down, those folks regard leaving the comfort and convenience of their kitchens to cook out among the elements with the same incredulity with which some people view skydiving: Why would anyone jump out of a perfectly good airplane?

But that's the point. The essence of outdoor cooking is that it can't be precisely replicated in a kitchen, and vice versa. We need a little smoke not only in our food, but also in our eyes. Cooking over a fire and under the sky lets us throw sparks, stack wood, coax coals, nudge embers, and watch...