

Bacon is Great on the Grill

By John Clarke

The big fatty phat burger/sausage roll

Who doesn't like the taste of bacon and the smell that comes from the kitchen when it is cooking? We like it on a burger, on top of a salad—some even like it in ice cream. So let's do something fun with bacon, hamburger and sausage, a triumvirate of tasty morsels that need to be in a whole new setup. The Fatty Phat Roll is thus born.

We all remember using bacon to cook meatloaf. In this slightly similar technique, we will wrap our meat in a woven bacon mat. It is much simpler to create than it may seem: just a slab of beautifully sliced bacon, some parchment paper and a few minutes of your time is all it takes to master this piece of meat art. So what are you waiting for? Grab some bacon and let's start weaving. There are different cuts of bacon to consider, too, but I prefer to use the thicker cuts because you get *more bacon*.

Step 1—Lay out 5, 6, or 7 slices of bacon, depending on the size of your bacon, horizontally, one slice under the other, on a sheet of parchment paper. (The goal is to have a bacon square the size of a flattened gallon zipper bag, as explained below.) Do not skip the parchment paper as it makes it easier to transfer your bacon weave when it is finished. A search for "bacon weave" on YouTube.com will produce many tutorials to demystify this technique. Also, SmokedMeatwithJef is an excellent YouTube channel for this and other grilling tips.

Step 2—Starting with the 2nd piece of horizontal bacon, fold back every other strip about the width of a piece of bacon to begin the weave. Place a strip vertically in the space and fold the horizontal pieces back into place.

Step 3—Now start with the first piece of horizontal bacon and fold back every other strip. It will become obvious that you must now work from the opposite side of your horizontal strips. Place a strip vertically in the space and fold the horizontal pieces back into place. Continue this pattern, alternating horizontal rows, to create a woven square of bacon. Set the weave aside while you prepare the internal part of the loaf.

Summer Intern Eli Valsing

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After years of traveling, she decided upon a career change, something that would keep her closer to home and family. In 2003, she became the business manager at Public Impact, an education policy and management firm in Chapel Hill. In 2011, she was hired by the College of Design at NC State University as the project coordinator for the Natural Learning Initiative. These positions required skills in office management, including fiscal planning, grant writing, personnel training, events planning, communications, marketing and project evaluation. In 2016, she entered the masters program in public administration at UNC where she was discovered by our Pine Knoll Shores town hall staff.

At the time of our conversation, Eli had been on board for just two weeks. During that time, her responsibilities had included preparing memos and working with the Parks and Recreation Committee (PARC) on the construction of a survey to gather information from residents on their preferences for future planning and funding. Eli attends town meetings and feels privileged to have been given the chance to serve in a small town that can provide her with opportunities to learn all aspects of local government.

Eli keeps fit by rising and running at 5:30 a.m. and also by working out at the Sports Center. She is an outdoor enthusiast who enjoys hiking and anything to do with the outdoors. In Carrboro, Eli and Chris grow garlic, peppers, peas, lettuce, beans and asparagus in raised beds. There are no tomatoes, however; after years of trying, they have surrendered to the squirrels. Chris continues to play with The Red Clay Ramblers as well as other local bands. In addition, he runs an electronic document compliance business for federal and state documents.

Admittedly, Eli is an unusual nickname. I had to ask in closing how someone named Elizabeth came to be called Eli. Much like her career, her nicknames have transitioned. Liz, Lizzie Lou, and Lou have all served time as Eli's monikers. Eli was given to her by a New York dancer in one of her shows. It suited her, she began using it, and she introduced herself as Eli when she met her husband. It now appears on all of her correspondence.

There are many types of sausage available, and I will leave it up to you to choose. Jimmy Dean or Neese's are good choices that can be found in most grocery stores. Also, the IGA on Highway 24 makes its own country sausage, which is very good. If you want to use sausage made by local farmers/butchers, stop by the Friendly Market on Bridges Street and Jennifer Lee will introduce you to their selections produced by Shoe Branch Farm ([facebook.com/shoebranchfarm](https://www.facebook.com/shoebranchfarm)) in Newport and Rainbow Meadows ([rmfpasturepuremeats.com](https://www.rmfpasturepuremeats.com)) in Snow Hill. Sausage from these companies is made from heritage hogs, which I consider to be a much better product and worth the higher cost. Italian sausage also works well.

Mix one pound of sausage with a similar amount of ground beef. Once you have the two well combined, place the meat in a one-gallon zipper bag. We want to shape the meat into a square slightly smaller than the bacon weave. If necessary, clip each of the corners of the plastic bag (opposite the zip edge) to allow air to escape as you use a rolling pin to form a square. (When making your bacon mat as described above, use the zipper bag as your size guide.) Once the meat has the desired shape and size, cut open the bag along the sides and transfer your meat mixture on top of the bacon weave.

Top off the meat mixture with some cooked chopped bacon, red onions, and possibly some pickled or freshly cut jalapeños (remove the seeds to cut down on the heat). Fresh spinach or other greens may also be added. Sprinkle generously with shredded sharp cheddar or pepper jack cheese, and apply a dusting of your favorite rub. I enjoy Old Bay seasoning on hamburger; give this a try or select a sweet rub if desired. Use a few tablespoons of a barbecue sauce in the center of the mix. Press the mix so that it is about an inch from the edges of the bacon weave.

Slowly lift the edge of the parchment paper and the weave to start making a log shape. Moving slowly down the weave, press and roll your mixture, keeping a firm hand as your roll and pull back the paper. You should finish with a nicely formed log. Wrap the log in the parchment paper (or plastic wrap), making sure to close the ends, and place in the refrigerator for approximately an hour.

While the meat chills, prepare the grill. We are going to smoke the log at 250 degrees for about 2-3 hours, so set your grill up for indirect cooking. If desired, you can add more of your favorite rub to the log before beginning to cook. Position the log on a wire rack with the bacon weave seam on the bottom. Place a disposable drip pan under the meat as there will be a fair amount of dripping grease.

You will need a good instant read meat thermometer. I prefer the ThermoWorks digital instant read model as it is very fast and accurate. When the internal temperature reaches 155 degrees, crank up the grill temperature to about 325 and cook for approximately 15 additional minutes to get the internal temperature to 165 degrees. Grill times vary, so check with the thermometer to gauge doneness. During this final stage of cooking you can baste the log with barbecue sauce if desired, but be mindful that sugar is a staple ingredient of most sauces and can easily burn. Use a Kansas City-style sauce or use any Eastern NC vinegar sauce and add either Heinz 57 or some Stubbs brand sauces to cut down on the sugar while keeping the flavor strong.

Once you have reached the proper temperature, remove the log from the grill and bring inside to rest for at least 10 minutes. Once rested, cut the log into hamburger bun-sized pieces and place on your rolls or simply eat like you would have eaten a nice slice of Mom's Wednesday night meatloaf. Pair with lettuce and tomato and a bit more onion or a nice garden salad if eating minus the bun. Enjoy.



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