

Veggie burgers that will change your mind

Partially dehydrated black beans are the key

By **GRETCHEN MCKAY**
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

If you're not a fan of veggie burgers, I can probably guess why.

Too often these plant-based patties masquerading as the cookout standard are either mushy or completely crumble the second you take a bite.

This recipe from Serious Eats will change your mind.

The secret is in the ingredients. J. Kenji Lopez-Alt solves the problem of mushy texture by partially dehydrating the burgers' protein source — canned black beans — in the oven. His recipe also adds chopped cashews for texture and panko breadcrumbs to help bind the patties, without making them too soft.

Sautéed onions, poblano peppers, garlic and a touch of smoky heat from chipotle chile, meanwhile, add depth to the patties without overpowering the flavor of the roasted beans.

The final tip is to cook the patties gently, over moderate heat in a skillet. You also can grill the burgers, but be sure to brush the patties with oil before placing them over the heat — it will help them to brown more evenly, while also preventing them from sticking to the grates.

REALLY AWESOME BLACK BEAN BURGERS

2 (15-ounce) cans black beans, rinsed and drained
4 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided
1 medium onion, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
1 large poblano pepper, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
3 medium cloves garlic, minced
1 chipotle chile in adobo sauce, finely chopped, plus 1 teaspoon sauce
3/4 cup roasted cashews



Gretchen McKay/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Roasted black beans and toasted cashews team up with chipotle chili pepper to create this really awesome veggie burger.

1/2 cup finely crumbled feta or cotija cheese
3/4 cup panko breadcrumbs
1 large egg
2 tablespoons mayonnaise
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Cheese for topping, such as pepper jack, cheddar, muenster, or Swiss (optional)
6 to 8 hearty hamburger buns, toasted
Condiments as desired, such as chipotle-mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard, or mayonnaise
Toppings as desired, such as shredded lettuce, sliced onions, and pickles

Adjust oven rack to center position and preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit (175 degrees Celsius). Spread black beans in a single layer on a foil-lined rimmed baking sheet. Roast until beans are mostly split open and outer skins are beginning to get crunchy, about 20 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly.

While beans roast, heat 2 tablespoons oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onion and poblano and cook, stirring frequently, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add chipotle chile and sauce and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

Transfer mixture to a large bowl.

Place cashews in the bowl of a food processor and pulse until chopped into pieces no larger than 1/3-inch, about 12 short pulses. Add to bowl with onions and peppers.

When beans are slightly cooled, transfer to food processor. Add cheese. Pulse until beans are roughly chopped. Transfer to bowl with onion/pepper mixture. Add breadcrumbs, egg and mayonnaise, and season with salt and pepper. Fold together gently but thoroughly with hands. (Patty mixture can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to three days at this stage.)

Form bean mixture into 6 to 8 patties as wide as your burger buns. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large nonstick or cast-iron skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add 4 patties and cook, swirling pan occasionally, until well browned and crisp on first side, about 5 minutes. Carefully flip and cook until second side is browned, about 5 minutes longer, adding cheese if desired.

Spread top and bottom buns with chipotle mayonnaise or other condiments. Add toppings to top or bottom bun. Place patties on bottom buns, close burgers and serve immediately.

Makes 6-8 burgers.
— Seriouseat.com

SOUTH

Continued from Page B1

1 cup fresh corn kernels
Salt and pepper
Peanut, canola or vegetable oil, for frying

For Creole mayo

1 cup canned diced tomatoes
1/2 cup finely chopped red pepper
1/2 cup finely chopped celery
1/2 cup finely chopped onion
1 tablespoon light brown sugar
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
2 tablespoons tomato paste
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1/2 cup mayonnaise

Prepare crabcakes: In a large bowl, mix crab, onion, bell pepper, celery, parsley, eggs, bread cubes, bread crumbs, thyme, cayenne, corn and 1/8 teaspoon each salt and black pepper until well combined. Cover and chill for at least 2 hours or up to overnight.

Prepare mayonnaise: In medium saucepan, combine tomatoes, bell pepper, celery, onion, brown sugar, cayenne, tomato paste, vinegar, salt and black pepper and bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring often.

Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the mixture has the consistency of a thick paste, about 20 minutes. Let cool to room temperature, then chill for 1 hour.

Transfer tomato mixture to a food processor and pulse until smooth. Spoon the mixture into a bowl and fold in mayonnaise. Chill for at least 30 minutes before serving, or store in a sealed container in the fridge for up to 1 month.

To make crabcakes, put bread crumbs in a shallow bowl. Form crab mixture into 1-ounce patties (about 1 1/2 inches in diameter). Dredge patties in breadcrumbs to coat and shake off excess crumbs.

Fill a large cast-iron skillet with oil to a depth of 1/2 inch. Heat over medium-high heat to 325 degrees. Working in batches to avoid overcrowding the pan, add crab patties to hot oil and fry, turning once, until golden brown, about 2 minutes per side.

Drain on a crumpled brown paper bag or paper towels. Serve immediately with Creole mayonnaise. Serves 6.

— "Meals, Music, and Muses: Recipes from My African American Kitchen" by Alexander Smalls (Flatiron Books, \$35)

PRALINES

Popular across the Southern states, these sweet treats — featured in the cookbook's "Serenades" chapter — are easy to make and a perfect way to end a meal.

3/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
3/4 cup heavy cream
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 cup chopped pecans

In a medium saucepan, combine brown sugar and cream and heat over medium-low heat, stirring, until brown sugar has melted. Cook, stirring occasionally, until blended into a paste, about 10 minutes. Add butter, vanilla and pecans. Cook, stirring, for 5 minutes.

