

BIG LEAGUE CHEW

Pros to compete in wild rice hotdish eating contest

By Christa Lawler
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Darron Breeden has never eaten wild rice hotdish, but based on his research — recipes and YouTube videos — he believes he can probably eat 20 pounds in 8 minutes.



Breeden

“It looks relatively easy to eat,” Breeden, 30, said in a phone interview from Orange, Va., where he is a high school teacher. “With casseroles, there’s not much chewing involved.”



Esper

Breeden is the No. 5-ranked competitive eater in the world and is among the favorites for the title of Wild Rice Hotdish Eating Champion — a first-time contest that will be held at 3 p.m. June 22 at Fortune Bay Resort Casino in Tower, Minn.

The field, which typically includes about 12 entrants, is at capacity. Top prize is \$2,500.

Major League Eating, as stat-heavy as any audience-friendly sport, has about 80 events a year, including the biggest in the biz — Nathan’s Famous Fourth of July International Hot Dog Eating Contest. It keeps a 50-eater ranking of men and women on its website, a list that starts with Joey Chestnut, a 230-pound Californian who can eat 73.5 hot dogs, buns and all, in 10 minutes, and ends with No. 50, Alex Perez, a 40-something Texan nicknamed “The Moose” who once ate 112 Hooters wings in 10 minutes.

This is the third Major League Eating competition to be held at Fortune Bay. Geoff Esper, ranked No. 3 in the world, ate 30.5 Indian Tacos at the resort-casino to win the event in 2018 — bettering his mark from the previous year by 1.5 tacos.

He’s the favorite for the Wild Rice Hotdish Eating competition.

Wild Rice Hotdish, which will be prepared at Fortune Bay, is a natural pick for a food competition, according to Sam Barclay who said it was his destiny to work with Major League Eating.

“It’s obvious,” he said. “Hotdish is a great Minnesota staple. A family gathering without hotdish is a day without sunshine.”

Master of oysters

Breeden is going into the competition with a recent victory: In early June he ate a personal best 44 dozen oysters in 8 minutes at the Acme World Oyster Eating Championship in New Orleans. A television news story from WGNO, the local ABC affiliate, shows the defending champion with his face inches from the pan, shoveling oysters with a fork, meat hanging from his mouth.

“I won \$1,000, a sweet belt and bragging rights,” Breeden said.

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IF YOU GO

What: Wild Rice Hotdish-Eating Championship

When: 3 p.m. June 22

Where: Fortune Bay Resort Casino, 1430 Bois Forte Rd., Tower, Minn.



Photo courtesy of Emma Ambrosi
Fresh strawberries covered in fair-trade chocolate are sweet in every way.

Strawberry desserts new and old

In June, at the height of strawberry season, I eat strawberries almost every day. My favorite way to enjoy strawberries is plain. That’s one of the things I love about fruit — you just wash it and eat it.



BONNIE AMBROSI
The Vegan Cookbook Club

Recently, however, I was inspired to be a bit more creative with my strawberries and discovered two easy ways — one modern and one old-fashioned — to make these delightful berries even more scrumptious.

Chocolate-covered strawberries strike me as very trendy and chic — the antithesis of my personal style. But chocolate-covered strawberries are also quick, easy and healthful, which is exactly what I am into. You can make a batch of these beauties in 10 minutes.

I tested three different batches of chocolate-covered strawberries. (That was a very good day!) The first recipe calls for raw cacao powder. Cacao powder is simply ground-up raw cacao beans. Cocoa powder, on the other hand, is made from cacao that has been roasted at a high temperature and is usually treated with alkali. As you would expect, raw cacao retains more nutrients than cocoa, but you can use either one.

The cacao powder recipe creates a silky chocolatey coating that does not get brittle when it sets, so it doesn’t crack and fall apart when you bite into it. The taste is a nice combination of cocoa, coconut and nut butter. I used crunchy almond butter and liked the effect of little bits of almond in the chocolate glaze.

For my second and third batches, I used semisweet and bittersweet vegan chocolate chips. These created a thicker coating that set up harder, and the taste was pure chocolate. All of these recipes are easily doubled or tripled if you’re making enough for a party or just want to keep a bunch in your fridge.

If chocolate strawbs are stylish and impressive, strawberry shortcake is old-fashioned, homely, and comforting. Nowadays, you might spoon sliced strawberries over yellow sponge cake or a slice of angel food cake, but I consulted our copy of The Fannie Farmer Cookbook, 1965 edition (the original was published in 1896 by Fannie Merritt Farmer) and it says: “Old-fashioned shortcake is made with biscuit dough, not cake, and is served with unsweetened heavy cream, not whipped cream.” This old-timey dessert, easily veganized, won the complete approval of my teenage taste-tester and photographer, Emma. We fudged a bit and used sweetened coconut creamer. You can use unsweetened plant-based creamer or plant milk if you prefer.

Bonnie lives in Duluth and is an organizer of The Vegan Cookbook Club, which meets at 11:30 a.m. on the first Thursday of every month at Mount Royal Branch Library. Contact Ambrosi at bonnieambrosi@gmail.com.

Recipes can be found on page C3

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