

The joy of (inferior) cooking

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Matt Yglesias makes some interesting points [here](#), and I'll echo [his pick for best pizza place in DC](#). Still: if making homemade pizza is doing it wrong, I don't want to do it right. Here's Yglesias:

The ideal way to make pizza at home is to ... not make pizza at home. Yes, you can get a kettle grill and then add the [KettlePizza](#) attachment and use it in combination with a pizza steel for what's [apparently the best at-home pizza solution yet](#). But why bother? Pizza is just a great instance of a complicated modern economy in action, and the best way to enjoy pizza is to purchase it from a specialized pizza fabrication facility.

The issue is that while great pizza is fairly simple to make, cooking it properly requires an expensive piece of capital equipment. Your oven can't get nearly hot enough to cook a pizza correctly. To do it, you need a pizza oven.

He's reacting to Kenji Alt, who responds rather epically [here](#). I want to pick up on just one point, which Alt gets around to a ways in: making pizza is (or at least can be) a joy-filled thing to do. That's reason enough.

Joy is not the only reason to do things for yourself that a professional would gladly do for you. Cost is one, a critical one for some people. Environmental and other ethical considerations are another. But I'm convinced joy is as good a reason as any.

And if you're a connoisseur of food (or clothes, or furniture, etc.), D-ing IY may bring joy specifically because you know how to make a superior product. But that's hardly the only reason. It's *satisfying* to do things for yourself and for others. It can be a powerful way to build community. And there's great pleasure in getting better at something over time, even if being *best* isn't the endpoint.

So it always makes me a little sad when someone looks at those of us who like to DIO and sees only calculations, whether of dollars or tons of carbon dioxide or overall aesthetic merit. I'm sitting in the corner of a big common room at the University of Chicago Divinity School, where my wife Nadia and some of her classmates are cleaning up after cooking and serving a from-scratch meal for those attending this year's ministry conference (which featured my colleague [Amy Frykholm](#)). Some group of students does this each week for a lecture event, and it's a lot of work. Years ago they used to just order pizza; now they do this.

Nadia came over just now to say hi, and I mentioned I was posting about this. She said, "People always go straight to the question of efficiency. But we like to do things like this partly *because* it's inefficient. There's value in doing and discovering things together, slowly." Small-scale gardening often isn't the cheapest, most efficient option; it isn't necessarily even the one that makes your carbon footprint smallest. Yet people love to garden. I don't can my own tomatoes because they're tastier than commercial canned ones (they often aren't) or because it saves money (it doesn't, or at least it didn't until Nadia started farming and bringing home bumper crops). I do it because I find it interesting and satisfying. It brings me joy.

We don't make tons of pizza at home, but when we do I like to use the grill (an ordinary Weber, w/o special attachments). It's not the best pie ever, but it's pretty good and it's fun and I get to sit outside with friends and smell the coals and drink a beer. Our standby simple dinner is tacos, made slightly less simple when Nadia decides to make the tortillas, too. It's a strange thing to do in our neighborhood, where hours-old commercial tortillas sell for 30 cents a dozen and two bucks will get you a stack of handmade ones right off the flattop. But she takes joy in making them, and I take joy in eating them.