

Wings

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It was an eye-opening, at times sweat-producing, experience. Each wing was judged based on appearance, aroma, heat, flavor, texture and "repeatability." In other words, would you reach for more?

As expected, there were some divergent opinions. Chef Michelle Johnson praised one batch's aroma as "pleasing," while NFL veteran Donnell Woolford thought they smelled "rancid." Parachute rigger Benjamin Fisher found one order "greasy," while Bears fan Charles Young thought the same batch was "fresh and juicy."

Medium heat to one establishment means slightly searing to another, as the judges discovered. Some came sopping in sauce, while others were nearly dry.

"I was surprised," said Woolford, the only judge who could claim to have eaten wings while preparing for an NFL season. "The variety of heat was more than I'd expect."

They were all good. But only one was recognized by all five judges as the best in town.

OK, It's Sports Bar & Grill, you can stand in the end zone and do your touchdown dance.

A close second (and second on most ballots) was Wings Over Fayetteville. Wingstop was tied for top honors on one ballot and finished third overall.

As for the rest, "Some were OK, but most needed some help," said Johnson, who said she likes her wings with a little more fire. "I'm not saying any needed a trip to the emergency room or anything, but they could use a

DONNELL WOOLFORD

Hometown: Fayetteville, born in Dunn
Age: 41
Favorite sporting event: Super Bowl



Favorite NFL team: Chicago Bears
Who's going to win the Super Bowl? Chicago Bears, 21-14
Most wings eaten at one sitting: 20
Who are you? Three-sport star at Douglas Byrd High School, two-time All-American comeback at Clemson University, drafted in the first round by the Chicago Bears. Since I retired, I've founded the Donnell Woolford Foundation.

CHARLES FRANKLIN YOUNG III

Hometown: Fayetteville
Age: 26
Favorite sporting event: Basketball



Favorite NFL team: Chicago Bears
Who's going to win the Super Bowl? Chicago Bears
Most wings eaten at one sitting: About 20
Who are you? I'm a youth minister at World Faith Clinic Church. In my off-time, I go to the gym and burn off all the chicken wings I eat. I love them!

BENJAMIN FISHER

Age: 22
Hometown: Warsaw, Ind.
Favorite sporting event: Colts and Notre Dame football



Favorite NFL team: The Indianapolis Colts
Who's going to win the Super Bowl? Indianapolis Colts by 10
Most wings eaten at one sitting: This will be it
Who are you? I was born and raised in Indiana, and have been a Colts fan since the 1994-95 season. I attended the game when Peyton Manning threw his 49th touchdown pass of the year. I'm a parachute rigger for the 82nd Airborne Division on Fort Bragg and attend Village Baptist Church and Manna Evangelical Church.

MICHELLE JOHNSON

Age: 31
Hometown: New Orleans
Favorite sporting event: Football
Favorite NFL team: New Orleans Saints



Who's going to win the Super Bowl? The Indianapolis Colts will win 36-28 — to pay back the Bears for beating my Saints.
Most wings eaten at one sitting: 30
Who are you? I'm the mother of three and moved to Fayetteville after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. Now I'm the head chef at Straight Outta New Orleans Restaurant.

JOE MCGEE

Age: 38
Hometown: Philadelphia
Favorite sporting event: Football
Favorite NFL team: Indianapolis Colts



Who's going to win the Super Bowl? The Indianapolis Colts, 31-27
Most wings you've eaten at one sitting: 20
Who are you? I'm the father of three, a single dad, director of GOTDAD, Inc., a nonprofit organization, restaurant owner and owner of Mpire Boxing Gym.

tune-up."

Joe McGee, the Colt fan who also runs a restaurant, offered a bit of insider insight. "The bigger chains tend to give you smaller wings," he said. "They cook faster that way, and they can serve more orders. They may be just as good, just smaller."

There was discussion, but little politicking. And when the numbers were tallied, the judges were in agreement.

"I might have to drop by there on the way home," Fisher said of the It's contender. "If not tonight, then certainly for sure for Super Bowl Sunday."