Line a half-sheet pan with parchment paper. Drop pralines by tablespoons onto prepared pans and let cool completely. Makes 12 pralines.

— Adapted from "Meals, Music, and Muses: Recipes from My African Kitchen" by Alexander Smalls (Flatiron Books, \$35)

FIELD GREENS, POACHED PEAR & BLACK-EYED PEAS SALAD

"This salad is, for me, about flavor, texture and childhood memories," writes in "Meals, Music, and Muses." The cookbook is a tribute to his South Carolina heritage and the music that inspired the former professional opera singer.

It was on the menu when he opened The Cecil in New York City in 2013. It honors his father and grandfather and the pears they grew in their backyard in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

The beans add protein and the pears a touch of elegance. A lemony vinaigrette ties it all together.

It's a versatile recipe that can be made ahead to be dressed later, and it easily goes from an appetizer to a full meal depending on the size. I halved the ingredients for smaller portions.

For salad

4 ripe but firm Bosc pears, halved and cored
2 cups red wine
1 cup sugar
2 cinnamon sticks
2 star anise pods
1 1/2 cups halved grape tomatoes
1 red onion, halved and thinly sliced
2 cups thinly sliced seedless cucumbers
2 pounds mixed salad greens
2 1/2 cups cooked black-eye peas

For vinaigrette

1/2 cup Champagne vinegar
1 tablespoon each fresh lemon, lime and orange juice
1 1/2 teaspoons minced shallot
1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons mayonnaise
1 1/2 teaspoons honey
Salt and pepper
3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Combine pears, wine, sugar, cinnamon sticks, star anise and 1 cup water in a medium saucepan.

Bring to boil over medium-high heat. Cover, reduce heat to low and poach until pears are tender but not mushy, about 35 minutes. Let pears cool to room temperature, then cover and chill for at least several hours or up to overnight.

Prepare vinaigrette: In a food processor, combine vinegar, citrus juices, shallot, mustard, mayo, honey and a pinch of salt and pepper. Pulse until smooth, about 30 seconds.

With the machine running, add oil in a thin stream and process until emulsified. Taste and season with salt and pepper. Use immediately or store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to three days.

Remove pears from poaching liquid and cut lengthwise into 1/8-inch-thick slices. Reserve poaching liquid for another use.

In a large bowl, toss grape tomatoes, onion, cucumbers and greens to combine. Add black-eyed peas and vinaigrette (a little at a time, until greens are lightly coated), and toss.

Divide among 8 chilled plates. Garnish with poached pears and serve immediately.

Serves 8.

— "Meals, Music, and Muses: Recipes From My African American Kitchen" by Alexander Smalls (Flatiron, \$35)

Pop-Tartare? Gourmet treat, no toaster required

By **JAMES LILEKS**
Minneapolis StarTribune

A new ad for Pop-Tarts has revealed the depths to which our once-proud civilization has fallen. It ran on Reddit.

"Split it. Crust first. Straight from the foil. 'The only' civilized way to eat Pop-Tarts."

Raw. In other words, Pop-Tartare.

Sophisticated? Really? It's one thing to say that cold Tarts are for people who've had a long day and don't feel like cooking, but don't pass this off as the equivalent of someone having high tea with a pinky extended.

If eating uncooked, processed-pastry shingles is sophisticated, it suggests there is an element of savagery involved in heating the confection. Imagine the opening sequence to "2001: A Space Odyssey," except the hooting, confused monkeys are capering around a toaster instead of a mute black monolith. One of them sticks his pastry in the slot, and they all stand in



Dreamstime/TNS

Is a raw Pop-Tart now considered a gourmet treat?

amazement as the machine heats up. Finally the Pop-Tart is flung from the slot into the sky, where it turns into a spaceship while "The Blue Danube" plays.

It is not uncivilized to eat your Pop-Tart raw, if you do it properly. With a napkin on the lap to collect the inevitable crumbs. But the idea that you go crust first, like it's some sort of delicacy, makes you wonder whether

the target market has the palate of an oven mitt. No. You fold it, sundering the tart, and work from the middle to the edges, and then you give the edges to the dog.

It's a matter of taste, I suppose. The "crust" of a Pop-Tart is the least appealing segment, to me; it's like baked newspaper. In 1967 they added frosting because they'd discovered

a new process that kept the frosting from melting in the toaster. I believe this process was later used to make the heat shields on the space shuttle.

Little did we know that there was an R&D facility where scientists in white coats worked for years with feverish dedication until they came up with the innovation that would upend the Pop-Tart paradigm once

more. Sprinkles. That may have been the pinnacle of Pop-Tart innovation.

Truth be told, it's been years since I've had a Pop-Tart. I know actual adults who still love them. I won't judge you if you do — well, I will, but in that Minnesota way where you nod politely and change the subject and tell your partner all about it later and agree it really does say a lot about you. But other than that, no judging. I don't care if you can't muster the initiative to throw it in the microwave, what with all the work of having to open the door and push the buttons, and then you have to stand there for 30 seconds, looking at your phone.

Just don't tell me that eating it raw is sophisticated. If that's the case, then spraying an unwrapped Slim Jim with Pam and sliding it down your throat is fine dining. I think this is Kellogg's way of admitting that its target market doesn't even own toasters, because that's for people who have, like, mortgages.

I would also like to note that none of the above applies in any way to Toaster Strudels, which have a separate frosting packet that lets you drizzle the sugary spackle as you please. I like to make elegant zig-zag patterns.

Now that's sophisticated.



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