



FOOD

Tacoma, WA - October 8, 2008



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Bacon: It's what's for dessert

The bacon-obsessed embrace all types of smoky goodness, even in the form of pork-powered dessert.

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Published: October 8th, 2008 01:30 AM | Updated: October 8th, 2008 07:31 AM

William Mueller is of the mind that everything tastes better with bacon. Even dessert. Nope, you did not read that incorrectly. Yes, he said it: bacon dessert.

Chocolate-dipped bacon, maple-bacon ice cream, peanut-butter-bacon cookies. Mueller has served a bacon wonderland of pork-filled desserts to his customers at Babblin' Babs Bistro in recent weeks. Their verdict? Bacon loooooooove.

When customers sampled Mueller's peanut-butter-bacon cookies, diners were surprised but intrigued. "They thought it was pure genius to incorporate bacon into a cookie," said Mueller, chef of Babblin' Babs and co-owner with wife, Shannon. He added about the choco bacon, "I didn't tell a lot of people it was bacon underneath. They said, 'This is great! It has a smoky taste and chewy texture, what is it?'"

"Wendyfaker," a TNT Diner blog reader, sampled some of Mueller's bacon concoctions at the Proctor restaurant. "Try it and let your taste buds be tantalized by these unique creations. Let me recommend the ice cream," she wrote on the TNT Diner blog. "The salt and smoke of the bacon pair

perfectly with the rich cream of the ice cream. YUM!”

Mueller received such an impressive response to his bacon desserts, he plans to serve his chocolate covered bacon at the Proctor Chocolate Festival, held Friday and Saturday in Proctor (see box).

“Everything with bacon tastes better, and now we have dessert to prove it,” said Mueller. “It’s great wrapped around anything from scallops, pineapple to jalapeño poppers. Bacon can be on salads, desserts, entrees and anything else you can come up with ... what (other ingredient) can make that claim?” he asked.

TNT Diner reader and bacon aficionado Crystal Green couldn’t agree more: “Pairing bacon with sweets makes total sense to me. Many people already do it as part of their bacon cooking repertoire – adding honey to their bacon to make honey-glazed pepper bacon, or sprinkling their bacon with brown sugar,” said Green.

“How many of us kids at heart and real life kids dip their bacon in their maple syrup? Tons! There’s something about bacon that compels some of us to dredge, sprinkle or glaze it with something sweet. Intentionally taking bacon to the next level of actual bacon-inspired desserts is a natural evolution,” she said.

REALLY? IN DESSERT?

If you’re not a fan of bacon, well, our apologies. You can scratch your head while you read this missive. If you are a fan of bacon, yet still cringe or shrug at the idea of bacon dessert, well, bear with us for a brief segue into flavor mapping. See if this makes sense to your palate.

Consider waffles. What goes with waffles? Maple syrup and bacon, of course. What’s next to the bacon and the waffles on your morning plate? Try eggs. Add a glass of milk on the side. Sure, it sounds like breakfast, right? But what else can you create from the same ingredients and flavor pairings? Bacon-maple ice cream in a waffle cone (insert Homer Simpson drooling noises here). If you can map out the flavors, then perhaps it makes sweet sense?

Here, in the words of flavor diva Karen Page, co-author of the newly published “The Flavor Bible,” with Andrew Dornenburg: “It may seem odd for a meat to pair well with sweet flavors at first, but meats such as duck, venison and pork have long paired well with fruit,” said Page.

Page's flavor map:

Bacon plus pancakes equals bacon cupcakes, bacon cookies, bacon corn bread.

Bacon plus waffles equals bacon soufflés.

Bacon plus French toast equals bacon custards, bacon bread pudding.

SMOKY TRENDSETTING

Bacon and sweet is a flavor match Page has seen chefs embrace across the country.

"It's funny how chefs will get on a bandwagon and using bacon as an accent to desserts is definitely one," said Page.

Evidence of the national palate embrace of sweet, sweet bacon? Try bacon baklava at Louisville's Brown hotel. Or bacon and egg ice cream with pain perdu (caramelized French toast) at the Michelin three-star-rated Fat Duck restaurant near London. And in New York City, Page said, Gramercy Tavern serves a milk chocolate tart with crme frache and bacon. And the Dovetail Restaurant in New York? Brioche bread pudding with bananas and bacon brittle.

And, of course, here in the Northwest, Portland's Voodoo Doughnuts has received national attention for its bacon maple bar doughnuts.

Bacon blasphemy? Sure. Some diners don a crazed look or mumble complete confusion when presented with the possibility of bacon sweets on a dessert menu. It does sound weird, we'll be the first to accept that, but there is a growing pile of evidence about flavor pairings that identify why smoky, sweet bacon goodness may seem so right.

Page explained, "... Do we love bacon and maple syrup because we grew up with it for so many years at breakfast that it's become a comfort pairing? Or is there something deeper at play?"

