Hot dogs are not all the same

By Dan Myers, TheDailyMeal.com

The hot dog is one of the few foods that's nearly impossible to screw up. You heat it through, tuck it into a bun, squirt on some mustard, and call it lunch. But there's a big difference between not screwing something up and turning it into a paradigm-shifting, transcendental dining experience. And there are lots of hot dog stands, restaurants, and drive-ins out there that have the power to change your life.

The perennial grill mate to hamburgers, the hot dog sometimes gets the short end of the stick, charring at the back of the grill while juicy burgers are snatched up as soon as they hit the right temperature. But there's a science, if not an art form, behind constructing the perfect hot-dog-eating experience.



Hot dogs and their toppings are not always ordinary. Photo/Food Network

That experience was introduced more than 100 years ago, when German immigrants first brought over their frankfurters and started selling them on the cheap at amusement centers like Coney Island, arguably the epicenter for American hot dog consumption. Charles Feltman is widely considered to be the first person to have applied hot dog to bun, in order to avoid

needing to supply plates and silverware to customers at his sprawling Coney Island restaurant. Employee Nathan Handwerker opened his own hot dog stand a few blocks away in 1916 and sold them for less than Feltman, and became wildly popular (and remains so to this day).

The hot dog diaspora then began to take on a life of its own, as people began developing their own spice mixes and making their own hot dogs, and every region and group of people soon put its unique stamp on the snack. Greek immigrants in Michigan concocted a cinnamon-rich beef chili that came to be known as Coney sauce, but it has nothing to do with Coney Island, while “michigans” are big in Upstate New York but have nothing to do with the state. In Chicago they top all-beef dogs with mustard, fresh tomatoes, onions, sport peppers, bright green relish, dill pickles, and celery salt. Spicy Texas Red Hots are popular in New Jersey, but not in Texas, and the uncured, unsmoked White Hot is popular in upstate New York. And the regional variations go on and on.

According to a recent study by GrubHub, the country’s most popular hot dog topping is cheese, followed by chili, mustard, onion, and Chicago-style. Ketchup is further down on the list, and, surprisingly, sauerkraut is down toward the bottom.

On our quest to find America’s best hot dogs, we kept an eye out for drive-ins, restaurants, and roadside stands with a definitive style of hot dog and topping, one which embodies not only the region’s quirks but the particular tastes and culinary traditions of its people. We judged these hot dogs based on several criteria: the quality of the ingredients (sourcing the franks from well-known regional producers and using fresh-chopped onions, for example), the entire hot dog-eating experience, from driving up to placing your order to taking that first bite, as well as reputation among professional critics and online reviewers.

In order to be included in our list, the vendor needed to have

a trademark dog, with toppings that are unique and renowned. For example, Ben’s Chili Bowl in Washington, D.C., doesn’t just have a trademark frank (the half-smoke), it has a trademark topping (chili), is well-regarded by locals and professional eaters alike, and eating there is a memorable experience unto itself. For those reasons, it’s high on our list.

Sadly, there were some popular favorites that didn’t make the cut. While Lafayette Coney Island in Detroit ranks high, its modernized neighbor, American Coney Island, didn’t, because it lost much of its charm in the renovation. And while the pretzel dog at chain Auntie Anne’s has its loyal devotees, the experience isn’t exactly sublime.

Our list runs the gamut from ancient stands that have been serving the same exact product day in and day out for decades to gastropubs putting their unique stamp on the hot dog to a place where people wait in line for more than an hour for one topped with foie gras. There’s one constant thread between them, though: they’re the country’s best.

America’s best hot dogs:

1) Fat Johnnie’s Famous Red Hots, Chicago: Mighty Dog

2) Rutt’s Hut, Clifton, N.J.: The Ripper with Relish

3) Hot Doug’s, Chicago: Foie Gras and Sauternes Duck Sausage

4) Schaller’s Drive-In, Rochester, N.Y.: Meat Sauce, Mustard, Onions

5) Olneyville N.Y. System, North Providence, R.I.: NY System Dog

6) Superdawg, Chicago: Superdawg

7) Rawley’s Drive-In, Fairfield, Conn.: “The Works”

8) Katz’s Delicatessen, New York City: Mustard and Sauerkraut

9) Flo’s, Camp Neddick, Maine: Hot Dog with Mayo, Celery Salt, Relish

10) Dew Drop Inn, Mobile, Ala.: Dew Drop Dog.

