

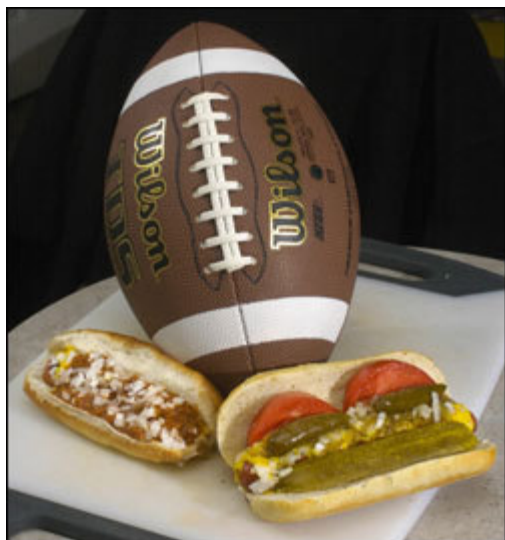
Haute Doggies

Let's be frank: Chicago and Indy part ways over the perfect hot dog

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Super Bowl Sunday isn't just about football. It's also about food. Try making hot dogs, Indianapolis-style, with its Coney sauce, or Chicago-style, piled with vegetables. (Journal Photo by David Rolfe)

Need help picking a team to root for Sunday during Super Bowl XLI? Pick a hot dog. Chicago and Indianapolis - home to the Bears and Colts - are both big on hot dogs. But they are worlds apart in the dogs they use and how they dress them.

"They're two completely different hot dogs," said Michael Stern, a cookbook author and food writer, in a telephone interview from his home in Redding, Conn., last week.

Stern confessed that he was born "without a sports-fan gene" in his body, but he and his wife, Jane, have made a living of ferreting out signature dishes of cities across the country for their book *Roadfood* and columns in *Gourmet* magazine.

"The foods of Chicago and Indianapolis are dear to my heart," Stern said. "They are both excellent eating cities."

Though Chicago's most popular street food is the Italian beef sandwich, and Indianapolis is known for fried chicken and

pork-tenderloin sandwiches. But their hot dogs make for a real lesson in contrasts.

Chicago's hot dogs are big, all-beef franks. Indianapolis' are smaller pork franks. An Indianapolis dog is "very different from the muscular beef dog you get in Chicago," Stern said.

The toppings set them apart even more.

Chicago is a serious contender for the No. 1 hot dog in the United States, Stern said.

Served on a steamed poppy-seed bun, a Chicago dog served with the works is typically referred to as "dragged through the garden."

The dog is usually steamed, but sometimes it's grilled.

Toppings include mustard, sliced tomatoes, dill-pickle spears, sweet-pickle relish, celery salt and "sport" peppers. The latter are elongated, medium-hot pickled peppers that are hard to find outside of the Midwest. Onions are optional.

This is a doozie, a gloriously messy affair in which the meat is almost beside the point. It takes a good-size bun to hold all the toppings, which create an explosion of juicy, spicy and tangy sensations in the mouth.

Most Chicago vendors serve Vienna-brand beef dogs. Mitch Kite and Kevin Sherfinski, two Chicago hot-dog lovers who run a Web site called www.hotdogchicagostyle.com, did a taste test of various

brands. Of ones readily available in our area, Oscar Mayer Deli Style Beef Franks and Nathan's Beef Franks got good marks - and were even favored over Vienna.

Makers of the Coney dog that is popular in Indianapolis and other parts of the country don't seem as particular about the brand, but it must be pork. The plain bun is steamed or broiled, and the dog can be steamed, boiled or grilled.

What really distinguishes a Coney dog is the chili - actually, some people insist it's not chili at all but a "sauce" made with finely ground beef and spices. "It's so finely ground that it's almost sandy in texture," Stern said. "And it's spicy, but not ferociously so."

Coney dogs also come with mustard and a topping of diced raw onions.

A Coney looks a lot like a Carolina dog without the slaw. But it tastes significantly different because the sauce offers a sweet and sour taste that's a bit like chili, sloppy joe's and barbecue sauce rolled into one.

