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Hot dog! How to make your own for the grill

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Since the beginning of time, famine has been a frequent scourge of the planet. So it is not surprising that from the moment that the first hunter-gatherer ate a piece of fruit, buried the remains and discovered that its seeds resulted in more of that very same fruit, mankind has been interested in increasing the quantity and quality of the food supply. Shortly thereafter, domesticated livestock entered the picture and the farm was born.

With the invention of the farm, we humble humans had a little more time on our hands to develop other important inventions, including curing meat, preserving produce and perfecting fermentation. Eventually, we were able to focus our eyes on more leisurely pursuits, resulting in less important developments, i.e., toothpicks, silk stockings and the Slinky.

Yet in spite of all of the improvements (and distractions) of a steadily advancing society, no civilization on the planet has proved itself immune from the drive to producing better and more food for its citizens, including the United States. During the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl era, U.S. corporations, farmers and government agencies became obsessed with producing larger quantities of food. People, Americans, were starving, and all manner of methods were employed in the attempt to nourish hungry, displaced families.

An Ancient Pedigree

This all out effort to increase the food supply resulted in an explosion of improvements in food production, preservation and marketing. These innovations included things like commercial and home canning, frozen foods and pre-packaged items like macaroni and cheese and boxed cake mix, along with the re-introduction of a surprisingly ancient food: the hot dog.

Precursors to the hot dog actually appear in literature as early as 900 B.C., when Homer mentioned them in his epic, the Odyssey. The frankfurter, or hot dog, as we know it, is believed to have been introduced in 1487 in Frankfurt, Germany, as a ground meat and spice combination stuffed into prepared animal intestines. However, the folks in Vienna dispute this with their own version, the wiener. Truth be told, everyone and his or her mother has taken credit for the ubiquitous tube steak.

In 1893, two events are responsible for the popularizing of the frankfurter/hot dog in the United States. The Colombian Exposition, otherwise known as the Chicago World's Fair, supplied sausages in bread to huge numbers of fair goers. Additionally, this is the year that Chris Von de Ahe, German immigrant and simultaneous owner of a St. Louis bar and the Browns — a St. Louis major league baseball team — began selling "Dachshund" sausages at the ball park. Eventually the term dachshund morphed into hot dog.

What About The Bun?

Yes, there are even theories concerning the invention of the bun. The most renowned is the tale of Anton Feuchtwanger. A Bavarian immigrant, Feuchtwanger supposedly handed out gloves during the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair as a tidy way for customers to eat their dachshund sausages. When the gloves went unreturned, Feuchtwanger soon began to run short of cash to replace them. His brother, a baker, was enlisted to bake buns as edible holders for the sausages, and a legendary foodstuff was born. The only problem with Feuchtwanger's story is that it probably isn't true.

Naturally, New York City has boasted its share of hot dog lore, including the story that a German butcher named Charles Feltman began selling hot dogs in milk buns at Coney Island as early as



R.R. Sloan photo

The Ferris wheel at the Columbian Exposition, better known as the Chicago World's Fair, where some claim the hot dog was introduced.



blogs.baruch.cuny.edu photo

Nathan's Delicatessen at Coney Island, N.Y., purveyors of the most famous hot dogs on the planet.



credit flickr.com photo

A fully loaded Chicago style hot dog, with its namesake city in the background.

1871. Others claim that German immigrants invented the whole shebang — hot dogs, buns and even hot dog carts in the Bowery as far back as the 1860's.

Barry Popick, an expert on American slang who has researched the origins of idioms such as "Windy City" and "The Big Apple," cites that the first mention of "hot dogs" appeared in the Oct. 19, 1895, issue of university newspaper, the Yale Record. He notes that several hot dog carts were stationed outside of the school's dorms, including one called "The Kennel Club."

In the 1930s on the advice of the U.S. government, city street vendors began offering cheap, easy to hold foods to help feed the masses of hungry, homeless job-seekers. An old stand-by, the frankfurter, was employed as a handy food item that could be quickly served and, when piled with condiments and assorted

vegetables, provided much needed salt and calories, amounting to a full meal on a bun. In Chicago, this resulted in the now familiar loaded, Chicago-style dog.