Kentucky Derby is more than a horse race

By Sam Dean, Bon Appetite

As far as we’re concerned, the mint julep is as important to the Kentucky Derby as the horses, or the jockeys, or whatever it is everyone seems to be cheering about while we launch our faces into another leafy sprig of mint. It’s the quintessential Southern drink—the sweaty climate calls for a serious cool-down, and only a region with a sentimental attachment to its landed gentry would think to drink booze out of silver cups.

But man, what a name! “Schlep” is the only other (not totally obscure) word in the English language that ends in -lep, and even that wears its Yiddishness on its sleeve. So how did the julep trot into our native tongue?

In the beginning (and likely a very early beginning, at that), the word was gul-ab, and the drink was Persian rosewater (*gul*=rose, *ab*=water). Gul-ab then moved through the normal channels (Arabic>Italian>French), until finally “julep” shows up in English, around 1400, in a surgical textbook called Lanfranc’s Chirurgie (the old-timey word for “surgery”). There, it’s described as a “sirup maad oonly of water & of

sugre," mixed with more medicinal ingredients to make them easier to swallow. So by the 15th century, "julep" had lost its floral notes, and had moved into meaning any kind of soothing, sweet drink.

By the late 1700s, though, the Atlantic seems to have split the julep into two camps. In Europe, it was still a general term for a sweet drink, including something with medicinal properties, but hard-drinking Americans had codified it into a cold cocktail, served with sugar, ice, and some kind of aromatic herb. Speed up to 1804, when an American writer credited his love of whiskey to "mixing and tasting my young master's juleps." So we know that whiskey was a major component, but in the 19th century, juleps were also made with brandy and (surprisingly) gin.

While the popular idea of a mint julep may have dwindled into a bourbon-only drink these days, there is still some linguistic innovation going on: Andrew Knowlton, BA's Restaurant and Drinks Editor, named his daughter Julep. (But it was more for the history of the word than anything—he and his wife were thinking of naming her "Rose," but decided to go for a more ancient version of the same. That said, he is a man who likes mint juleps.)

Our favorite julep, the Prescription Julep, is a throwback to those 19th-century recipes, with Cognac and rye replacing the typical bourbon (and a nod to the drink's medicinal roots in the name), but there's clearly a final frontier to cross for any true julep traditionalists out there: going back to the drink's rosy roots.

Vineyard of the year hails from Amador County

A scientist responsible for discovering the family ties of several varieties of wine grapes and a vineyard responsible for the rediscovery of the Sierra foothills as prime viticulture territory are receiving the California State Fair's top wine and viticulture honors.

Carole Meredith, professor emerita of the Department of Viticulture and Enology at UC Davis, is receiving the State Fair's Wine Lifetime Achievement Award. She was among early researchers to develop DNA markers for grapes, then used them to identify the genetic and geographic origins of numerous varieties.

A native of Wales who spent her formative years in Canada and California, Meredith joined UC Davis as an assistant professor in 1980 where she oversaw research in grapevine genetics, including the creation of a genome map now used internationally to identify genes that control disease resistance and fruit quality in wine grapes. Her use of DNA profiling has been instrumental in solving several longstanding vineyard mysteries, such as tracing the origin of the Zinfandel grape to Croatia.

The State Fair's 2013 Vineyard of the Year is being awarded to the Deaver Vineyard. The 300 acres of rolling hills is located in Amador County's Shenandoah Valley outside Plymouth.

Fifty years ago this coming harvest a Sacramento home winemaker bought some of the vineyard's Zinfandel and made a wine that caught the attention of key players on California's wine scene, setting in motion a revival of the region's wine trade, largely dormant since the end of the Gold Rush about a century earlier.

