



BETWEEN THE ROWS
WENDY SCHMIDT



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Oregon grape in bloom.

Our state flower: Oregon grape

Our state flower, Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), is related to *Berberis* (barberry). Easily grown, the plant looks good in all seasons. Leaves are divided into leaflets that usually have spiny teeth on the edges.

Bright yellow flowers grow in a dense mass at the end of branches this time of year. I've noticed them all over town.

Mahonia aquifolium is native from British Columbia to Northern California, all zones. This mahonia grows 10 to 12 feet with a prominent pattern of vertical stems. Blooms at the ends of stems in early spring, followed by powdery blue berries. Plant in partial shade; water generously.

Other varieties are:

- *Mahonia bealei* — leather-leaf mahonia, all zones. This mahonia grows 10 to 12 feet with a prominent pattern of vertical stems. Blooms at the ends of stems in early spring, followed by powdery blue berries. Plant in partial shade; water generously.
- *Mahonia fremontii* — desert mahonia. Not hardy in our climate.

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Abel Uribe/Chicago Tribune-TNS

Finished soft pretzels, prepared and styled by Shannon Kinsella.

A TASTY TWIST

■ Making homemade soft pretzels is a simple and fun way to create a unique meal

James P. DeWan
The Daily Meal

If I had to guess, the fact that you're carving time from your busy day to read this suggests you may be new to this whole "how to make pretzels at home" affair. Something to keep in mind is that pretzels can be fairly complicated, what with all the science and so on — especially if you're stretching for pretzeled perfection.

Here's me, though: Feh. Perfection, schmerfection. I just want some pretzels.

See, in my fevered estimation, fresh soft pretzels, beastly yeasty and warm from the oven, will always be good.

As such, I've made today's Pathway to Pretzels just about as easy as I can. No unusual ingredients. No multi-part mixing. No extended fermentation. Just four easy steps: mix, ferment, boil, bake.

What are pretzels made of?

Before we get started, let's take a quick lap around those ingredients. Because pretzels are bread, they're mostly just flour, yeast, water and salt. There's also a sweetener to feed

the yeast and help with browning.

Traditionally, since pretzels are associated with Germans and, consequently, beer, that sweetener would be a malted barley syrup. We'll take the low road, though, and go with simple brown sugar. Finally, there's a little fat. Fat shortens the gluten strands, helping to keep your soft pretzels true to their adjective.

How to make pretzel dough

First, mix your dough. Some recipes call for activating the yeast separately, but the easy way is simply putting your ingredients in the bowl of a stand mixer — all at once — and running it with a dough hook for four to five minutes. Your dough should be soft and smooth.

When your dough's mixed, give it a couple kneads and form it into a ball. Place it in a greased bowl, cover it, and let it rise — what the cool kids call "fermenting" — for an hour-ish, until it's about double in size.

How to shape pretzels

First, divide your dough into roughly 3-ounce pieces and keep them under plastic

until needed. Starting with one piece, roll the dough back and forth beneath your palms while moving your hands further apart, like you're making a Play-Doh snake about 18- to 24-inches long. Once the dough is rolled, it'll shrink back somewhat. Don't panic.

Form the dough rope into a big circle with the ends crossing by an inch or two, then fold those ends back over onto the opposite side of the dough.

There's your pretzel. Set it on a parchment-covered sheet pan and shape the remaining pieces.

How (and why) to boil pretzels

Once your pretzels are shaped, here's the weird part: The boiling. The very idea of dropping dough into boiling water is counterintuitive, but fear not. We boil the pretzels just long enough to gelatinize the starch on the outside without cooking the dough on the inside, about half a minute. This prevents the dough from rising too much in the oven, keeping the interior dense and chewy.

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Apprehensive about artichokes? Don't be afraid

Ben Mims
Los Angeles Times

We all have cooking tasks that, for whatever reason, we simply refuse to do — the thought of doing them prompts feelings of dread or disdain. When I think of the arrival of spring each year, I'm reminded of my personal hell: preparing artichokes.

It's prime artichoke season and although I love seeing the pyramidal stacks at farmers markets and encourage anyone curious to cook with them, it won't be me. I know that won't win me popularity points with a California readership, but let me explain.

I grew up in the South at a time when artichokes came only in cans or jars or from the freezer. My mother would always make what she called "artichoke tea sandwiches" with canned artichokes, chopping and mixing them with mayonnaise and dry ranch dressing seasoning before slathering the mix between two slices of wheat bread. She'd

trim the crusts, as you must do for tea sandwiches, and set them in the fridge to get nice and cold before a party. The result was kind of like a vegan tuna fish sandwich before I knew such a thing existed.

In culinary school, when I first encountered fresh artichokes and their impenetrable outer petals — botanically, the part we eat is an immature flower bud — I was intrigued. But when I learned that before they are cooked they must be "turned" — painstakingly trimmed, pared, de-spiked and de-choked, all before they turn brown from air exposure — I felt ... exhausted. The ratio of preparation work to taste payoff was egregiously unbalanced.

I appreciated knowing where the canned iterations came from but with my eyes opened to what it took to get them there, I vowed to never subjugate myself to such masochism again. Artichokes would just be something I didn't



Ben Mims/Los Angeles Times-TNS

Canned artichokes allow you to make delicious appetizers, like this elegant tart.

eat again, and I swore off cooking them unless forced to for work.

Of course, I learned later that you can boil or steam the whole thing and break off the petals with ease, one by one, to dip in butter or mayonnaise, but

even that seemed like too much work to someone not raised on the practice. And as much as I now understand the value of the work that goes into preparing them for cooking, I place a higher value on the time it takes to cook al-

most anything else. That said, I'll gladly spend hours picking minuscule nibbles of meat from crawfish shells, so we all have our contradictions.

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