



Brats In Beer

It's the soul food of Wisconsin, or so claims the Bratwurst Page, a site created by Jim Schroeder that is devoted to the gustatory pleasures of the Badger State. Brats cooked in beer offer sustenance for tailgates, picnics, barbecues and all kinds of parties. There's even a Bratwurst Hall of Fame in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

Though most Wisconsin natives know that bratwurst should be cooked in pale, fizzy pilsner-style lagers or, as Schroeder advises, "the cheapest beer available," I ventured into new territory by simmering brats in craft beers. Always the subversive chef, I tried adding spices and other sauces, too-strictly verboten, according to Schroeder.

"Just use beer and onions," says Schroeder. "There's no need for anything else."

The basic technique for grilling beer brats is to slowly heat the brats in beer in a large pan set over the grill. Though some people talk about brats boiled in beer, actually letting the beer come to a rolling boil is awful treatment for the tender fresh wursts. Boiled brats will burst out of their casings, and that's an ugly sight. Such cruelty to encased meats can be avoided. The best treatment is a very hot bath in beer, with just a few bubbles popping to the surface to show the heat is still going.

After about 20 minutes in the hot beer bath, the brats turn a milky-gray color. Use tongs to place the brats on the grill over

medium heat. Avoid piercing the casings, or the juices will run out. How hot should the grill be? Schroeder says, "A good test is to hold your hand, palm down, 2 inches above the grate. If you can hold it there for 4 to 5 seconds, the coals are just right. If you can still see a red glow, it's too early to start cooking."

Rotate the brats often on the grill. One bratmeister I know uses his bare hands to rotate the brats, but I prefer tongs. The brats should brown for at least 10 minutes before serving. You can serve the brat hot and crisp-browned from the grill. Or, if serving a crowd, make a holding sauce of more beer, onions and a few tablespoons of butter. If you put the grilled brats in a holding sauce, the casings turn soft and some of the juices leach into the sauce.

"In Sheboygan, they are persnickety about what you put on a brat," says Schroeder. "Raw onion, brown mustard, pickles and two brats on a round hard roll side by side. That's it, although there are heretics even in Sheboygan who use ketchup." Elsewhere, brats are bedecked in sauerkraut, ketchup, barbecue sauce and even yellow mustard.

Here are a half-dozen different ways to prepare bratwurst in craft beer, with ingredients bound to make a bratmeister cringe, but delicious nonetheless.



Herbed Ale Brats

- 8 fresh bratwursts
- 1/3 cup minced onion
- 2 bottles (24 ounces) pale ale (not too hoppy)
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons dill pickle relish
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon minced parsley
- 1 tablespoon minced marjoram
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- Spicy brown mustard

1. Simmer brats with 14 to 16 ounces pale ale (just enough to cover) and onion in a deep skillet placed over hot grill. After 20 minutes, remove from beer and place brats on grill to brown. Discard the beer and onions used to cook brats.

2. In a medium saucepan, heat flour and butter until a roux forms (light brown paste). Slowly whisk in 1 cup pale ale, and simmer 2 minutes. Stir in relish, garlic, parsley, marjoram, salt and pepper. Simmer, stirring often, until sauce is thickened.

3. Dip and roll brats in herb sauce and serve on toasted or grilled buns with spicy brown or Dijon mustard.

Stout Spiced Brats

- 8 fresh bratwursts
- 2 bottles (12 ounces each) stout or dark lager of choice
- 2 tablespoons minced onion
- 1/2 cup prepared Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons molasses
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon cloves
- Pinch ground white pepper

1. Simmer brats with 12 to 16 ounces stout (enough to cover) and onion in a deep pan over medium heat. After 20 minutes, remove brats from the stout and place on grill to brown.

2. Add mustard, molasses, Worcestershire sauce, nutmeg and cloves to the stout mixture. Simmer in skillet until thickened and reduced by half. Dip and roll brats in sauce before placing on buns and serving. Serve with additional stout or barley wine.