The first vines on the Deaver Vineyard site are believed to have been planted in the 1860s by John James Davis, a cooper whose son Joseph Davis married the widowed school teacher Amy Elizabeth Deaver in 1927 and continued to farm the spread. Her son Kenneth Deaver gradually took over the Davis farm, now tended by his son, Ken Deaver.

In 1963, Sacramento home winemaker Charles Myers visited the Deaver Vineyard in search of mission grapes, spotted an old stand of Zinfandel on the property, and began to make wine with its fruit. In 1968, one of his early wines caught the attention of Bob Trinchero of Sutter Home Winery in Napa Valley. Trinchero liked the wine so much he bought 20 tons of Deaver Zinfandel that fall.

The critical and popular success of Sutter Home's 1968 Deaver Zinfandel touched off a new rush to the foothills by aspiring growers and established vintners alike. Trinchero ended up buying one of the early modern wineries in the valley, Montevina, now known as Terra d'Oro, which continues to buy much of the fruit from Deaver Vineyard. Ken Deaver also uses grapes from the vineyard for his own eponymous brand.

Farmers' market season arrives in Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Fresh produce is about to arrive on the South Shore – and it doesn't involve a grocery store.

The farmers' market season begins Friday at Kahle Community Park in Stateline. This is the first market to open in the

area. It will be one of three on the South Shore.

Markets throughout the region are gearing up to bring seasonal vegetables and fruit to consumers from California and Nevada. Most of the markets are still working on locking in all of their vendors. While produce is the focus of the events, most also have another component – whether it's prepared food, arts and crafts, entertainment or alcohol.

"I treat this one like a boutique farmers market," Steve Rozier said of the Kahle market. "When I look at this market, I think of our community."



Farmers' market season is about to begin in Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN file

He owns this market, while this year he will also run the Lampe Park market in Gardnerville that is owned by Douglas County Parks.

(The Kahle market is Fridays through October from 4-7pm starting May 3. Lampe starts June 12 and is then every Wednesday from 8am-4pm.)

Kahle had a market years ago, but for about a decade was non-existent. Rozier, who is assisted by his wife, resurrected this market last year.

Rozier told *Lake Tahoe News* he starts with farmers from California and then brings in Nevada growers when their crops

are ripe – which usually starts in June.

“We focus on farmers and markets. We will bring entertainment over time,” Rozier said.

Cheese created from a dairy farmer in Nevada will be for sale. Olive oil, craftsmen from Carson Valley and Carson City will sell their wares, a woman from Gardnerville will return to sell her cupcakes. Eggs and flowers are also going to be for sale.

The second South Shore market to open this year is the oldest one. This will be the 19th season for the El Dorado County Certified Farmers Market Association to operate every Tuesday from 8am-1pm at the American Legion parking lot in South Lake Tahoe. The market runs from June 4-Oct. 8.

Jim and Lois Coalwell, who own a farm on the West Slope of El Dorado County, are the longtime operators of this market.

“Everyone is hopeful this will be a good, strong spring,” Lois Coalwell told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Expect to see cherries from Day 1 at this market. Stone fruit from growers in Stockton and Fresno will come early.

Potatoes and tomatoes are in the ground in El Dorado County soil, but won’t be seen at the market right away.

Despite a still sluggish economy last year, Coalwell said the farmers did fairly well.

Besides fresh produce, this market also has prepared food vendors, but a minimal number of crafts people.

The produce changes each week, as it does at each market, as the crops come in. It’s a true testament to buying, and therefore eating, what the land produces locally. Imperfections in the product are normal when it comes to what it looks like. This is nature and normal.

What is sold at any market is usually picked at zero-dark thirty that morning to be able to be sold as fresh as possible.

The other South Shore market is on Ski Run Boulevard between Larch and Birch avenues. It will be each Friday beginning June 21. It starts at 3pm, and goes to dusk – about 8pm in the heart of summer.

“It’s more of a street fair atmosphere than strictly a farmers’ market,” said Alex Mellon, who runs the market. This will be the fourth year for the Ski Run market.

He expects about one-third of the vendors to be agriculture, one-third crafts and one-third prepared foods.

Dogs won’t be allowed this year except on the sides of the market – but not where the vendors are. And alcohol cannot be consumed in the market area.

