

Simple Tailgating Strategies

BY HEIDI STEVENS

Chicago Tribune

There's tailgating. And then there's tailgating.

"When I was at University of Florida, there were people who got there at 2:30 in the morning cooking a whole pig on a spit," says Taylor Mathis, author of "The Southern Tailgating Cookbook: A Game-Day Guide for Lovers of Food, Football and the South" (University of North Carolina Press). "It's great to see that kind of dedication, to get there 17 hours before kickoff."

Mathis saw dedication writ large during his gridiron-infused culinary tour of 35 college stadiums _ from a Halloween game at the University of Kentucky with mummy-shaped apple slices floating in cider, to a University of Washington crowd hosting a Midwestern fish fry with Great Lakes fish sent by their University of Michigan pals.

"One of my favorite things was seeing how creative people could get with themes," says the 28-year-old University of Wisconsin at Madison graduate.

Mathis devoted a chapter of his book to an "eat your competition" theme. (Beer can chicken when your rivals are birds; a mutton dish when Rams are the opposition; souped up hot dogs when you're facing a team of Bulldogs.)

"Take the disdain you feel toward the competition and channel it into a delicious and creative meal that will inspire your fellow fans and intimidate the opposition," he writes.

Some teams require more creativity than others.

"You're not going to eat tiger, obviously," he told us. "But you could make a red cocktail and call it tiger's blood."

Regardless of your theme _ or the number of tailgates under your belt _ let the food take center stage, he suggests.

"Go for quality over quantity," Mathis says. "Pick one or two great dishes and do them well."

Because once you walk into that stadium, greatness is up for grabs.

"You can't control how your team performs on the field," he says. "All you can do is throw the best pregame celebration possible."

Here are recipes to get your season started.

CHICKEN-SWEET POTATO KEBABS

Prep: 1 hour

Marinate: Overnight

Cook: 12-15 minutes

Makes: 12 kebabs

Note: Adapted from "The Southern Tailgating Cookbook" (University of North Carolina Press, \$30), by Taylor Mathis.

Chicken:

2 1/2 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar or white wine vinegar
1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon each: coarse ground black pepper, ground sage

1/4 cup olive oil

2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite-size cubes

Vegetables:

1 each: red bell pepper, yellow bell pepper, orange bell pepper

1 medium yellow onion

2 pounds sweet potatoes, peeled, cut into bite-size pieces, parboiled, cooled

1 tablespoon white balsamic vinegar or white wine vinegar

1/4 teaspoon each: salt, Dijon mustard, coarse ground black pepper

1/4 cup olive oil

For the chicken, whisk the vinegar, Worcestershire, mustard, salt, pepper and sage together in a bowl. Continue whisking while slowly pouring in the olive oil. Add chicken to a large zip-close plastic bag; pour in the marinade. Seal; refrigerate overnight.

For the vegetables, chop the peppers and onion into bite-size pieces. Add to a large zip-close plastic bag along with the sweet potatoes. Whisk the vinegar, salt, mustard and pepper together in a bowl. Continue whisking while drizzling in the olive oil. Pour over the vegetables. Seal; refrigerate overnight.

The next day, assemble the kebabs at home. (Soak wooden skewers in water for 30 minutes before using.) Alternate pieces of chicken, vegetables and sweet potatoes on 12 skewers. (Discard marinade.) Transfer the skewers in covered containers to your tailgate event.

Grill over medium-high heat, turning once, until the vegetables are softened and

the chicken is cooked, 12-15 minutes.

Nutrition information:

Per serving: 156 calories, 4 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 42 mg cholesterol, 13 g carbohydrates, 16 g protein, 87 mg sodium, 2 g fiber.

POBLANO STUFFED WITH CHORIZO, SHRIMP AND RICE

Prep: 1 hour

Cook: 45 minutes

Makes: 12 large peppers or about 50 small peppers

Notes: Adapted from a recipe from Guy Fieri's show "Guy's Big Bite" on the Food Network. We used mini sweet peppers, yielding appetizer-size bites for a crowd. Also, Fieri calls for lopping off the tops to stuff the peppers. We slit them along one side for easier stuffing and grilling.

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon oil

1/2 pound Mexican-style

chorizo, casings removed
1/2 red bell pepper, diced
1/2 green bell pepper, diced

1 jalapeno, minced
1 red onion, diced
2 tablespoons garlic, minced

1 cup short-grain rice
1 cup low-sodium chicken stock

1/2 cup each: white wine, water

12 large poblano chili peppers or about 50 small sweet peppers

1 pound cooked shelled shrimp, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

3/4 cup each, shredded: cheddar, Jack cheese

Heat oil and chorizo in a saucepan over medium-high heat; cook, 3 minutes. Add chopped peppers, jalapeno, onion and garlic; cook until softened. Add rice; cook, stirring to coat the rice with oil.

Stir in the chicken stock, wine and water; heat to a boil. Cover; reduce heat. Simmer, 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, place poblanos on a rimmed baking sheet; bake in 400 degree oven, 15 minutes. Allow to cool. Once cool, cut top off of the peppers or slit them down one side; remove ribs and seeds.

When rice is done, fluff with a fork; stir in shrimp. Taste for seasoning, adding more salt if needed. Stuff chilies with the rice mixture. Pack in covered containers.

On site, sprinkle exposed stuffing with the cheeses. Grill peppers over medium heat until heated through and cheese melts.

Nutrition information:
Per serving (for 12 servings): 156 calories, 4 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 42 mg cholesterol, 13 g carbohydrates, 16 g protein, 87 mg sodium, 2 g fiber.



