



Bountiful Bumpers: THE ART OF TASTY TAILGATING

By Rebecca Lang

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For those who have a greater love of food than a passion for sports, tailgating is the most important event occurring on game day. Without a proper tailgate party, no fan can be full and happy when the kickoff finally occurs. Tailgating has been part of football for over one hundred years. It's believed that in the 19th century, after traveling to games in carriages, fans were so hungry upon arrival that they cooked out near the horses' *tail ends*. Thus, tailgating had its start.

Truly talented tailgaters can be seen with lavish tables covered in linens in the team colors and sometimes even the family silver. Flowers on the table are usually, once again, arranged by team color and the spread of food is as impressive as any Southern Sunday dinner. A few tailgates even have bartenders pouring quality liquors and beer that doesn't come in cans. An invitation to these pre-game get-togethers is deemed a touchdown in the tailgating league.

The Southern tailgate staples of pimento cheese, chicken salad, and cucumber sandwiches can be livened up with a few new additions to the selection. Remember that tailgate food will need to sit out for a while and should be small enough that it can be enjoyed standing up while listening to the pre-game show. Because packing up and leaving usually takes place early in the morning, make-ahead recipes are a necessity. Then, after simply putting a few finishing touches on the food during set-up, the party can begin.

Cheering through the game builds up quite an appetite, so be ready to reassemble the buffet when the score is final. A good cooler is the most important accessory for game day. Don't forget to pack all perishable food back in the cooler before walking to the game. This way, the tailgate can simply pick up where it left off before the clock started on the scoreboard. After all, no one wants to drive home hungry, no matter who won the game. A good tailgate can make any game day better. If you're like me, you won't remember the score, but you'll certainly remember the food.

TAILGATING RECIPES FROM REBECCA LANG



Pecan-Smoked Trout Spread

Yield: 2 cups

1/2 pound pecan-smoked trout fillets
8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
1/3 cup sour cream
juice of 1 lemon
2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1/4 teaspoon hot sauce
Fresh dill, optional

Peel skin from each trout fillet. Finely chop trout and combine with remaining ingredients in a medium mixing bowl. Cover and chill for one hour. Transfer to a serving bowl and garnish with fresh dill if desired. Since the weather can still be on the warm side during football season, we recommend serving this spread in a bowl resting in another bowl filled with ice.

Serve with crackers or toast points.

Food Editor's Note: Pecan-smoked trout can be found in large grocery stores in the same section as smoked salmon. We like the Woodsmoke Provisions brand, a high-quality product made right here in Atlanta.

Chicken Skewers with Tomato-Basil Dipping Sauce

Yield: 12 appetizer portions and 1 1/2 cups sauce

Tomato-Basil Dipping Sauce

1 cup seeded, chopped tomatoes
1 cup fresh chopped basil
1/4 cup red wine vinegar
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
3 cloves garlic, chopped
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1 cup olive oil
salt and pepper to taste

Chicken Skewers

4 boneless skinless chicken breasts
1/4 cup olive oil
salt and pepper to taste
long bamboo skewers, for grilling

For the Tomato-Basil Dipping Sauce

Combine first six ingredients in food processor or blender and process until smooth. Then slowly add oil while processing. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Set aside. The sauce can be made up to two days in advance and refrigerated.

For the Chicken Skewers

Preheat grill over medium-high heat. Cut each chicken breast into three strips. If the chicken breasts you are using still have the tenderloin attached, trim it off to make a fourth strip and increase the yield by four. Weave each chicken strip onto a bamboo skewer. Lightly brush chicken with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Grill chicken for three to five minutes per side, or until cooked through. The chicken can be grilled the day before and stored in air-tight plastic containers that can be put straight into the cooler on game day.

To Serve

Arrange chicken on a platter and serve with dipping sauce on the side. Any leftover sauce makes a terrific salad dressing.

tip:

Soak bamboo skewers to avoid burning on the grill.



Food Editor's Note:

If we've whet your appetite and you're looking for more tasty tailgate ideas, super-star chef Mario Batali's new book *Mario Tailgates NASCAR Style* (Sporting News Books, 2005) should get your creative engines running.



Roasted Pepper Crostini

Yield: 30

1 baguette
1/4 cup olive oil
4 ounces goat cheese
freshly ground pepper
1 1/2 cups roasted red bell pepper strips
2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Cut baguette into 1/2-inch slices. Brush slices with olive oil and arrange on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake for five minutes or until slightly browned. Turn over slices and bake for additional three to five minutes. Transfer slices to a platter.

Spread goat cheese on one side of each slice and sprinkle with pepper. Top each slice with two to three slices of roasted pepper. Sprinkle oregano over peppers. If making ahead, store crostini (without the toppings) in an air-tight plastic container and assemble before serving.

The Perfect Blonde Bar

Yield: 16 bars

1 1/4 cups graham cracker crumbs
1/3 cup melted butter
1/4 cup sugar
2 cups light brown sugar, packed
3/4 cup butter
3 large eggs
2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 cup pine nuts
(may substitute with lightly chopped macadamia nuts)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a 13 x 9-inch pan with foil. Grease foil.

In a mixing bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs, melted butter, and sugar. Press evenly into bottom of prepared pan. Combine brown sugar and butter in a heavy saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until butter melts. Remove pan from heat.

Add eggs to brown sugar mixture, one at a time, stirring with each addition. In a separate bowl, combine flour, baking powder, and salt. Add to brown sugar mixture. Stir or whisk until mixture is combined and no lumps remain. Stir in vanilla extract and pine nuts. Work quickly to pour batter over graham cracker crust.

Bake at 350 degrees for 40 minutes. Cool completely in pan on a wire rack.

Once cool, lift foil out of pan and slice into 16 squares.



Early bird tailgating gatherings can kick off with a sweet beginning thanks to Krispy Kreme and their new football shaped doughnuts – they can even be ordered in your favorite team's colors.

Tailgating Tips

According to Affairs to Remember, an Atlanta catering company

Food and Menu Planning

Create “mobile” food so you and your friends can visit other tailgating parties and not miss a bite. Slice open the side of individual bags of corn chips and offer chili, cheese, onion, sour cream and other condiments that guests can add to their bag.

Or, put brownie wedges on a popsicle stick, dip in chocolate and sprinkle with nuts, cookie pieces or crumbled candy bars.

Food Safety Tips

Bring antibacterial cleaners to wipe down surfaces.

Freeze plastic bottles of water. Use them in the cooler for food storage; then later use the melted water for cleanup.

Beverage Tips

Make sure you have plenty of water and nonalcoholic offerings for tailgaters of all ages.

Clean Up

Use disposable plates, forks, and napkins for easy clean up.

Have foil on hand to wrap up hot coals or ashes if you'll be grilling.





1. Who cares if your team is losing if you can snuggle up in this luxurious **Merino wool blanket** from Zambaiti.
2. Deliver your favorite bottle in style with these **leather wine holders** with bold stitching, available in black and tan. 3. This luxurious **orange leather basket** with buckle handle makes the perfect sturdy receptacle for loads of tailgating supplies. Little Red Riding Hood never had it so good! 4. Cane handles lend a casual air to this **silver-plated champagne bucket** by Lappas that would be welcome at any party. 5. No tailgating party would be complete without trays full of goodies for wandering guests. **Leather square trays with pony skin linings** are made exclusively for Owen Lawrence. Products seen on this page available at Owen Lawrence. 404/869-7360.