This market wants to distinguish itself by being more kid friendly.

Many of the markets have Facebook pages as a way to reach clients.

Here is a list of some of the markets in the region:

Tuesday:

• Truckee: Truckee River Regional Park

10500 Brockway Road off Highway 267

8am-1pm, June 4-Oct 8

• Kings Beach: Kings Beach SRA

Highway 28 at Bear Street

9am-1pm, June 25-Aug. 27

Thursday:

• Tahoe City: Commons Beach

Commons Beach Road and North Lake Boulevard

8am-1pm, May 23-Sept. 26

• Tahoe City: Tahoe Lake Elementary School

375 Grove St.

June 27-Aug 22

• Truckee Thursday Nights: Donner Pass near the train station

5-8pm, June 13-Aug. 22

Saturday:

• Carson City: Downtown

Third Street and Curry Parking Lot

8:30am-1pm, opens June 9

Sunday:

• Homewood Farmers Market

Homewood Mountain Resort on Highway 89

8am-1pm. Opens June 20.

Chinese interested in

California produce

By Donna Jones, Santa Cruz Sentinel

WATSONVILLE – Cathy Calfo couldn't help but be impressed by the wholesale produce market in Guangzhou, China, with its 40,000 workers, hundreds of trucks, and "unimaginable" quantities of fresh fruits and vegetables changing hands in all-cash transactions.

Calfo, executive director and chief executive officer of Santa Cruz-based California Certified Organic Farmers, toured the market as part of a state trade delegation to China. The delegation, led by Gov. Jerry Brown, spent April 9-15 promoting California products and learning about the massive Chinese market.

"You can't imagine the energy and activity there," Calfo said of the Guangzhou market, though she may well have been referencing the country at large. She was struck overall by the "numbers of people, the pace of growth, the diversity of methods employed to produce energy, to produce housing, to produce food."

So many cranes topped high-rises under construction in Shanghai, people joked that they were the national bird, she said. Nearby, the group visited an island with a deep water port. A 14-mile road lined with windmills linked the island to the mainland. Construction of the complex took just three years.

"You visit a market like China, and it's so huge that you see more and more opportunity," she said.

That's not to say Calfo didn't notice the downside of crowding millions of people into urban areas, especially after experiencing the much publicized poor air quality.

But the trip, well-organized by state officials, was productive, Calfo said, The 75-member delegation reflected California's economy, with representatives from technology, tourism, real estate, clean energy and agriculture. The agricultural group was similarly diverse, with representatives from dairy and cattle industries, raison, nut and citrus growers, wine producers, Driscoll's Berries, and organic as well as conventional farmers.

For Calfo, it was an opportunity to learn more about reaching Chinese consumers and making the contacts that could help CCOF's members enter the vast market.

The delegation met with government officials, toured grocery stores and talked to entrepreneurs, including a group of young online marketers who are developing a home food delivery business in Beijing and already had signed up 300,000 subscribers. The scale, she said, was amazing.

"Everywhere I went, there was a keen interest in California products, organic in particular," Calfo said. "People were anxious to talk about food, food safety and the availability of good healthy food, both grown and produced in China and also that could be exported to China."

Weather, climate factor into winemaking

By Kathryn Reed

PLACERVILLE – Like all farmers, grape growers have a precarious relationship with Mother Nature.

“In 2011 we never picked the Merlot. If the birds won’t eat it, you can’t make wine,” Vaughn Jodar of Jodar Vineyards in Placerville told *Lake Tahoe News*. “2012 was beautiful. People are thrilled with the wines out of 2012.”

Vineyard managers and winemakers can work their magic each season, but ultimately the water content of the soil, the outside temperatures once the buds break, a hard freeze when the vines are no longer dormant, or prolonged heat beating down on the grapes – these are factors that are beyond the control of those in the wine business.

And those are issues on an annual basis.

Then there are the long-term consequences of climate change.



The Sierra, in the distance, provides water for many of the El Dorado County vineyards. Photos/Kathryn Reed

With how El Dorado County is situated and its various elevations throughout the region, wineries are less worried than their brethren in lower lying areas.

Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and some other white varietals are definitely more temperamental.