Indeed, the pairing of bacon and sweet could very well make sense because of their botanical relationships, said Page. "When you think about maple syrup, it is the reduced sap of maple trees. Bacon is often smoked with wood from trees. So nature surely has something to do with it, too." Bacon and maple are practically siblings, after all.

Science aside, it's true that some flavor pairings just don't seem to work for an American palate. Even the bacon curious might cringe at the thought of bacon lemon bars or chugging down a bacon banana milkshake. Ewww.

Familiar flavors are much more acceptable to the culinary curious. "The key for coming up with bacon desserts, since there is not a large and/or long tradition of them, is to reference flavor pairings that are familiar to the diner," said Page. "That involves deconstructing the familiar and then reconstructing flavors into the unfamiliar that manages to seem familiar."

That means obvious comfort foods such as peanut-butter-bacon cookies or maple-bacon ice cream to Proctor's Chef Mueller. When creating his bacon treats, Mueller let his mind wander to the comfortable and familiar – things already on the menu of his bistro, like crme brlée and bread pudding. The addition of bacon just seemed a natural for his house desserts. "I just started with the thing that seemed to make sense," Mueller said. "You can let your palate roam from there."

BACON BRLE AT HOME?

Mueller has advice for the bacon curious wanting to try bacon desserts at home. Start with bacon that is thick, very meaty, but lean. Pick a bacon that is smoky. Use bacon that is hickory smoked for pairing with rich desserts that seem a natural pairing with salty notes. For sweeter desserts, think maple flavoring.

Green has not experimented much with making bacon desserts at home, but she likes the idea of pairing really rich, decadent flavors and textures with bacon.

"We all know that grey sea salt caramels work well together," said Green. "If the pairing of salty-sweet works for salt and caramel, so why wouldn't it work for bacon and caramel? The answer is, of course it would. I would love to have a caramel, whether chocolate covered or not, with crispy sprinkles of bacon on it. I think caramel in particular would play off well with the salty-smokiness of the bacon."

Want to start easy? Consider the Southern treat Pig Candy, or sometimes called Bacon Candy. The recipe is very basic. Slice strips of bacon, roll in dark brown sugar (and use black pepper or cayenne to give it kick). Place the strips of bacon on a cookie rack placed on top of a deep pan to catch the drippings, and bake at 325 for 20 minutes or so, turning once to ensure even cooking. That's it. You have yourself a very basic bacon dessert.

Want to get deep with bacon sweet treats? Get your bacon on with the recipes here from chef Mueller.

Sue Kidd: 253-597-8270

"Bacon Bacon Bacon!"

Lately around the office, the very mention of fried pork flesh elicits the yelling of that phrase pulled straight out of those doggy-treat commercials. It's a Pavlovian response that coincides with the drooling. It's our food-page cheer these days, our motto.

And bacon deserts? Game over, man. We're running into that heart attack with irrevocable smiles.

In celebration of bacon-o-philia, we've come up with a short quiz to test your knowledge of crispy goodness.

1. We'll start off easy. The "Bacon bacon bacon!" commercials are for which product?
2. About a month ago, on our TNT Diner blog, we wrote about a peculiar bacon item sold at the Front Street Ale House restaurant in Friday Harbor. What is the item?
3. An old party-game standby has players linking this actor – movie star by movie star – to any other actor in six moves or less. You get a point for every link. Name the actor, and link him to, let's say, Carrie Fisher (Princess Leia).
4. These fictional brothers from the Great White North regularly celebrated the consumption of Canadian "back bacon" with the consumption of beer and doughnuts. Name the characters and the actors who played them. For an bonus point, name their 1983 movie.
5. Who was Shakespeare's contemporary, the guy some folks think ol' Will might have ripped off?
6. Law enforcement officers from Tacoma and Seattle used to meet in this annual football battle.

ANSWERS

1. Purina Beggin' Strips.
2. Bacon beer, crafted by the San Juan Brewing Co.
3. Kevin Bacon is the actor. He was in "JFK" with Tommy Lee Jones, who was in "The Fugitive" with Harrison Ford, who as in "Star Wars" with Carrie Fisher. (Party foul for using "JFK" since every actor who ever lived was in that movie.)
4. Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas starred as, respectively, Bob and Doug McKenzie in "Great White North" on SCTV. Their movie "Strange Brew" is a cult classic.

5. Sir Francis Bacon.

6. Bacon Bowl.

Bill Hutchens, The News Tribune

Proctor Chocolate Festival

When: Friday and Saturday

What: Pick up free chocolate samples and other chocolate-themed items at the self-guided event.

Information: www.proctorbusinessdistrict.com

Where: Babblin' Babs Bistro and participating businesses in Proctor. Pick up a Chocolate Passport that lists participating businesses for more information on who will offer samples and chocolate-themed products.

Praline of Bacon

1 tablespoon sugar

2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce

1 tablespoon butter, melted

1/8 teaspoon red pepper

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1/2 pound cooked and diced bacon

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Spray sheet pan. In a mixing bowl, add the sugar, Worcestershire sauce, butter, red pepper and cinnamon. Whisk well.

