

The joys of being a Barbecue OWNER

Ooh, there's so much you can do on a barbie, says proud new grill purchaser Lauren Cope.

T I'm very excited to announce that, last month, I marked a major milestone.

It wasn't an engagement, new child or even a big holiday - but it was significant, and I think, despite 26 years spent in Norfolk and Suffolk, cemented my British citizenship.

Yes, dear reader, I bought a barbecue.

I have, of course, had disposable ones for afternoons of charred, rubbery sausages, but this is a proper, on wheels, temperature dial kettle job, with sticky-out bits and hooks to house all manner of discarded dishes and Edward Scissorhand tools.

Spurred on by the fear of the brief British summer ending (how foolish we were) and the heady optimism of England winning the World Cup (see previous foolishness), we dived in boldly, eschewing quarterpounders for loftier heights. Duck crown. Shoulder of lamb.

Our first experiments were largely successful - the duck didn't quite reach the desired level of crisp, and the vision of perfectly pink lamb with a

charred crust disappeared fairly quickly - but we were, all in all, pretty happy.

Once we'd moved passed the spatchcock chicken stage, a resounding success, we knew we were ready for the real test: family.

With my birthday celebrations in sight (26, I'm told now is the time to buy eye cream), we spent an eye-watering amount on snacks, dips, meat and drinks (naive dreams of hosting Christmas Day were hastily dropped) and it was time to go.

All in all, it was a success. Burgers were over-cooked, halloumi fell off skewers almost instantly and we are adrift in a sea of leftover potato salad.

But we did it. No-one was ill. Guests left happy. We pulled muscles scrubbing the barbecue clean.

There's something special about eating in summer.

Hearty winter food is definitely my happy place - pies, sausage and mash, roast dinners, crusty bread dipped in sauces, baked cheese and mulled wine. Me all over.

But it is somewhat more unsociable. Christmas is the obvious exception, but those long November, January, February

"There's loads to love about this time of year. So let's make the most of it"



ABOVE:
Lauren Cope

TOP RIGHT AND LEFT:

Lauren writes about getting her first barbecue - and the joy of summer cooking
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nights are often spent at home, holed away indoors. And while I don't cope particularly well with the heat (someone kind would call me an English rose, someone realistic would opt for pale), it's hard to deny the joy of shared spreads, al fresco dinners, tapas and barbecues, away from hot ovens and stodge.

(As an aside: I did actually make toad in the hole a couple of weeks ago, and had to open every window to bring my body temperature down to a safe level, so there's that, too.) But the summer is the perfect backdrop for families, friends and colleagues to come together and bask in overcast humidity or sunburn-inducing sunshine. And the produce - this being our first summer with a garden,

we've been enjoying fruits of the labour of its previous owners, strawberries growing alongside asparagus and potatoes. We will inevitably, and quickly, destroy it as soon as we attempt to put our mark on it for next year.

Iced tea, minty lemonade - there's loads to love about this time of year. So let's make the most of it - who knows how long we'll be in this hot snap (admittedly it feels like eternity right now), before the autumnal crispness in the air returns, along with the morning where you first reach for a scarf and turn to casserole ingredients.

Also - I'm told that autumn is when plums ripen, so with a tree in the garden sprouting green fruit, I'll be in need of plenty of recipes...