Justin Boeger with Boeger Winery said an issue winemakers will have to pay attention to is whether certain varietals that

have done well might not grow so well in that particular location in the future.

“Average temperature is very important. It’s very critical to grape growing,” Boeger said.

But he said it’s not something he is worried about at the 110 acres at his four vineyard sites.

Looking out at the 70 acres from where Boeger is sitting there is a 300-foot elevation difference between the varietals. This in itself gives his family winery flexibility.

Jodar said it’s counties that are warmer than El Dorado that are likely to have trouble in the future. While it may reach 90 degrees where he is, it’s not that temperature all day. It starts off relatively cool most mornings and the evenings cool down.

It’s the scorching temps throughout the day in other wine regions of California that are likely to be detrimental to certain varietals as increased temperatures become the new norm.



Buds are coming out on vines throughout El Dorado County.

When it comes to year in, year out farming, water can be an issue. In dry years sometimes drip irrigation is needed.

Boeger gets its water from Eldorado Irrigation District.

Steve Grace at Grace Patriot Wines says water-stressing grapes can be a good thing. He tapped into EID's system three times last year.

"We could go a whole season without water and produce a good fruit," Grace said.

Being so close to the source of water also helps El Dorado County. EID gets much of its water from Desolation Wilderness, with a dam at Aloha Lake, as well as at Caples Lake on Highway 88.

And for the growers on well water, getting some snow each winter helps replenish the groundwater.

"We have everything in small blocks so the wells can handle it," Guy Herriott of Fenton Herriott Vineyards said.

K's Kitchen: Creamy mushroom pasta

By Kathryn Reed

I'm still trying to understand what, "It's a little too mushroomy" means.

"Too mushroomy" is like a foreign language to me with no English translation.



While at first the phrase uttered by Sue bothered me, it didn't take me long to realize that meant I didn't have to share my mushrooms. That, to me, was the best part of the conversation.

I came up with the recipe below as a way to use up some ingredients I had in the fridge from other dishes.

I used whole wheat pasta for the first time. It's probably a good choice for this recipe if only to help with the nutritional value.

The amount of pasta really depends on the number of servings and how much sauce you like compared to pasta. I used half a 13.25-ounce box.

For the mushrooms, I used half a "container" of the presliced ones from Safeway.

Creamy Mushroom-Asparagus Pasta (serves 4)

Whole wheat pasta

2 T unsalted butter

4 ounces portabella mushrooms, chopped in bite-size pieces

½ bunch asparagus, chopped in bite-size pieces

1 C (heaping) Fontina cheese, shredded

½ C heavy whipping cream

1 T fresh tarragon, minced

Salt and pepper

Cook pasta according to package directions.

Melt butter over medium-high heat. Add asparagus. Cook a few

minutes until tender. Add mushrooms. Cook until tender. Add cream. Turn heat down to avoid scorching. Add cheese. Stir until melted. Add tarragon. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Make sure the mixture is hot and then serve over pasta – to people who like mushroomy dishes.

El Dorado County wine sales increasing

By Kathryn Reed

PLACERVILLE – Based on the number of cases leaving wineries and headed for vehicles, wine sales in El Dorado County are doing well.

Granted, buyers could have been lured by last weekend being the first of two weekends of the annual Passport where there are some special deals going on that aren't seen the rest of the year. Still, winery officials told *Lake Tahoe News* that people are buying wine year-round.

The Wine Institute earlier this month said wine sales in the United States hit a record in 2012. The 360.1 million cases sold was an increase of 2 percent from 2011. The retail value of that wine was $34.6 billion.



Guy Herriott of Fenton Herriott provides a sample of the 2010 Merlot. Photos/Kathryn Reed

California wineries sold 207.7 million cases – which accounts for 58 percent of the U.S. wine market.

"In the last six months there has been more of an uptick in wine sales," Justin Boeger with Boeger Winery in Placerville told *Lake Tahoe News*. His parents opened the winery in 1974.

The lower priced wines continue to be the better sellers Boeger said, admitting this is an indication the economy has not completely turned around. His philosophy is to charge an appropriate price – not inflate the value.

