



Karen Anderson

Does anybody out there know how the butter warmer attaches to my grill?

It's grilling season. And, for Club columnist Karen Anderson, this time of year brings back all kinds of memories of outdoor cooking experiences – some good, some bad, and some still unresolved.

The Stone Age discovery of fire put humankind on the fast track to civilization. It was surpassed in importance only by the subsequent invention of grills, tongs, lighter fluid and barbecue sauce.

Here in the weather-challenged Pacific Northwest, our barbecue season is short, but we make the most of it: baking pizzas, frying bacon and eggs, roasting turkeys, grilling steaks and smoking fish.

You can cook just about anything on a backyard grill – assuming, of course, that you can get the grill assembled in the first place.

We've come a long way from the days of the simple black kettle grill. My family had one of those when I was a kid. My dad would build a cone-shaped pile of charcoal briquettes in the kettle, soak it thoroughly with lighter fluid, then toss on a match. Martini in hand, he would wait patiently for the briquettes to heat. This was harder than you might think, because my mother would lean out the screen door every two minutes or so to ask "Isn't it hot yet?" But dad held his ground until the coals were glowing.

Given the chance, my mother liked to hurry the briquettes along with several extra squirts of lighter fluid and a barrage of matches.

"Daddy doesn't like it if you do that," I once ventured.

"So don't tell him," she replied, as flames roared skyward. Her hot dogs and hamburgers had a slightly petrochemical taste – but they cooked very quickly.

These days, grills resemble industrial kitchens. They have side counters, bread warming baskets, griddles, special containers for catching dripping grease, and an array of gas-fueled burners that come with BTU ratings.

The big gas grills are also far, far more powerful – particularly if you turn all those burners up and put the

lid down. I discovered that one night when I tossed some chicken breasts on the grill, closed the lid, ran in to the house to get some hamburgers, came back, opened the grill, and found four sizzling lumps of charcoal where the chicken breasts had been. My mother would have loved that grill. We nicknamed it "The Incinerator."

Eventually, Seattle weather got the best of The Incinerator. It turns out that carefully covering your grill with plastic tarps for the winter prevents rust on the outside but encourages rust on the inside. You just can't win.

By then, I was divorced and had begun dating the Scholarly Gentleman. I'd just bought a new grill, and asked him if he'd be willing to assemble it.

I highly recommend this technique for anyone wanting to assess the technical skills, patience and creative vocabulary of a prospective partner. Believe me, it's far more accurate than anything they have on Match.com.

He opened all the little packets of nuts, bolts, screws, wires and mysterious linkages, and arrayed them neatly on the patio table. Then he studied the 48-page booklet and began matching the hardware to the diagrams. Or, at least he tried to.

"We have a problem," he reported.

I brought him a glass of water and tried to look as concerned and innocent as possible.

The Scholarly Gentleman spent the next three hours on his hands and knees on my patio, assembling the gas grill. I heard him muttering. I like to think he was talking to himself, but I suspect he was talking to the people who had designed and

manufactured the grill.

Finally, as the sun was sinking down over Shilshole Bay, he tested the grill. I breathed a sigh of relief when all four burners (I told you these things were getting more complicated) lit.

But the Scholarly Gentleman didn't look very happy. He pointed to a few nuts and bolts and screws and one weird little metal cup that were still sitting on the table.

"I can't figure out how to connect the butter warmer," he confessed.

The butter warmer? I told him I thought we could do perfectly well without it, and, sure enough, we have.

