

Home & Garden

Use the bubble method to test a barbecue for leaks

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planning meals — include lots of cold foods and salads.

Natural gas barbecues — doing more for less

Most people think that a barbecue is a barbecue. But nothing could be further from the truth, said Huggard. "The fact is, natural gas barbecues outperform charcoal barbecues — and even propane — at every turn."

✓ A natural gas barbecue costs up to 75 per cent less to operate than either a charcoal or propane barbecue.

✓ You'll never run out of cooking fuel again.

✓ Natural gas barbecues offer precise temperature control so you can cook with heat that's more reliable and even.

Annual safety checks for barbecues

Whether your barbecue is natural gas or propane-fueled, safety checks are crucial before firing it up for the first grill of the season.

✓ Check for blockages. "The start of the season is the obvious time to make sure that everything is in good working order," said Huggard.

For example, over the winter months, spiders or other insects may build nests in the gas tube leading into your barbecue. If so, this will impede the flow of gas, so be sure to clean all openings with a pipe cleaner to remove any possible blockages.

✓ Check for leaks. The next thing to do is ensure that your gas hook-up is leak-free.

Huggard describes a do-it-yourself check: "With the barbecue off, sponge some soapy water over the tubes and gas connections. Then look for soapy bubbles expanding by themselves, indicating leaking gas. If you see any such bubbles, try tightening the connections — or call for assistance."

✓ Keep your barbecue on level ground, in open air, away from wooden fences and overhanging roofs.

Water, water everywhere — and not a drop wasted

"Summer is when water consumption can go through the roof," said Huggard. "And not because parents let their kids run through the sprinkler. That doesn't happen often enough to make a big difference. The real problem is that everybody waters their lawn. And not very efficiently, either."

The issue, he explained, isn't the watering itself, but the wasting of water in the process.

The trick is to water your lawn efficiently — without wasting either water or money. And the way to do that is to minimize evaporation, so that the water goes into the ground — not up into the air.

Tips for saving water outdoors:

✓ Do water your lawn in the

early morning or after dark to minimize evaporation. An automatic timer set from 4 a.m. till 6 a.m. or from 10 p.m. till midnight will do the job nicely.

✓ Don't water your lawn every day. Lawn experts say that a thorough soaking ever two to three days is sufficient.

✓ Do opt for a sprinkler with a coarse spray setting. (Fine mists evaporate too quickly).

✓ Don't cut your grass too short. Reduce evaporation by adjusting your mower's cutting height to leave grass longer.

✓ Do leave finely chopped (mulched) grass clippings on the lawn. Clippings help retain water and act as fertilizer as they decay.

✓ Don't spread peat moss on your lawn.

It will soak up all the moisture and leave your grass roots dry.

Do's and don'ts for trees and shrubs

✓ Do landscape with less lawn and more rock gardens (which require less water).

✓ Do get your local garden centre's help in choosing trees and shrubs that need less water.

✓ Do add mulched grass clippings around trees and plants to reduce evaporation and discourage weed growth, too.

✓ Don't use the hose for washing your car. You'll save a lot of water by using a pail of soapy water. Use the hose only when it's time to rinse off.

✓ Do rinse off your car near hedges and shrubs so that excess water won't be wasted.

✓ Do place a rain barrel at the end of an eavestrough downspout to collect run-off. Use it to water trees, hedges and other plants.

Water heater do's and don'ts:

✓ Reduce the temperature setting on your natural gas water heater to 54°C (130°F). "Each six degree reduction in water heating temperature equals a saving of about three to five per cent on your energy bill," said Huggard. "You'll still get hot water, but it won't be hot enough to scald you."

✓ Do insulate your water pipes to reduce heat loss as hot water in the pipes cools. If you can't insulate all the pipes, at least do the first two to three metres of the hot water pipe and the first metre or so of the cold water supply pipe.

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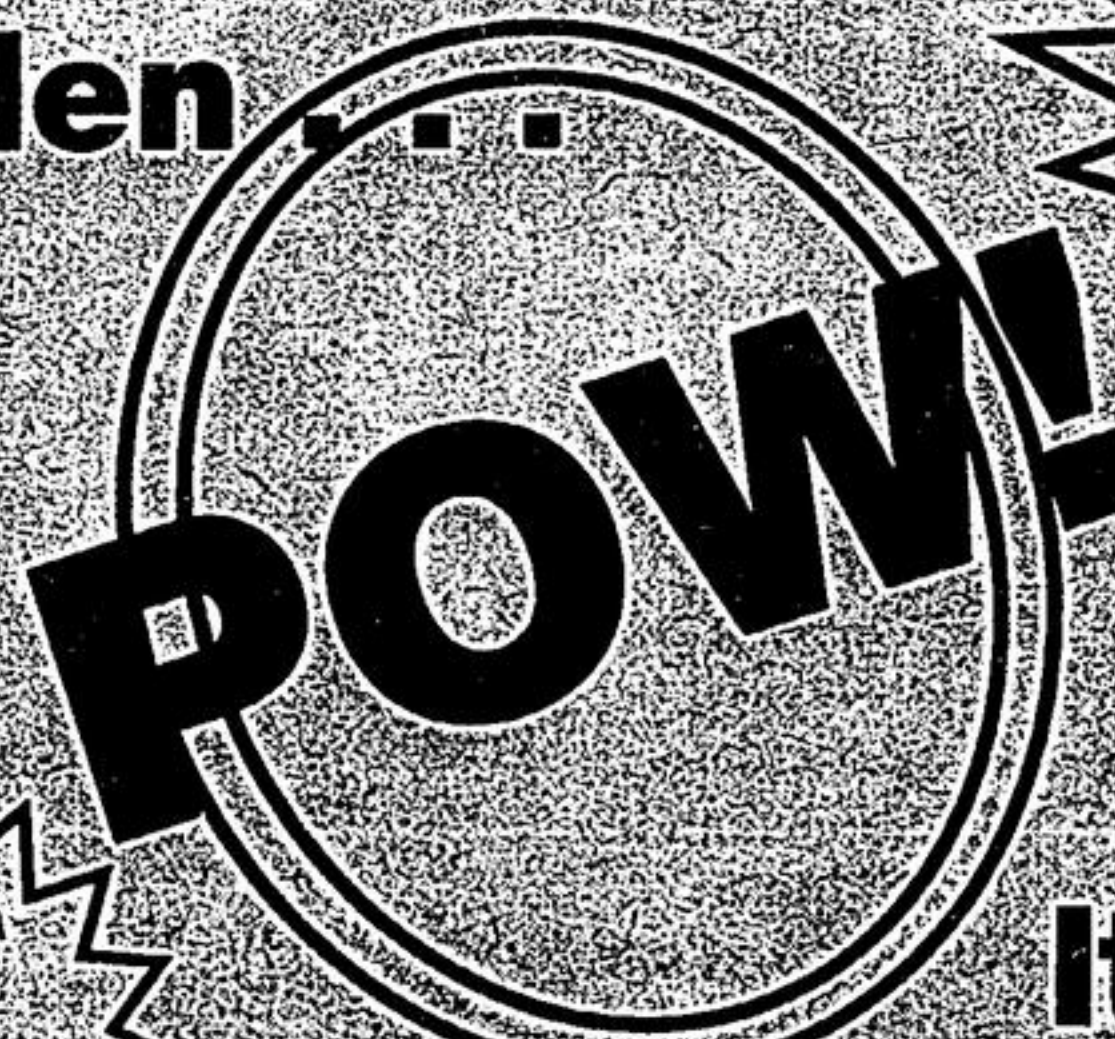
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