Boeger said he likes to shop in the $20 bottle range so he tries to have many of the wines he sells be in that price point.

He is seeing a growth in Barbera sales.

"I think the Barbera grape is particularly situated to the foothills because of its natural acidity (in the soil)," Boeger said.

Fenton Herriott Vineyards has been seeing steady growth in its sales since opening in 2006.

Winemaker and owner Guy Herriott said one key to being successful is having a variety of wines for people to taste.

On this particular weekend he is pouring the 2009 Merlot from bottles and samples of the 2010 Merlot from barrels. This is not a varietal found in the foothills with regularity or one that is memorable. Fenton Herriott is proving Merlot and El Dorado County go together.

Herriott said with people forgetting the movie “Sideways” that dissed Merlot, the varietal is making a comeback.

To make sure his wines don’t sit in a warehouse, Steve Grace of Grace Patriot Wines recently hired two people who are savvy in social media and other marketing techniques that aren’t necessarily traditional for the wine industry.

Even so, the former plastic surgeon from Reno told *Lake Tahoe News*, “Direct sales are the best.” This means no middleman – instead putting the wines in customers’ hands as they leave the tasting room.

Their first vintage was 2004, with the tasting room opening in January 2011. As one of the newer wineries, Grace Patriot has not had to weather the farming and economic cycles like some of its neighbors.

Since the first crush in 2000, Aaron Hill – owner and winemaker at Illuminare – says sales have increased by the same percentage each year. The Petit Verdot is his best seller.

Illuminare produces almost 2,700 cases a year, with that number increasing a little each year.

Hill attributes the growth to having affordable wines, people choosing to take trips closer to home and wine tasting along the way, and people not wanting to give up wine no matter the economy.

At Jodar Vineyards, which has been bottling wine since 1990, the predominant change over the past few years is the age of

the person visiting the winery. It’s people over 40.

This is particularly evident with the Passport crowd, which in years past was full of twentysomethings who rented limos and acted more like they were out to get drunk than on an outing to discover a new wine for the cellar.

Last weekend for Passport it was less party atmosphere and more talk of the wines and food being paired at the various stations. It was about buying something for down the road and not how much could be consumed that day.

It was about wine sales.

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Notes:

• El Dorado County Passport Weekend continues April 20-21. Tickets and information are available online.

• Many of the winemakers praised the 2012 crop, saying what’s in the bottles could be outstanding.

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Cake has birthday girl going back for seconds

By Kathryn Reed

One would think my reading comprehension would be better than it is at times. Well, at least my memory isn’t so good. And

skimming is not a good thing to do when reading a recipe.

Had I remembered reading the first paragraph of the recipe, I would not have made the frosting for the cake when I did. (Too early.) And it would not have gotten hard. (Bad for spreading.) And I would have had enough to cover the cake and not have it look like something I decorated when I was a kid. (Good thing mom didn't see this.)



So, that is a warning to others. Pay attention to what the recipe says about the frosting.

Besides how it looked, this cake is outstanding. A ritual started by my parents is the birthday girl gets to pick what she wants to eat on her special day – including dessert. I've carried this tradition with me into adulthood.

With Sue having a thing for maple syrup – she's from Vermont – I thought the recipe below might appeal to her. She said bring it on.

It's a definite keeper.

It is from the November 2010 *Cooking Light* magazine.

Pecan Spice Cake with Maple Frosting

Work quickly to spread the warm frosting over the first layer, stack the second on top, and then spread the remaining frosting over the top and sides before it sets. If you prefer, you can substitute walnuts for the pecans in this luscious cake.

Cake:

Cooking spray

2 tsp all-purpose flour

9 ounces all-purpose flour (about 2 cups)

½ tsp baking soda

½ tsp salt

½ tsp ground cinnamon

¼ tsp ground nutmeg

Dash of ground cloves

1 C packed brown sugar

½ C butter, softened

3 large eggs

1 tsp vanilla extract

1 C buttermilk

1/3 C chopped pecans, toasted

Frosting:

½ C packed brown sugar

¼ C heavy whipping cream

¼ C maple syrup

1 T butter

Dash of salt

2 C powdered sugar

½ tsp vanilla extract

2 T chopped pecans, toasted

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

To prepare cake, coat 2 (8-inch) round metal cake pans with cooking spray. Line bottoms of pans with wax paper; coat with cooking spray. Dust each pan with 1 teaspoon flour. Weigh or lightly spoon 9 ounces flour (about 2 cups) into dry measuring cups; level with a knife. Combine 9 ounces flour, baking soda, and next 4 ingredients (through cloves), stirring well with a whisk.

