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Bacon jamming

A bacon condiment? Why didn't someone think of that before



KEITH BEATY PHOTOS/TORONTO STAR

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 FOOD EDITOR

Bored of your usual condiments? Help yourself to bacon jam.

Josh Henderson, the Seattle chef behind Skillet Street Food, flew in last week to promote the launch of his savoury Skillet Original Bacon Spread at All the Best Fine Foods.

Then Loblaws provided a sneak peak of citrusy-sweet Bacon Marmalade, which should hit shelves in select stores in mid-October.

"I can't believe bacon jam hasn't been done before commercially," said Alison Fryer, manager of the Cookbook Store. "The possibilities are endless. I mean bacon is a food group, isn't it?"

She sampled Skillet's version and declared it "awesome."

All the Best Fine Foods threw a public party for Skillet, inviting Toronto chefs Claudio Aprile of Origin/Colborne Lane, Chris McDonald of Cava/Xococava, and Nick auf der Mauer of Porchetta & Co. to cook with it alongside Henderson.

The four chefs set up cooking stations in the Yonge St. shop and

Seattle chef Josh Henderson, left, creator of Skillet Original Bacon Spread, hands out beef sliders topped with his bacon spread at All the Best Fine Foods in Toronto.

handed out samples to customers.

Aprile put bacon jam dumpling in a puréed Jerusalem artichoke soup with Champagne-vinegar, poached garlic scapes and a dollop of caviar.

"We're trying an ingredient that's kind of low-brow and adding a bit of a contradiction to it," he explained.

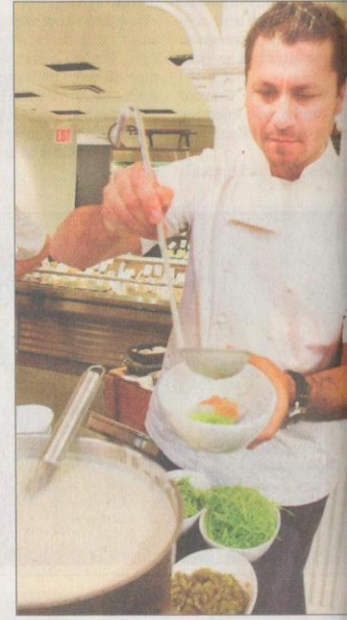
McDonald stuffed deep-fried Spanish croquetas with bacon jam and smoky Blue Haze cheese.

"We've used bacon in wacky ways before," he said, citing his maple bacon toffee and maple bacon ice cream as examples.

Auf der Mauer used bacon jam in a panini with his signature porchetta and crackling plus aged white cheddar.

"It's a new product and there's lots of buzz," he said. "It's pork. It's pretty versatile."

BACON continued on E6



KEITH BEATY PHOTOS/TORONTO STAR

Nick Auf der Mauer, left, of Porchetta & Co., puts bacon jam into a Panini. Chris McDonald, centre, of Cava and Xococava, uses the spread in croquettes with blue cheese. Claudio Aprile, right, of Origin, pairs bacon jam dumplings with Jerusalem artichoke soup topped with caviar.

'They think jam needs to have fruit'

BACON from E1

Jane Rodmell, who owns All the Best Fine Foods and is a cookbook author, created the free sampling to show people different ways to use bacon jam. She also handed out recipes.

"This would be wonderful with lightly smashed potatoes cooked in their skins," Rodmell said.

Enjoying the company of fellow chefs, Henderson served bacon jam on beef sliders with blue and brie cheese plus arugula.

While he (and everyone else) calls his creation bacon jam, it's labelled as a spread due to American and Canadian labelling laws.

"They think jam needs to have fruit in it," he said with a shrug.

"We think they're nuts."

Henderson started Skillet Street Food in a vintage Airstream trailer

in 2007 serving American-inspired lunches. This year he opened a bricks-and-mortar Skillet diner.

So many people bugged Henderson for his bacon jam that he worked on jarring it and then figured out how to sell it commercially.

It caught the attention of Concord-based food distributor Peter Neal of Neal Brothers Foods and Ian Gordon, senior vice-president of Loblaw Brands, in January at the Winter Fancy Food Show in San Francisco.

"We walked away wondering how can we do something similar to that but completely make it our own and make it shelf stable," said Loblaw's product developer Jackie Houghman, who handled the new President's Choice black label line of gourmet products.

PC black label Bacon Marmalade

will sell for \$4.99 for a 370-millilitre jar.

