

SUMMER TELEVISION

Ripening in the Heat



Kids will be out of school soon and family vacations are just around the corner. Planning for neighborhood cookouts, pool parties and 4th of July parades have begun in earnest. Television viewing, according to legend, should soon drop off.

For more than a half-century, television programmers took a break during the summer. Viewers, presumably, flocked outdoors and away from the television. Reruns ruled the day. Viewers would wait until the fall, when they could digest a flood of new and returning shows. For some, that was a fall custom on par with going back to school, watching football, picking apples and raking leaves.

Not anymore. The legend has turned into a myth!

Summer time rating slumps ended with the advent of Reality TV shows. Year after year, each network manages to find reality shows to make the summer sizzle. Some of them have been among the biggest discoveries in recent programming. Hits such as "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" on ABC in 1999, "Survivor" on CBS in 2000, and "American Idol" on Fox in 2002 laid the foundation for the new genre.

Summer television has never been the same. The networks have since radically reordered their calendar years. They've gotten into the year-round business. There's no mid-season. There is no longer a summer season. There is just one, 52-week season. As a result, there are more choices and more viewing opportunities.