



A LONG-STANDING TRADITION

Clockwise, from top: Tickets from long-past games; Nannette Comer (far right, with a guest); Carl Comer.



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In the hours before dawn and leading up to kickoff, this small parcel of grass will become the scene of an elaborate banquet, with silver winking in the strong sunlight and fresh flowers perfuming the air. A feast will be served on real china, with mimosas poured into real glass flutes—an enormous buffet dinner, not a quick bite grabbed from aluminum foil and plastic everything. Elegant women in sundresses and even black cocktail dresses will gather with men in honest-to-God neckties, even in the unrelenting late-summer heat, because that's just the way it's done in these parts. Polo shirts are about as dressed-down as it gets.

It's called "tailgating," but really, that's like referring to a Mardi Gras ball as a backyard weenie roast. "It is a social occasion," says Nannette Comer, Ole Miss class of '61 and Karen's mother—and the grande dame of these Saturday festivities.

"I cannot remember not going," says Lois Gregory, class of '73, whose late father, Howard Yawn, helped establish this fete with the Comers all those years ago. They've been here for every home game ever since, rain or shine. Before a big contest, the families may play host to 80 people under their tent, striped in red-and-blue Rebel colors.

All who pass by are welcome, even if they're supporting the enemy team. "Inside the stadium it's all about the football, and we want to beat 'em," says Carl Comer, class of '60, who married Nannette in 1961, the same year the tradition began. Both are Ole Miss graduates from a time when the Rebels had one of the most elite football programs in the nation. Ole Miss won a share of the national title in 1959, 1960, and 1962, but the tailgating tradition was less elaborate in its beginnings, just a card table and a cooler for most people. "But it just kind of grew," he says.

Comer may want the Rebels to prevail, but off the field, "we love to say to people walking by, 'Come

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Game Plan

We asked seasoned tailgaters to share their tips for the perfect pre-party

1 Get organized. Before the season starts, make a comprehensive list of everything you'll need. Have it with you while you shop, then double-check it the night before the game and while loading your car.

2 Play by the rules. Check the home school's website for tailgating regulations. You may need a propane grill—charcoal is outlawed at many venues—and some schools ban glass bottles and alcoholic beverages.

3 Maximize cooler space. Use frozen water bottles to keep meat and other beverages cold. You won't have to haul coolers filled with ice, and you'll have cold water to drink when the bottles thaw.

4 Go with finger foods. Table space will be limited, which makes slicing a chore. The easy solution? Premade grub that fits in a bun or wrap, or meat served on the bone, like drumsticks.

5 Time your party right. Arrive at least three to four hours before kickoff for plenty of time to take in the fun. Afterward, set out chairs, drinks, and leftovers so folks can nibble and rehash the game while waiting for traffic to clear.

6 Mark your territory. A tent with your team's logo will get lost in the crowd. Make it easy for friends to find you by attaching a unique flag or inflatable item to your car or tent. It's simple to direct people if you tell them, "Look for the minivan with the big shark on top."
—Paige Greenfield

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