Place 1 cup brown sugar and 1/2 cup butter in a large mixing bowl; beat with a mixer at medium-high speed until light and fluffy (about 3 minutes). Add eggs, 1 at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in 1 teaspoon vanilla. Add flour mixture and buttermilk alternately to butter mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture and beating just until combined. Fold in 1/3 cup pecans. Divide batter evenly between prepared pans.

Bake at 350 degrees for 24 minutes or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pans 5 minutes on wire racks. Invert cake layers onto racks; cool completely. Discard wax paper.

To prepare frosting, place 1/2 cup brown sugar, heavy whipping cream, maple syrup, 1 tablespoon butter, and dash of salt in a heavy saucepan over medium-high heat; bring to a boil, stirring just until sugar dissolves. Cook 3 minutes, without stirring. Scrape brown sugar mixture into a bowl. Add powdered sugar; beat with a mixer at high speed 2 minutes or until slightly cooled and thick. Beat in 1/2 teaspoon vanilla. Place 1 cake layer on a plate. Spread about 3/4 cup frosting evenly over 1 layer; top with second layer. Spread remaining frosting over sides and top of cake; sprinkle with 2 tablespoons pecans. Let the cake stand until frosting sets.

Not your ordinary scrambled eggs

By Kathryn Reed

Scrambled eggs are just about the only way I make eggs. But that can get a wee bit old even for someone who doesn't make them that often.



The recipe below is something I made for Sue for her birthday earlier this month. I think it would be a perfect Mother's Day breakfast as well.

The recipe is from the June 2010 *Cooking Light* magazine. I think I will have to try it again when morels in Tahoe start to sprout. I used a mixture of dried mushrooms.

While the recipe says it makes enough for four servings, we found it was better for three. But I didn't serve anything else with it. So if fruit or something else were to be paired with it, the egg concoction would go farther because the diners would need less to feel satisfied.

The rest is from The Enlightened Cook column of the magazine:

Scrambled Eggs with Morel and Tarragon Cream Sauce

Use fresh morel mushrooms if they're available – substitute 1 cup cleaned, fresh mushrooms for dried. The light anise notes from the tarragon make a natural pairing for eggs and also complement the earthiness of the mushrooms.

1/2 C (about 1/2 ounce) dried morel mushrooms

2 tsp butter

¼ C finely chopped shallots

½ C organic vegetable broth

1 tsp fresh lemon juice

1/3 C reduced-fat sour cream

2 tsp chopped fresh chives, divided

2 tsp chopped fresh tarragon, divided

¼ tsp salt, divided

¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper, divided

Cooking spray

3 large eggs

3 large egg whites

4 English muffins, split and toasted

Place mushrooms in a bowl, and cover with boiling water. Cover and let stand 20 minutes or until tender. Drain well; coarsely chop.

Melt butter in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add shallots; sauté 1 minute. Add mushrooms; sauté 2 minutes. Add broth and juice; cook 2 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in sour cream. Stir in 1 teaspoon chives, 1 teaspoon tarragon, 1/8 teaspoon salt, and 1/8 teaspoon pepper. Place mushroom sauce in a small bowl; cover and keep warm. Wipe pan clean with a paper towel.

Heat pan over medium heat, and coat with cooking spray. Whisk together remaining 1 teaspoon chives, 1 teaspoon tarragon, 1/8

teaspoon salt, 1/8 teaspoon black pepper, eggs, and egg whites. Pour egg mixture into pan. Cook for 4 minutes or until soft-scrambled, stirring frequently.

Place 2 muffin halves, cut sides up, on each of 4 plates. Top each serving with about 3 tablespoons sauce and ¼ cup eggs.