Pour mixture on sheet pan, and toss cooked bacon in to evenly coat. Bake turning every 5 minutes for 20-25 minutes total.

Source: William Mueller, Babblin' Babs Bistro

Love Me Tender Peanut Butter, Bacon & Banana Cookies

Yield: About 3 dozen

1/2 cup organic butter

1/2 cup organic peanut butter

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1/2 cup brown sugar

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1 whole organic egg

1 teaspoon organic vanilla extract

1 1/4 cups organic flour

1/4 cup organic banana chips crushed

1/4 cup Praline of Bacon (see recipe)

Preheat your oven to 375 degrees. In a large bowl, beat butter, peanut butter and egg with a mixer. Add sugar, brown sugar, baking powder and baking soda. Mix until all is incorporated and continue to scrape sides.

Slowly, at a low speed, add flour until all is incorporated into dough. Finish your cookies with banana chips and bacon (really add as much or as little, even throw some chocolate chips in). Place in a bowl, covered, and chill so dough will be easier to work with.

Make 1-inch balls with dough or larger if desired. Place on a baking sheet with parchment paper 2 inches apart. Flatten with palm of your hand. Bake in at 375 degree oven for 7-9 minutes or until bottoms are browned.

Source: William Mueller, Babblin' Babs Bistro

Chocolate Covered Rum Bacon

1/2 pound natural thick cut, lean bacon

2 tablespoons organic maple syrup

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

Gosling's Bermuda Black Rum (or your favorite rum)

4 ounces Cacao Barry Cocoa melted or any good quality dark chocolate

1 tablespoon toasted coconut (optional)

2 tablespoons chopped walnuts (optional)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet pan with parchment paper, and then place strips of bacon on pan. Spread 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon maple syrup on each slice of bacon rubbing it into the meat. Lightly dust bacon with cinnamon.

Bake at 400 degrees, watching bacon to make sure it does not burn. As soon as it starts taking on a crispy character, pull out of the oven and sprinkle with rum generously and turn pieces over and repeat with maple and cinnamon. Place back into oven and continue cooking until crispy and firm. Pull out of oven, and sprinkle with more rum.

Remove from pan and completely cool on a plate with a light spray of canola oil (Warning: Leaving it to cool in the pan may cause it to stick).

In a small pan on low, slowly melt chocolate stirring very sparingly or chocolate may seize up. Spread chocolate only on 1 side of bacon, covering completely.

Have fun and add coconut, walnuts, peanuts, potato chips or even banana chips. Make it your own.

Source: William Mueller, Babblin' Babs Bistro

Maple Bourbon with Bacon Praline Ice Cream

6 large organic egg yolks

1 cup organic maple syrup

2 teaspoons organic flour

1 cup organic half-and-half

1 teaspoon organic vanilla extract

1 1/2 cups organic cream

1 cup Praline of Bacon (see recipe)

In a bowl, beat the egg yolks with the maple syrup, and flour. Set aside.

Bring half-and-half to a simmer in a heavy saucepan. Slowly beat the hot half-and-half into the eggs. Pour the entire amount back into a clean saucepan and place on low heat.

Stir with a wooden or rubber spatula until the custard thickens slightly. Remove from heat and pour through a strainer into a bowl. Allow custard to cool, and then stir in cream and vanilla. Cover and refrigerate until cold.

Stir the chilled custard, and then freeze in your ice cream maker, following the manufacturer's directions.

Add Praline of Bacon when ice cream is semifrozen. Allow the machine to mix in bacon and continue until finished.

Source: William Mueller, Babblin' Babs Bistro

Maple-Bacon Bread Pudding

2 cups milk

2 cups half-and-half

1/2 cup brown sugar

1/2 cup orange marmalade

3 egg yolks

1 teaspoon cinnamon

2 whole eggs

8 cups bread, cubed

6-8 ounces cooked bacon

cup melted butter

1/2 cup organic maple syrup

3/4 cups walnuts

Preheat oven to 325 degrees, and spray a 9-inch square baking pan. Combine milk, half-and-half, brown sugar, marmalade, egg yolks, cinnamon and whole eggs. Whisk until blended and set aside.

Place cubed bread in a large bowl, and add cooked bacon, butter and maple syrup. Toss until evenly distributed then transfer to baking pan. Pour egg mixture over the top, not quite filling the pan, then stir.

Crumble 3/4 cup of walnuts over the top. Place a plate over cubes, and set aside for 20 minutes.

Wrap the baking pan with foil tightly. Poke 2 holes on opposite sides. Place on a pre-heated sheet pan.

Bake 1 hour 15 minutes, then uncover and continue another 15 minutes. Remove and cool on a wire rack.

Source: William Mueller, Babblin' Babs Bistro

What's shakin' with bacon?

Have thoughts on bacon dessert? Which desserts at South Sound restaurants would you add bacon to? Visit the TNT Diner blog at blogs.thenewtribune.com/tntdiner and tell us.



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