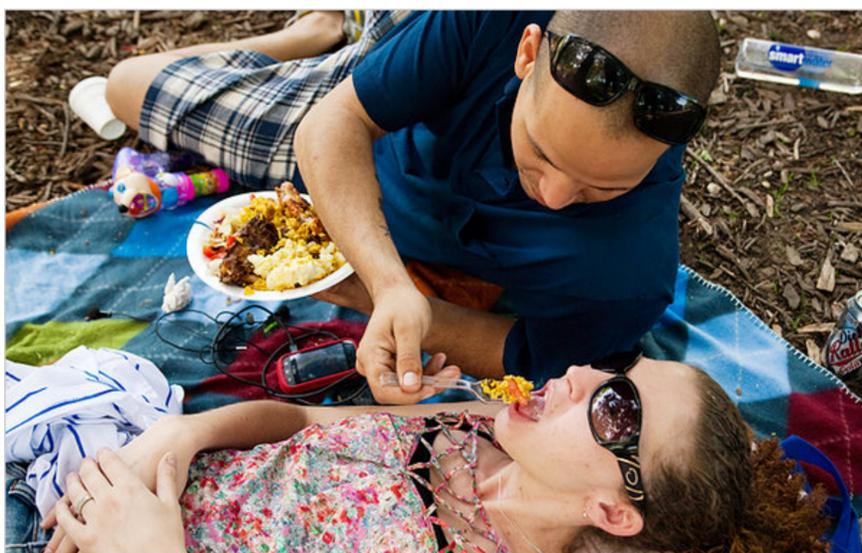




SUMMER RITUALS | AROUND THE GRILL

# Cooking Out in the City, No Backyard Necessary



Raymond McCrea Jones/The New York Times

Johnmichael Daalling and his wife, Leah, at their family's barbecue in Prospect Park.

By RAYMOND MCCREA JONES  
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THOUGH I have been a [vegan](#) for a decade, I've always been fascinated by barbecuing (teriyaki-marinated [tofu](#) is delicious [if you can keep it from sticking to the grill](#)). Maybe it's because I grew up in the South, eating a home-cooked meal every night of my life — often a slab of meat fired on the back porch — and have long been intrigued by how food brings people together, particularly outdoors, especially in the sizzle of summer.

## Around the Grill



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Raymond McCrea Jones/The New York Times

John Daalling, left, the patriarch of the family, played guitar at the barbecue. His wife, Mirta, was the organizer and primary cook of the day.

In my three years living in New York, I have marveled at how people here make homes in small spaces, how they barbecue without the lush, expansive backyards of my youth. There are folks grilling on tiny balconies in public housing projects in the Bronx, families co-opting public spaces with charcoal and special sauces.

The traditional barbecue season begins this weekend, but many started cooking out in the first sunny days of spring. John and Mirta Daalling, who live in Bushwick, Brooklyn, showed up around dawn on May 1 to claim a picnic table near the band shell on the west side of Prospect Park. "We literally woke up at about 5:30 to load the truck," said Mr. Daalling, who retired from what is now Verizon in 1999.

The Daallings, who have been married for 35 years, said their last big family barbecue was about 25 years ago, with 60 or 70 relatives celebrating the baptism of their three sons, Johnmichael, Matthew and Giovanni.

This time, they were celebrating the birthdays of their daughter-in-law Adelynes, 27, and granddaughter Heaven, 7, above right. "It takes a lot of work and it's very expensive, but it's nice because that's the time you get to share with the family," said Mrs. Daalling, a real estate broker.

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She was the grill master, rotating chicken wings and breasts, shish kebabs, hamburgers, hot dogs and spare ribs, complemented by [salads](#) and Puerto Rican-style rice with green peas. Mr. Daalling, an ordained minister, strummed the guitar and sang what he called "Jesus songs". Others played dominoes, Frisbee and cards. They did not pack up until 6 p.m.

There are 36 parks across the five boroughs with areas designated for barbecuing, many of them with grills available for public use. Churches, block associations and other community groups often haul stoves

onto sidewalks or streets on summer days, while friends and families camp out on apartment rooftops, in brownstone backyards, even on fire escapes.

Whether they are grilling tempeh or T-bones, chances are it's not just about the food.

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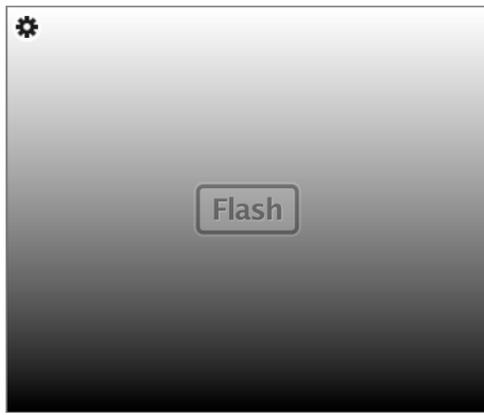
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