"In Chicago, a Coney dog would be run out of town on a rail," Stern said. "And I don't know that anyone in Indianapolis would even recognize the Chicago dog dragged through the garden as a hot dog."

Chicago Hot Dog

This recipe is based on information at www.hotdogchicagostyle.com.

Re-creating a Chicago dog that's "dragged through the garden" poses some challenges in this area. First is the poppy-seed bun, which needs to be a bit larger than the standard hot dog bun to hold all the toppings. A long, soft sandwich or deli roll (bigger than a hot-dog bun but smaller than a hoagie roll) works best, but these are hard to find with poppy seeds. A way to improvise is to find partially baked rolls in the bakery or freezer section of the supermarket. Brush them lightly with water, then roll in poppy seeds and bake as directed. Or just get plain or sesame-seed sandwich or deli rolls; the dogs won't be authentic Chicago dogs, but they'll still be good.

The second challenge is the "sport" peppers, a type of pickled serrano pepper not sold around here. Use the best pickled serrano peppers available - jarred are best but canned work in a pinch. Kite and Sherfinski of hotdogchicagostyle.com said that hot banana peppers could be substituted, but they are more sour than sport peppers. They consider pickled jalapenos too hot - not many people would brave two whole jalapenos on a hot dog.

Large all-beef franks

Poppy-seed buns

Sweet pickle relish

Yellow mustard

Dill pickle spears

Chopped white onion (optional)

Ripe tomato, cut into wedges

Sport peppers or pickled serrano peppers, whole

Celery salt

1. Steam or grill the franks.
 2. Lightly steam the buns until soft and moist but not soggy. This can be done in a microwave by wrapping them in paper towels and heating for about 1 minute. Or use a steamer insert in a pot for 20 to 30 seconds - and watch it carefully to make sure the buns don't get soggy.
 3. Place one frank on a bun. Squirt or spread mustard on the frank, from one end to the other. Add a generous amount of relish. Sprinkle onions, if using, on the dog. Place two tomato wedges end to end between the dog and the top part of the bun. Place one pickle spear between the dog and the bottom of the bun. Place two whole peppers on top of the dog. Sprinkle with a dash of celery salt.
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Coney Dog

Pork franks

Plain hot-dog buns

Yellow mustard

Coney sauce (recipe below)

Diced onions

1. Steam or grill the franks. Run the buns under the broiler until lightly brown, or steam by wrapping with paper towels and placing in microwave for about 1 minute, or until hot and soft, but not soggy. Or use a steamer insert in a pot for 20 to 30 seconds - and watch it carefully to make sure the buns don't get soggy.
2. Place dog in bun. Squirt or spread with mustard. Top dog from end to end with some chili. Sprinkle onions on top.

Coney Dog Sauce

Recipes for this sauce - which is basically a chili - vary, but it should always be fine-textured, so that the ground beef is reduced to small granules. This can be done by using a hand-held blender in the pot or by transferring the cooked mixture to a food processor. This recipe is adapted from one at www.recipehut.homestead.com.

1/2 pound ground chuck

1 cup ketchup

1 1/2 cups water

1/4 cup pickle relish

1/4 cup finely grated fresh onion or 1 tablespoon instant minced onion

1/2 teaspoon dry mustard or 1 tablespoon prepared yellow mustard

1 tablespoon chili powder

1 tablespoon sugar plus 1 tablespoon vinegar OR 3 tablespoons root beer

1/2 teaspoon salt

Pinch of cayenne pepper or dash of hot-pepper sauce

1. Brown the meat in a skillet. Then add all of the other ingredients and stir well. Bring to a simmer, then reduce heat and simmer 30 minutes to an hour, until flavors are well-blended and sauce is quite thick. If sauce becomes so thick that it sticks to the pan, add a little water and reduce heat.

2. Slightly puree the meat in the pan by using a hand-held blender, or transfer to a food processor and process for a few seconds until finely textured.



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