Amber Ale Brats with Onion & Sauerkraut

- 8 fresh bratwursts
- 2 bottles (24 ounces) amber ale
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 2 cups sauerkraut
- 2 large yellow onions, peeled and sliced
- 2 tablespoons applesauce
- 1 to 2 teaspoons fennel seed (to taste)
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper, or more to taste
- 1 tablespoon molasses

1. Simmer brats with 14 to 16 ounces amber ale (just enough to cover) and minced garlic in a deep skillet placed over hot grill. After 20 minutes, remove from beer and place brats on grill to brown.

2. Mix remaining amber ale, sauerkraut, onions, applesauce, fennel seed, pepper and molasses in skillet placed over medium heat. Simmer uncovered until most of the ale has reduced and onions are very soft. Serve brats on toasted or grilled buns with Dijon mustard, topped with several spoonfuls of well-drained sauerkraut and onion mixture.



Gold and Green Brats

- 8 fresh bratwursts
- 16 ounces amber ale
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 yellow bell pepper
- 1 green bell pepper
- ½ cup minced onion
- 1 teaspoon thyme
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

1. Simmer brats with 14 to 16 ounces amber ale (just enough to cover) and minced garlic in a deep skillet placed over hot grill.

2. Prepare a large sheet of heavy-duty foil by spraying it with nonstick cooking spray. Slice and core peppers and toss with onion, thyme, salt, red pepper flakes and olive oil. Mound vegetable mixture on the foil and roll up edges, crimping to seal. Place foil pack on grill.

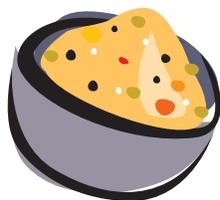
3. After 20 minutes in ale and garlic mixture, remove brats from beer and place on grill to brown. Turn the foil pack several times. When brats are browned, carefully slide foil pack onto a platter and use tongs to unroll foil. Let a corner open first and stand back to avoid steam hitting your face or hands. Serve brats with a spoonful of yellow and green pepper mixture on toasted buns.

Summertime Brats

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 cups sliced onion
- 12 ounces kolsch beer
- 1 teaspoon caraway seeds (or more, according to taste)
- 1 tablespoon brown mustard seeds
- 1 to 2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper, divided (according to taste)
- 6 to 8 fresh brats
- ½ cup minced scallion
- ½ cup diced tomato
- 1 teaspoon salt

1. Mix butter, onion, kolsch, caraway, mustard seeds and pepper in a large pot set over hot grill. Add brats and simmer. After 20 minutes, remove brats from the kolsch and place on grill to brown.

2. Use a slotted spoon to remove beery onions, and place in skillet. Add minced scallion and tomato; cook over medium heat until tomatoes just begin to release their juices. Season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper, and serve a spoonful of the tomato-onion mixture over bratwurst on toasted buns.



Custer's Bold Beer Brats

A great cook and generous recipe tester, Lee Custer enjoys cooking outdoors over real wood, sometimes in a grill and sometimes over open fires. Here's his riff on the best brats.

- 4 or more fresh bratwursts
- 1 sliced onion for every 4 brats
- 1 clove garlic for every 4 brats
- Ale or lager to cover the brats, at least 12 ounces
- 1 teaspoon hot sauce, or more to taste
- Spicy brown mustard

1. Simmer the brats in beer, onions and garlic for 20 minutes. Remove brats from simmering beer and reserve cooking liquid in pot over low heat. Place brats on prepared grill to brown.

2. Place brats back in warm beer and onion mixture. Cook on grill over medium heat for 15 to 20 minutes. Serve with hot sauce and strained onions and garlic on oversized buns with plenty of spicy brown mustard.

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Bratology

Q: Why discard the onions and beer used to cook brats?

A: It's your call, actually. I don't like the gray smidgens of brat bits that float in the beer, but many people adore the taste. Some cooks even use the brat-beer simmer water as the base for a bean soup or stew instead of stock.