Pick Your Pup

Since then, every region of the country has created its own version of this all American favorite. In addition to the topping and cooking methods, there are now an assortment of ingredients including vegan, turkey, and uncured options. Here are just a few variations:

New York Kosher: An all natural, snappy beef hot dog topped with sauerkraut and deli mustard.

Chicago: Served up on a poppy seed bun and piled high with old fashioned yellow mustard, bold green relish, chopped onion, pickled peppers, a dill spear, tomato slices and a sprinkle of celery salt.

2 teaspoons garlic powder
1 tablespoon kosher salt
2 teaspoons finely ground black pepper
2 teaspoons ground coriander
1 teaspoon ground mace
1 teaspoon ground cardamom
1 cup non-fat dry milk
1 teaspoon cure (known as pink salt, Prague powder or Instacure)
2 teaspoons liquid smoke (omit if you will be smoking the meat yourself)

Ice water, up to 2 cups

Casings, for stuffing

Cut the pork and beef into 1-inch cubes and run through the meat grinder twice on the finest plate. Mix in all ingredients except water and chill for 30 minutes. Using a food processor, emulsify the meat as directed above, adding water as necessary to create a smooth mixture. Stuff the meat into the casings and allow to air dry for 30 minutes. Then boil the hot dogs, or prepare them for smoking (see below).

To Smoke Hot Dogs

First, hang the hot dogs in your smoker with plenty of room for circulation, and let dry between 90 and 100 degrees F until dry to the touch. When dry, prepare your wood chips and smoke the sausages at 160-165 degrees until the sausages reach an internal temperature of 152 degrees. Let's Make Sausage stresses using a cure for homemade hot dogs or sausage to prevent botulism.

Home Canned Relish

To create the day-glo shade of Chicago style relish, simply add a bit of blue food coloring to your batch after draining off the excess liquid. This recipe will make a not-too-sweet relish.

3 pounds of pickling cucumbers, seeded
1 large onion
1/4 cup kosher salt
3 cups vinegar (see note)
1 cup sugar
1 tablespoon dill, optional
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 teaspoons mustard seed
2 teaspoons celery seed

Grate or finely dice cucumbers and onion. Mix with the salt, then place in a strainer to drain, about 2 hours. Squeeze excess liquid from vegetables. Place remaining ingredients in a kettle, bring to a boil, then add vegetables. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook for 10 minutes. Place in sterile, half-pint jars, seal and water bath for 10 minutes. Cool completely and store in a cool, dry place. Refrigerate after opening. Makes 8-10 half-pint jars, depending on how much brine you add while packing. Note: Most recipes call for white vinegar, however, I prefer cider vinegar, which has a better flavor and adds a little color to the relish.

Southern Slaw Dog: The classic red hot or pork/beef/chicken blend is up to you, but a heapin' helpin' of sweet cole slaw is mandatory.

Michigan Coney: This is a chili dog, topped with no-bean chili, onions and mustard. Cheese is optional but highly recommended.

The Recipes

If you are in an industrial frame of mind or simply want to know exactly what is in the hot dog you are eating, here is how to make you own from the bottom up.

Homemade Hot Dogs

To make hot dogs at home with this recipe, you will need a meat grinder, a food processor, and either collagen or natural casings, which are made from sheep or hog.

First and most importantly, you will want a very finely ground "emulsified" blend of meat. To achieve that, the folks at www.lets-make-sausage.com, recommend grinding the meat twice through the finest plate of your sausage grinder, mixing in the cure and spices, and allowing the meat to chill for 30 minutes. Then, in small batches, process the meat in a food processor until the consistency of jarred baby food meat. Small amounts of ice water — up to 1 1/2 cups per 5 lbs of meat, can be added to enhance the emulsification process. Here is the site's recipe No. 1 for hot dogs:

5 pounds of 80 percent lean pork butt or shoulder
2 pounds of 80 percent lean beef chuck
3 tablespoons paprika
3 tablespoons corn syrup