Chicken-Sweet Potato Kebabs & Poblano Stuffed with Chorizo, Shrimp & Rice

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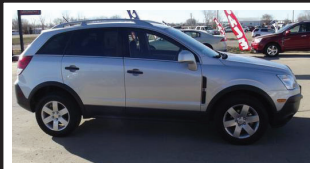
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2012 Chevrolet Captiva Sport

2n100, p. windows-doors-seat, Blue-tooth, xm, cd, alum whls, 6,524 miles

Was: \$24,995 NOW: \$17,993



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3n7, p. drs-win-seats-mirrors-sunroof, remote start, rear back up camera, htd leather seats, polished alum whls, all wheel drive, 12,900 miles, black

All Wheel Drive

Was: \$33,494 NOW: \$22,889

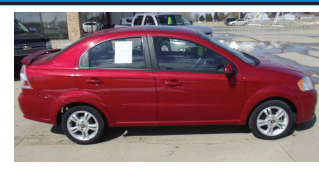


2012 Chevy Captiva LTZ

2n91, p. win-drs-sunroof-seat, leather rear-camera, polished alum whls, all whl drive, silver, low miles, all wheel drive

All Wheel Drive

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2011 Chevy Aveo LT

2rnt1, p. windows-doors, keyless, alum whls, leather, sunroof, maroon, 15,065 miles

Was: \$17,995 NOW: \$12,769



2012 Chevrolet Captiva LT

3n14, p. win-drs-seat-sunroof, remote start, rear camera, heated leather, polished alum whls, black, all wheel drive 11,217 miles,

All Wheel Drive

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2011 Mitsubishi Endeavor

1p112a, p. win-drs, keyless, alumwhls, am/fm/cd stereo, diamond white, 31,182 miles

All Wheel Drive

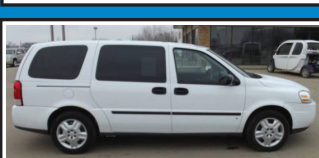
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2011 Dodge Grand Caravan

1p140, p. win-drs, dual slider, alum whls, cd, keyless, stow-n-go, p.lifgate, white

Was: \$23,995 NOW: \$17,988



2008 Chevy Uplander LS

2n89a, p. win-drs, cd, fwd, white, air, cruise, keyless remote, V6

Was: \$12,995 NOW: \$6,777



2009 GMC Acadia SLT

3n15a, auto, a/c, cruise, htd leather seats, am/fm cd satellite xm stereo, Blue-tooth, remote start, rear camera, tv/dvd rear entertainment, silver

All Wheel Drive

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2008 Chevy Silverado

2n45a, 4 wheel drive, p. win-drs, keyless, cd, alum whls, low miles, white, 5.3V8, chrome pkg

4 Wheel Drive

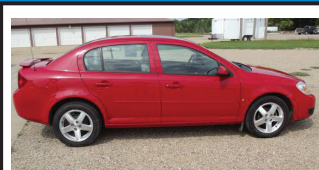
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2007 Ford 1/2 Crew 4x4 XLT

2n33c, Auto, air, cruise, p/ doors-windows-seats, am/fm cd stereo, polished alum whls, brand new tires, silver

Was: \$22,995 NOW: \$18,944



2006 Chevrolet Cobalt LT

3n29, 4 door, auto, A/C, cruise, tilt, p. doors, windows, mirrors, sunroof, am/fm cd stereo, rear deck spoiler, keyless remote, alum wheels

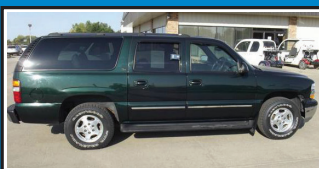
Was: \$8,999 NOW: \$5,988



2006 Chrysler Town & Country

2n97a, auto, dual power sliding doors, p. rear lift gate-doors-windows-seats-sunroof, navigation, tv/dvd rear entertainment, quad leather seats with 3rd seat bench, am/fm cd stereo, alum whls, silver

Was: \$10,995 NOW: \$7,665



2002 Chevy Suburban

1p81c, p. windows-doors, cd, heated leather, alum whls, green, 4 wheel drive

4 Wheel Drive

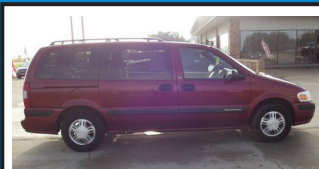
Was: \$12,995 NOW: \$6,449



2001 Ford Taurus SES

1p100e, auto, a/c, cruise, tilt, p. doors, windows, mirrors, seat, sunroof, keyless remote, 6-cylinder front wheel drive, alum wheels, rear deck spoiler, blue

Was: \$4,495 NOW: \$1,889



1999 Chevrolet Venture

2n106c, auto, a/c, cruise, p. doors, windows, mirrors, am/fm cd stereo, alum whls, maroon

Was: \$2,995 NOW: \$995



1999 Ford Explorer XLT 4x4

2n95b, 4 door, auto, air, cruise, tilt, p. doors-seat-windows, alum whls, maroon

Was: \$4,995 NOW: \$2,988



1996 Chevrolet Camaro

2n81d, 2-door, automatic, a/c, cruise, p. doors, windows, am/fm cd stereo, 3.8v6, alum whls, 108,449 miles

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3n2c, auto, a/c, cruise, p. doors, windows, am/fm cassette stereo, custom stripe pkg, alum wheels, white

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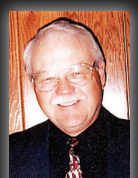
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