

THE MENSA'S OF MEAT: A TRIBUTE TO BACKYARD GRILLERS WHO MAKE IOWA GREAT!

Written by Laurie Johns
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There are some things we can agree on that we don't like about summers in Iowa: mosquitos, humidity, road construction. But all are quickly forgotten once we catch the waft of juicy meat sizzling on the grill or pork ribs slowly smoking in the Cookshack.

Neighbors who were previously only seen waving from their cars in winter magically appear in our backyard to debate the finer points of meat rub recipes and barbeque sauces. "Do you make your own rub? Do you sear the meat first? What's the internal temperature?" Such conversations are done in the same serious tones of nuclear physicists measuring alpha particles. These are the Mensa's of Meat.

Mensa's of Meat congregate and compete each year at the Iowa Farm Bureau Cookout Contest (www.iowafarmbureau.com) at the Iowa State Fair. This year will be the 50th Cookout Contest and I'm sure competition will be stiff as county Farm Bureaus begin their contests. It's intense, but it's just as fun to stand on the sidelines and watch; hundreds of State Fair-goers do that (and get free samples in the meantime).

I, and other women in my neighborhood, have surrendered the whole meat grilling/smoking endeavor to our husbands. Some of these men, who admittedly can't seem to do a single load of laundry without turning everything gray, are transformed into subject matter Experts on Everything, simply by standing at their backyard smoker/grills. They gather to debate every culinary detail and nuance of spice rubs and sauces: "You've added one teaspoon of cayenne, right? I use two, and a touch of cumin."

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It's refreshing to surrender the evening meal to the Mensa's of Meat. No challenge is offered, no criticisms leveled. None dare; although I heard one year, one spouse got tired of waiting for dinner to start, so she went on the patio, lifted the lid of the smoker and complained loudly. She hasn't been seen since.

But seriously, I don't interrupt the bliss, the adventure, or traditional domain of the Mensa's of Meat gathering. Any attempt to enter the backyard and I get waved away by my husband, who is gamely armed with a rather ominous-looking stainless steel seasoning injector. Our two small dogs hover nearby, sniffing the air, respected ancestral members of the same carnivorous pack, bound by a mutual pursuit of the perfect steak.

Tonight, we're having smoked pork ribs. Or, so I'm told. Don't ask me how they're done, or when they'll be done, but the men and dogs are gathering. The way I look at it; what better tribute to Father's Day than to patiently pay homage to the Mensa's of Meat?