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THE WING PANEL

BUFFALO WINGS

Cooking chicken wings is one of those "man things." Every man thinks he can do it, but it's a task better left to the experts.

But if you're like most men and won't listen to reason, here's the easiest recipe I've found for decent at-home wings. You can even make your own sauce, with appropriate heat and sweetness.

Yes, I've tried to make wings in the past. Yes it can be done. But like the closet I built in our converted carport, you really can tell the difference between the home-made type and the work of professionals.

So you've been warned. But like most guys with a new chainsaw for Christmas, you can't wait to try it out. So, enjoy!

By the way, these are the original directions for Buffalo wings, from the folks at kitchenproject.com. And before you start, make sure your stove has a good exhaust fan. These wings are good, but they create a lot of greasy smoke:

- Figure on 5 to 6 wings per person, which is about a pound each. It's easier to buy the wings pre-cut.
- Chop off the end of each

chicken wing and discard it. You won't miss it, and no one wants to eat that scraggly piece anyway.

■ Chop the wing in half at the joint to make two pieces. If you can't figure out where the joint is (it's like the elbow of the wing) you may want to think about calling a wing place.

■ Heat cooking oil over high heat in a deep-fat fryer (or deep skillet if you don't have the fryer) until it starts to pop and sizzle at 375 to 400 degrees.

■ While the oil is heating, salt

and pepper the wings lightly.

■ When the oil is ready, carefully place enough wings to fit in and cook until they're crispy. Stir them every so often to make sure they're totally cooked, about 10 minutes total, depending on size.

■ When done, remove them to drain on paper towels and cook the remaining wings.

■ Roll them in the sauce of your choice. Serve with celery sticks and blue cheese or ranch dressing for dipping, if desired.

— Chick Jacobs

Tart cherry mustard goes well with pork and sausages

The Washington Post

Chef Brian Polcyn created this tart fruit mustard to make use of one of Michigan's outstanding natural products. It goes well with pork and sausages, especially Teutonic varieties such as Thüringer, hunter and summer sausages.

The mustard can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 1 month.

Adapted from "Charcuterie: The Craft of Salting, Smoking, and Curing," by Polcyn and Michael Ruhlman (Norton, 2005).

TART CHERRY MUSTARD

- 2 tablespoons dry mustard, such as Colman's
- 3 large egg yolks
- 1/2 cup unsweetened cranberry juice
- 3 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt, or more to taste
- 1/2 tablespoon Worcestershire
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- Pinch cayenne pepper
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped dried tart cherries

Combine all the ingredients except the cherries in a large heatproof bowl set over a medium saucepan with a few inches of barely boiling water. Cook for about 15 minutes, whisking continuously but gently, until the mixture is thickened and smooth; a whisk drawn through the mustard should leave a line. (Do not beat it too vigorously, or it will become frothy.) Remove from the heat and add the cherries, stirring to combine. Taste and adjust the seasoning as necessary. Cover and refrigerate to chill thoroughly.

Cook's Corner Recipes

Spring lamb needn't be gamey or unhealthy

By Jim Romanoff

The Associated Press

Lamb, long considered a harbinger of spring, too often gets a bad rap.

For one thing, some people

a choice as many other meats.

Lamb rib or loin chops, though a bit pricier, are lower in fat than more popular shoulder chops, and are delightfully mild. A cooked 3-ounce portion (off the bone) of lamb rib meat has

LAMB CHOPS WITH RAISIN-ALMOND COUSCOUS

- 1 1/2 cups water
- 1/3 cup golden raisins
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, divided
- 3/4 cup couscous
- black pepper
- Eight 3-ounce lamb rib chops, trimmed
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds

ERIC'S LIT'L SMOKIES AND BRATWURSTS

- 24 ounces (2 packages) Lit'l Smokies
- 1 (1-pound) package Bratwursts, whole
- 1 (10-ounce) bottle of ketchup
- Barbecue Sauce
- 6 ounces light beer
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped