

“Dressed up or down, nachos are a favorite for versatility, friendliness”

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With National Nacho Day coming up on Nov. 6, we've picked our favorite nacho recipes, including the barbecue tofu nachos at R.P. Tracks. The tofu is pan fried until just crispy and soaked in barbecue sauce.

Common ingredients are ground beef, chicken, jalapenos, peppers, onions, salsa, guacamole, sour cream, lettuce, tomatoes, olives and refried beans. But the inventive soul can go way further.

Wally Joe is about as inventive as they come. The executive chef at the Brushmark Restaurant and formerly of the restaurant on Sanderlin that bore his name is one of half a dozen local chefs who shared their insights into the glorious nacho.

"For me, if I'm making it for a party, it's got to be a fun dish," he says. Fun, yes, and with bold flavors.

Like tuna.

"I don't like things that are ordinary, run-of-the-mill stuff," Joe says. "I like to give it a little twist."

No kidding -- the tuna nachos were on his bar menu for a while and he still turns them out for banquets and parties at the Brushmark. And nothing says "Go Griz!" like a hearty nacho dish with seaweed, pickled ginger, sambal oelek and some sushi grade tuna.

Taking a more traditional approach is Jackson Kramer of Interim, the restaurant that occupies the Sanderlin site where Wally Joe -- who Kramer cites as a mentor -- once held forth.

Behold the nacho, and what we're talking here is not merely the fried tortilla chip.

We mean to dip deeply into the concoctions that may be called appetizers or dishes or big honkin' chili-bean-cheese-jalapeno-tomato mountains that can engulf entire sports parties.

But first, a modest history review. Various sources pretty much agree that in 1943, Ignacio 'Nacho' Anaya, invented the dish -- melted cheese on chips with jalapenos on top -- at the Victory Club in Piedras Negras, Mexico. It became well known in Texas, but got national recognition thanks to Howard Cosell who discovered it in the mid-1970s. The garrulous sports-caster liked the dish and loved the word, so he talked about it incessantly on "Monday Night Football." Humble Howard's word of mouth launched the nacho into culinary stardom.

The thing about nachos is that they're so friendly; not only as a social munchie, but because there are so many ways you can configure them.

"Since I've been known to eat nachos as a meal and have made every type imaginable, I feel like an expert," Kramer says. "I like using the usual Tex-Mex ingredients like black or refried beans, hot peppers, cilantro, tomato and sour cream."

Hand grated cheese melts better, he says, and for the chips, he uses Santitas. "Nachos have got to have lots of toppings to be good with cheese being the most important," he says, noting that "using the broiler helps melt the cheese fast, but be careful not to burn the chips."

The Majestic Grille's Patrick Reilly asserts that "It's the chili," and serves up what he calls the Ultimate Chili Nachos. "It's all about the layering," he says, warning against having a big pile of dry chips.

Reilly likes shredded Monterey Jack on his Cadillac of nacho dishes that are given a nice exotic touch of class with some chopped fresh cilantro.

Memphis being a barbecue town, you should not be surprised this is where you'll find the guy who says he invented barbecue nachos.

Ernie Mellor of Hog Wild BBQ is that guy and he says, "The very first thing is the pulled pork. Our pork is much better because we prep the meat before it goes on the smoker -- it's falling off the bone."

The other key elements of a winning barbecue nacho dish are chips, barbecue sauce and cheese sauce.

"Our chips are actually herbed flour tortillas, not corn, and we fry those up," Mellor says. Then he recommends his own Hog Wild Killa' Wet Sauce followed by a good nacho cheese sauce.

The Red Rock Tavern has just opened and is so new that its grand opening isn't until Friday but Mike Miller, who has built a reputation with Patrick's, has a clear vision of his nacho dish.

The Mile High gets its name because the concoctions are double stacked. "We're always looking for ways to be unique," Miller says.

"We use a Colorado style chili with rich tomato sauce, kidney beans and Shiner bock beer." Other elements that make it tower above your average nacho dish are beef tenderloin cubes and a subtle touch of cinnamon in the chili. "It gives it a bit of sweet taste and the Shiner bock gives balance in terms of flavors," Miller says.

His barbecue nachos are based in his longtime devotion to the pig. "We smoke our own pork shoulder and use a house barbecue sauce."

Peter Moon, co-owner of R. P. Tracks, says that years ago some of his vegetarian staff were discussing tofu and he asked them to come up with something. The barbecue tofu nacho dish has become a popular part of the eclectic menu. With tofu in that and other dishes, Moon says, "We sell as much tofu as I sell ground beef."

R. P. Tracks is next to the University of Memphis campus and rejoices in its diversity. "What we pull off is a vegetarian sitting next to a hamburger eater and they're not killing each other," Moon says.

Recipes to follow...

Ultimate Chili Nachos

- 1 bag unsalted corn tortilla chips
- 2 cups chili
- 1 cup sliced pickled jalapenos or pepperoncini
- 2 cups shredded Monterey Jack cheese or cheese blend
- 1 cup diced tomatoes
- 1 tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 cup sour cream

Place a layer of chips in a 12-by-14 inch pan. Spoon one-third of the chili over the chips and sprinkle with one-third of the cheese and one-third of the peppers. Repeat to create three layers.

Bake in a 350 degree oven until the cheese is melted and bubbling.

Remove from oven and sprinkle with diced tomatoes and cilantro. Serve sour cream on the side.

For a vegetarian option, substitute two cans of pinto beans (well drained) for the chili.

Source: Patrick Reilly at The Majestic Grille

Barbecue Tofu Nachos

- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 1/4 cup of jalapeno peppers, diced (plus sliced ones for serving)
- 4 tbsp. cumin
- 4 tbsp. chili powder
- 1 tbsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tbsp. salt
- 3 cans of black beans
- 4 fresh diced tomatoes
- 8-10 1-inch cubes of fried tofu
- Barbecue sauce of your choice

Cook vegetables, add spices, add beans (puree half a can of beans to give the mixture a creamy consistency).

Dice medium-firm tofu and pan fry in a light oil until crispy. Soak in barbecue sauce after it's cooked.

Serve on chips with tomato and sour cream and additional jalapenos.

Source: Peter Moon of R.P. Tracks

Original BBQ Nachos

- 2 lbs. flour tortilla chips (recipe follows) or corn tortilla chips
- 2 lbs. pulled pork shoulder (recipe follows)
- 1 pint barbecue sauce
- 1 quart nacho cheese or queso sauce (recipe follows)
- 3 tbsp. of your favorite dry rub
- Hog Wild-Style flour tortilla chips:
 - 1 gallon vegetable or canola oil
 - 2 tbsp. kosher salt
 - 2 tbsp. of your favorite dry rub
- 24 (10-inch) flour tortillas
- Nacho cheese/queso sauce:
 - 1 lb. pasteurized cheese product (Velveeta)
 - 8 oz. shredded cheddar

8 oz. shredded Monterey Jack cheese
1 (14-oz.) can tomatoes with green chilies
1 tomato, diced
1/2 jalapeno pepper, finely diced
1/2 red onion, finely diced
2 green onions, chopped
1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 tbsp. ancho or chipotle (or other) ground chile pepper
Kosher salt
Real Memphis barbecue/pulled pork shoulder (Boston butt):
8-lb. Boston butt pork roast
16 oz. of your favorite marinade
5 oz. your favorite dry rub

Preheat a charcoal grill for indirect cooking to 225 to 250 degrees.

