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leisure

The game of tailgating

Putting together the perfect parking-lot picnic

By **Stephanie Stephens**

IN TAMPA, ONE GROUP hauled in 3,000 pounds of sand to their party. In Cleveland, there's the full-size bus painted "MOBILE DAWG POUND." In other cities you'll see hot tubs and even a setup with seven big screens to watch earlier-time-zone games.

Welcome to tailgating, the international tradition turned social phenomenon. It's the ultimate portable party, featuring food, drink and props. If you can dream it, you can tailgate it.

The law defines tailgating as "Following too closely behind another motorist: an aggressive behavior." Rabid football fans and attendees of concerts, NASCAR, horse racing and dozens of other events, have a different definition.

"Tailgating is the last great American neighborhood," says Costco member Joe Cahn of New Orleans. The congenial Cahn has traveled some 280,000 miles promoting tailgating and is the generally undisputed, self-proclaimed Commissioner of Tailgating (www.tailgating.com). He declares, "[Tailgating is] one of the safe places to picnic, to celebrate community, like a reception before a banquet. Think Mister Rogers: 'Won't you be my neighbor?' [Tailgating] brings people together from all levels, every walk of life and gender."

"Tailgating is growing because someone started to do it and other people wanted to outdo them," figures Greg Pyne, a project manager from Baltimore whose other life revolves around his Johnny Road Trip Web site (www.johnnyroadtrip.com/tailgating), a superb one-stop tailgating source.

Meet "One Crazy Fan," Mike Young of Philadelphia. His Web site, www.onecrazyfan.com, is "an informative Web site for all Philadelphia fans," says Young, an admitted sane fan, philanthropist and true tailgating devotee. He operates the "Tailgate Rescue Squad," an ambulance stocked with free supplies for anything fans forgot.

"Walk down big-city streets, people avoid you, never making eye contact. Tailgating is where people really talk to each other," Young observes. "In parking lots, you'll see different groups for different personalities."

Don't be intimidated by the elaborate props and

faces painted with team colors. Anybody can tailgate at virtually any event. All you need are some basic supplies and foods. An understanding of tailgating etiquette helps, too. Here's a primer.

Location, location, location ...

In tailgating, the spot is definitely the thing, says Pyne. Smart tailgaters get to the stadium early.

"Party! Whether you get there at dawn or two hours pre-game, it means convenience, not competing with 70,000 people for a parking spot," he says.

But Commissioner Cahn reminds newbies about parking-lot etiquette: "Never knowingly park in someone's space. If you do, cars can be moved. People usually park in the same place for several years. When in doubt, ask."

The necessary equipment

Tailgaters need food, conjured from something as basic as a large picnic basket to extravagant kitchens on wheels. Cahn lauds "those monster stainless backyard grills—towed behind your vehicle—plus pop-up tents." The grill requires group unloading; tents are easy to assemble. "Put a small generator in your trunk," Cahn advises.

Portable chairs are a must; a portable picnic table helps out tremendously. Many tailgaters use canopies to keep food and sports fans out of direct sun. Cahn's must-have list includes jumper cables, plastic trash bags, rain gear, first-aid kit, sunblock, comfortable shoes, antacid and a friend. "Change their life," he says. "Bring them to a tailgate party." [M]

Freelance writer Stephanie Stephens tailgates in Laguna Niguel, California, and Cambridge, New Zealand.

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Advice from the pros

PRO TAILGATERS Greg Pyne and Joe Cahn offer these top tailgate to-do's:

- Nothing's worse than running out of food, except for running out of your favorite beverages.
- Buy good rolls or bread—or ruin a good bratwurst.
- Choose a view parking lot: A tailgate out of stadium sight just doesn't feel right.
- Have a theme: Thanksgiving? Bring a turkey. Christmas? Bring a tree.
- Dress in team colors: You're the 12th man!
- Arrive three to four hours early; parking spaces are not created equal!
- Fly a flag and decorate your site.
- Leave the area clean.

"Become a participant; it's so much better than just being an observer in life," recommends Cahn. "Even if you only bring a sandwich and a Coke."

Hey, maybe you'll adopt the philosophy of one no-nonsense Baltimore tailgater whose van bears this painted-on slogan: "STOP WORKING AND TAILGATE." —SS



The Costco Connection

Costco carries everything from A to Z for tailgating, including ingredients for lunches and dinners, premade foods such as vegetable and seafood platters, beverages, plastic utensils and paper plates, portable canopies, barbecues and more.