Bacon is the seventh ingredient after sugar, water, orange peel, sautéed onion, balsamic vinegar of Modena and orange juice concentrate. It also contains bacon seasoning. It's somewhat more attractive and tastes overwhelmingly of orange.

Neal, meanwhile, went on to bring Skillet's bacon jam to more than 50 shops across Ontario and Quebec.

Skillet's version retails for about \$19.99 for a 300-gram jar. Smoked bacon is listed as the first ingredient and it also contains onion, balsamic vinegar, brown sugar, salt and black pepper. It's puréed, very brown and not particularly attractive, but tastes overwhelmingly of bacon.

Henderson says his product is 70 per cent smoky bacon that he gets from Neuske's smokehouse in Wisconsin.

"In something like this you need an intense bacon," he said.

Henderson figures bacon's enduring appeal has much to do with nostalgia for pancakes and Saturday morning breakfasts.

He's working on new bacon jam flavours, such as fennel and black pepper, and brown sugar-apple.

But just as bacon jam gets its moment in Canada, America moves on to mayonnaise.

Empire Mayonnaise Co. is poised to open in Brooklyn with a starting roster of 40 specialty mayo flavours including coffee, smoked paprika, foie gras and mushroom.

Co-owner Elizabeth Valleau told Grub Street New York that the city is in the grips of a "condiment revolution" but "nobody is coming in and owning the mayonnaise."

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RECIPE

Jane Rodmell, cookbook author and owner of All the Best Fine Foods at 1101 Yonge St., created this dish to showcase Skillet Original Bacon Spread. The store now carries the spread.

Skillet Bacon Chicken With Mushrooms

✓ Star Tested

1 tbsp (15 mL) each: extra-virgin olive oil, butter

4 whole chicken legs
Kosher or sea salt, freshly ground black pepper

1 tbsp (15 mL) chopped fresh rosemary

1/2 lb (225 g) cremini mushrooms, quartered

1/2 cup (125 mL) each: red wine, chicken stock

2 tbsp (30 mL) bacon spread/jam (purchased or homemade)

Fresh lemon juice to taste

In large skillet, heat oil and butter over medium-high.

Season chicken lightly with salt and pepper. Add to pan, skin side down. Brown well, about 10 minutes per side. Reduce heat to medi-



KEN RODMELL PHOTO

Stir a little bacon spread/jam into the pan juices of this chicken (along with wine and stock) and you've got a sensational dinner.

um. Add rosemary and mushrooms.

Cook, stirring occasionally, until mushrooms are evenly cooked and chicken is cooked through, about 10 to 15 minutes.

Remove chicken and mushrooms to plate. Discard excess fat from pan. Add wine and stock. Bring to boil over medium heat, stirring.

Simmer 1 to 2 minutes, until liquid thickens slightly. Stir in bacon jam. Cook, stirring, 1 minute. Taste; sharpen flavour with lemon juice. Return chicken and mushrooms to pan. Heat briefly, stirring to coat with sauce.

Makes 4 servings.

Star-tested by Jennifer Bain
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RECIPE

Skillet Street Food chef Josh Henderson kindly offered up this basic bacon jam recipe when visiting Toronto from Seattle last week. The key is buying a slab of top-quality bacon from a butcher. Since I'm not bound by government labeling laws, I'm calling this a jam instead of a spread.

Bacon Jam

✓ Star Tested

2-lb (1-kg) piece smoked bacon, diced

1 yellow onion, diced

1/4 cup (60 mL) each: balsamic vinegar, brown sugar

1 tsp (5 mL) freshly ground black pepper

1/2 tsp (2 mL) coarse kosher salt

Place bacon in large skillet (preferably cast iron) over medium-low

heat. Slowly render out fat, stirring often.

Once you have 1 tbsp (15 mL) bacon fat, place in medium skillet over medium heat. Add onion. Cook, stirring often, 15 minutes until lightly browned.

Add vinegar, sugar, pepper and salt. Cook, stirring, 5 minutes.

Add onion mixture to bacon in skillet. Reduce heat to low. Cook, stirring occasionally, until most of moisture has been absorbed, about 3 hours. (If liquid doesn't evaporate, raise heat slightly and cook, stirring often, until it does.)

Remove from heat. Purée. Cool to room temperature. Transfer to sealed container and refrigerate overnight before serving. Refrigerate up to 3 weeks.

Makes about 2 cups (500 mL).

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