To prepare the meat: Inject the meat with marinade (Mellor recommends). Alternatively, you can also marinate the pork overnight in the refrigerator. Season pork generously with dry rub (Mellor recommends Hog Wild Special Dry Sauce). Place meat on grill and cook until the internal temperature is consistently 180 degrees for at least 1 hour; it will take about 8 hours. Remove meat from grill and let rest for at least 15 minutes. Pull the meat with your hands and remove any fat or gristle. Gently sprinkle pulled meat with dry rub and then toss like a salad.

To fry the flour tortillas: Place oil in a deep fryer or in a large, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven. Heat oil to 325 degrees.

Meanwhile, combine salt and dry rub in a small bowl. Cut tortillas into chip-sized triangles. When oil is 325 degrees, carefully add cut tortillas and deep fry for about 3 minutes, turning at least once until a light golden brown. Remove chips from oil and dust with salt-dry rub mixture.

Note: Mellor recommends Hog Wild Special dry sauce.

To make the nacho/queso sauce: Combine all ingredients in a double boiler and stir until melted. Season with salt, to taste.

To serve: Arrange chips on a large serving platter. Cover with barbecued pork shoulder. Top with barbecue sauce and then the cheese. Sprinkle generously with rub and serve immediately.

Notes: Mellor recommends Hog Wild Killa' wet sauce and Hog Wild Special dry sauce for the rub when wet and dry sauces are called for, and Hog Wild Hog Wash to inject the shoulder.)

Editor's note: You can buy prepared barbecue at your favorite barbecue restaurant.

Source: *Ernie Mellor of Hog Wild BBQ*

Grilled Chicken and Bacon Nachos

4 strips bacon, diced
1/2 red onion, julliened
2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and chopped
1 tomato, diced
2 chicken breasts, grilled and diced
1/2 can refried beans
Tortilla chips
1 lb. pepperjack cheese, grated by hand
1 avocado, diced
1/2 bunch cilantro, chopped
Sour cream
Siracha chili sauce

In a saute pan, add the bacon and turn burner on medium heat. Once the bacon has rendered about half way, add the onions and peppers. Cook until the bacon is crispy and onions have started to brown. Add the tomatoes and cooked chicken. Warm through and set aside.

In a small sauce pot, warm the refried beans with a little water to thin out and set aside. On an oven-safe plate, place a layer of chips to cover the entire plate. Add about a quarter of the cheese on top of the chips. Spoon the chicken and bacon mixture evenly over the chips. Add the refried beans in small spoonfuls all over. Spread the rest of the cheese on top.

Place the plate in a preheated oven on low broil and in about 1-2 minutes the cheese should be totally melted. While still warm, add the avocado, cilantro and sour cream. Drizzle a small amount of siracha chili sauce on top and enjoy.

Source: Jackson Kramer of Interim

Asian Spiced Tuna Nachos

8 sheets nori (dried seaweed sheets for sushi)
1 egg, beaten with a little water for a wash
Flour for dredging
Canola oil for deep frying
1 lb. sushi grade tuna
2 tbsp. soy sauce
1 tsp. sesame oil
1 tsp. black sesame seeds
1 tsp. sambal oeelek
1 tbsp. pickled ginger, finely chopped
1 tsp. minced chives
1 oz. wakame seaweed salad

Cut nori sheets into 3-inch triangles. Take 2 pieces of the nori triangles and brush one side only with the egg wash. Press the two egg-washed sides together. Dredge the triangles in flour and set aside. Repeat with the remaining nori triangles.

Heat the canola oil to 350 degrees. Fry the nori triangles in small batches until crisp. Drain on paper towels.

Dice the tuna into small cubes and place in a chilled mixing bowl.

Fold soy sauce into tuna followed by sesame oil. Add sesame seeds, sambal, and pickled ginger. Mix well. Mix in chives.

Place a small spoonful of the tuna mixture on top of each nori chip. Garnish each nacho with a little of the wakame seaweed. Serve as an elegant hors d'oeuvre with chilled sake or champagne. Serves 4 or more

Source: Wally Joe at Brushmark Restaurant