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Snow Forecast? Set Up the Patio



Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times

Courtney Wilson grills sausages on football Sundays in Connecticut.

By HILARY STOUT
Published: January 26, 2011

IN the cycle of the seasons, now is a time of longing — for backyard sunbathing, for cocktails on the patio, for pattering in the garden, and for the distant time when all those activities will be possible again.

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And for those who live in climates where all that is still possible, it is high gloating season, a time to feel superior

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"You have to extend the season," said Scott Walsh of Long Island City, Queens. His backyard wintertime plans include drinking cocoa, building an igloo and an ice rink, and grilling for guests.

to those of us who have been slogging through slush, picking our way across the ice, heaving snow with our shovels, condemned to wait out the frigid months inside our four walls.

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Then there is another type of person, a rarer breed.

Even in this winter of record-challenging cold, there are those who refuse to cover before the elements and retreat indoors. They never shroud the grill or store the patio furniture. They are exhilarated to relax on the deck in the chill. And they find a special beauty as they gaze at the slate

-gray sky on a winter morning.

As the following hardy souls prove, people can diverge sharply in their reasons for indulging in an alfresco way of life. For one man, the spur is football, the chance to prop his TV on a patio wall for his weekly wintertime ritual. Another has created a year-round garden, bountiful not just in summer but in winter, too. For a third, a recent transplant to the city, the goal is to preserve a suburban lifestyle — grilling, hosting parties and even working up plans to build a backyard ice rink.

FOOTBALL AND FLANNEL

From September to early February, Courtney Wilson's Sundays are devoted to football. Starting at around noon, he heads for the couch.

He gets a good fire going in the fireplace, makes sure the fridge is stocked with beer, and settles — usually horizontally — in front of his 45-inch flat screen with his remote and his laptop at arm's reach (the better for following multiple games and his fantasy football league).

It is a scene played out, for better or worse, in countless living rooms and family rooms. Except that Mr. Wilson, who lives in Westport, Conn., where the snowfall this winter totaled more than 30 inches even before yesterday's storm, does much of his football-viewing, beer-drinking and fire-building on the backyard patio.

When Mr. Wilson, who runs his own insurance business, and his wife, Susan, built a patio last year, their aim was to make it an extension of their home — an outdoor room of sorts that they could enjoy no matter the season. "We don't really like the heat — we go to San Francisco in August," Mrs. Wilson, a Wall Street banker, said on a day the snow was so deep it nearly covered the outdoor ottoman.

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So the couple built a big stone fireplace in one corner of the patio, flanked by sitting walls that are a perfect place to set up the TV for all those hours of football, not to mention movies under the stars. There is also an outdoor kitchen to one side with a granite-topped island, a small refrigerator, a bar and a large propane grill — on which they cook at least two times a week, whatever the temperature.

A sectional with outdoor cushions and the ottoman are arranged in front of the fireplace, and (very important) there's a high-definition cable hookup so that, when they carry their set outside, they can get the full Direct TV football package. On football Sundays, Mr. Wilson likes to grill sausages, and sometimes takes a break to play Ping-Pong at an outdoor table with his 9-year-old son, Tyler. He keeps warm with the fireplace, a propane gas lamp and, if need be, another fire in a fire pit.

Even when the temperature is below freezing, Mr. Wilson usually wears nothing heavier than a flannel shirt. "It's important to be able to go out there without a coat," he said, explaining that it wouldn't truly be an extension of his home if he had to bundle up to use it.

He is not alone in this extreme approach to backyard living. On [Christmas](#) Day, when temperatures were in the 30s, his wife's Uncle Bob, who is in his 70s, joined him on the patio to watch basketball and drink martinis in their shirt sleeves. A few weeks earlier, about 100 people attended the Wilsons' Christmas party, with a good half of the guests spending most of the time on the patio.

But the Wilsons will probably shelve their plans for an outdoor [Super Bowl](#) party. It has nothing to do with the weather — much to Mr. Wilson's dismay, the New York Jets lost to the Pittsburgh Steelers last Sunday and will not be playing.

PARSLEY IN THE SNOW

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