

THE FOOD OF KINGS

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[Assignment: Write about how you mastered a particular skill or gained exceptional expertise in some *constructive* area. Your audience is a general one with no special knowledge of your topic.]

(1) Picture the scene: it's Sunday afternoon. You and a few of your fellow pigskin fanatics are glued to the television to watch three-hundred-pound men beat themselves silly in front of millions of screaming, delirious fans. Eventually, this amazing display of sheer, raw aggression pushes to the surface another natural instinct that all beer-bellied, big-mouthed, armchair quarterbacks share: the need for food.

(2) Now, of course, we're not just talking about normal food. This certain breed of men requires more than just a bland menu of raw carrots, alfalfa sprouts, and low-salt Wheat Thins. No, no, no--their food must possess several characteristics to satisfy their seemingly endless appetites. Their fuel must contain high amounts of cholesterol, fat, calories, and most importantly, enough acid to rot the stomach of a buffalo. No food is able to fulfill all of these high expectations at the same time except one, and that one is the bratwurst.

(3) For those of you who don't know what a bratwurst (brat, for short) is, let me shed some light on the subject: try to envision a cross-breed between a breakfast sausage and a three-pound salami and you'll be envisioning a brat. There are numerous ways to prepare a brat for consumption. Boiling and cooking brats in a pot are evidently popular in the less cultured households of America and it has been rumored that some Californians have even been preparing brats in their microwaves. All of these methods are unnecessary acts of sacrilege, and those accused should be dragged out into the street and shot--not once, but several times. The only correct way to prepare a brat is out-of-doors on the old fashioned grill surrounded by elemental nature, and here's how you do it.

(4) First, you pick out some heavenly bodies (brats) at the meat market. (For those of you who don't have a meat market nearby, a supermarket, Seven-Eleven, or any store that sells brats will suffice.) Try to pick out brats that are the largest, without wrinkles in the skin, and those that sport a nice shade of pukey-pink. If you buy brats unlike these, the meat inside will shrink instead of expanding simply because air will be able to enter between the skin and the actual meat. This results in an ugly, shriveled up breakfast sausage that looks tackier than Tammy Faye Bakker's make-up job. Having found the right kind, buy about two brats for every guest at your bash and wheel them on home.

(5) At about halftime of the first game, head for the kitchen to prepare the brats for grilling. This is a careful process that requires the gentle and partly-sober hands of a skilled professional. Empty the thawed brats into a large pot. Then, add three cups of water, two teaspoons of butter, and most important, 24 fluid ounces of beer. Please refrain from using light beer or the non-alcoholic variety; these tend to make the brats taste like dirty dishwater, and this really puts a damper on the feast. Finally,

put the pot on the stove and let the brats simmer for three hours. (Don't just stand there and watch the brats sink, go back and watch the game, my friend.)

(6) About forty-five minutes before grill-time, you must start the fire. Use a lot of charcoal and tend to the grill until the fire is an inviting flame-red. It is at this point that superstitious cooks hold the sacred brat ritual. They offer prayers to the Brat-God in return for a successful batch of brats. You can usually tell if the Brat-God has accepted your prayers almost immediately; if the fire suddenly flames up and torches your face off, you can bet that your brats will taste terrible. Perhaps, for the newly initiated it would be wise to skip the ritual.

(7) Bring the brats out to the grill and throw them on. Turn them over about every three minutes to avoid burning the skin. Make sure that you have some sort of watering can handy; flames spell death to a defenseless bratwurst, and you must keep the fire low so that the brats don't burn and blow up. Water the fire whenever a flame pops up and you'll be just fine. Remember that the appearance of the brat does not indicate whether it is done; it's the inside that counts. Quickly poke the brats with your finger until you can feel that the inside is plump and fat. When the brats reach this point, take them off the grill and serve them on a hard roll to your guests. The guests are free to add the accessories such as mustard, onions, pickles, ketchup, and even sauerkraut.

(8) I'm originally from Sheboygan, Wisconsin, the home of the bratwurst. Last year, our city of 60,000 people consumed over two million brats, which is a lot of sausage. Bratwurst, to us, is the greatest invention since the wheel, and perhaps you'll feel the same way when you try one of our brats. However, you must be sure to follow my directions carefully. Otherwise you will be accused of sacrilege, brought forth to a Sheboygan court of law, and given a sentence that will make the Salem witch trials look like a tea social.

(9) So you see, NOT ALL Wisconsinites are "cheeseheads"; some of us are of the more sophisticated "wursthead" society. So grab a brat, dance a few polkas, and give us a try, eh?