

Foodie Travel

USA



Mustard Musings

A Wisconsin museum and store showcase the condiment.

Story and photos by Katherine Rodeghier

Mustard lovers: Head to Middleton, Wisconsin.

More than 6,000 varieties of mustard are showcased at the [National Mustard Museum](#) in this town just outside Madison. Admission is free, though the destination is open only five

days a week during the coronavirus pandemic (face coverings are required; capacity is limited). Enter and you'll encounter shelves groaning with mustards from all 50 states and more than 70 countries, along with displays of antique mustard pots, tins and jars, plus vintage posters and advertisements.



Photo Credit: Katherine Rodeghier

While the building's lower-level museum operates as a nonprofit, the store upstairs runs as a commercial enterprise with 250 to 300 mustards on sale at any given time, along with chutneys, preserves, hot sauces, salsas, even dessert toppings. The popular tasting bar is currently closed but will reopen once sampling is safe again. The store remains open, but orders also can be picked up curbside and are always [available online](#). In addition to food items, whacky mustard-theme gifts and souvenirs are also in stock. Need a Poupon U sweatshirt or bottle of mustard rub massage oil?



Photo Credit: Katherine Rodeghier

One Man's Obsession

How this homage to what the museum calls “the king of condiments” began goes back to one man, Barry Levenson, whose business card reads “Curator & Chief Mustard Officer.”

When his beloved Boston Red Sox lost the World Series to the New York Mets in 1986, Levenson was heartbroken. “I was despondent, could not sleep and went to an all-night supermarket to wander the aisles, pushing an empty shopping cart while tears streamed down my cheeks,” he says. Somehow, he became fixated on the store’s display of mustards, bought about a dozen, and found his calling. He continued adding to his collection while working as an assistant attorney general for the state of Wisconsin, even arguing a case in the U.S. Supreme Court with a jar of mustard in his pocket that he’d picked up from a discarded room service tray in the hallway of his hotel.

In 1991, he left the legal profession to devote himself full-time to his passion for mustard. He opened the Mustard Museum in Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, in 1992. As his collection grew, he moved to a larger space across the street in 2000 and then to the present location in Middleton in 2009, renaming it the National Mustard Museum. It has become a popular Wisconsin visitor attraction and garnered the attention of major newspapers and national TV shows.

Levenson remains active in the museum operation, mixing his engaging brand of wit and wisdom to the delight of visitors. You might hear him quoting Shakespeare, perhaps repeating Falstaff's line about a friend as "his wit's as thick as Tewkesbury Mustard" in Henry IV, Part 2. A staple in 17th-century English kitchens, horseradish mustard was made in the town of Tewkesbury.

In the museum's Mustard Piece Theatre, Levenson gives a world tour of mustards from Germany's sausage carts to posh dining emporiums in France. In Mrs. Mustard's Kitchen, he offers cooking tips, demonstrations, and recipes.

A group experience, "Mustard Bites: A Tasteful Adventure," is offered on a limited basis during the pandemic. It includes a history lesson, a hands-on cooking demonstration, a guided tour of the museum, and nine mustard and food pairings. You might, for example, taste Pommery Moutarde Royale with roasted baby bella mushroom caps, and Kelley's Gourmet Stone Ground Mustard with a stack of cornichon and Wisconsin cheese and charcuteries.



Photo Credit: Katherine Rodeghier

Festival and Competition

On the first Saturday of August, Middleton goes crazy for the condiment as the museum hosts International National Mustard Day. The street festival draws crowds with live music, games, and other entertainment. Of course, there's free mustard sampling as well as hot dogs and bratwurst to slather it on. In 2020, the event was virtual due to the pandemic. It's anyone's guess whether it will be a live event in 2021, says Levenson, but will have a virtual element in any case.

Every spring Levenson assembles a jury of chefs, food writers, food professionals, and mustard lovers to act as judges in the museum's World-Wide Mustard Competition. In a blind tasting, they sample mustards entered from around the world. Past competitors have hailed from Japan, Australia, Canada, Germany, England, Poland, Ireland, New Zealand, France, Sweden, South Africa, Slovenia, Denmark, and, of course, the United States.

Mustards might be the product of a large international company or an obscure artisan *moutardier*. Seventeen categories of mustard are scored and tasted, among them honey, hot pepper, Dijon, whole grain, and horseradish as well as mustard-based dressings and barbecue sauces. The top three in each category receive a medal and the Grand Champion title goes to the best of the gold medalists.

Enjoy Mustard At Home

Visitors to the National Mustard Museum might be inspired to incorporate mustards into culinary creations in their own kitchens. The store and museum happily provide [recipes](#) both on-site and online. A few samples:

Asparagus Puffs

Ingredients

1 puff pastry sheet

Terrapin Ridge Raspberry Honey Mustard

2 ounces prosciutto, thinly sliced

12 asparagus spears, hard stalks trimmed

Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

Thaw puff pastry and roll out the sheet onto a cutting board. Brush Raspberry Honey Mustard onto puff pastry sheet. Cover with one layer of the thinly sliced prosciutto. Using a very sharp knife, slice into thin strips about 1/2 inch wide. Wrap each strip in a spiral around each asparagus spear. Place onto a parchment-lined baking sheet and season with salt and pepper. Bake in 400-degree F oven for 12-15 minutes. Yields 12 asparagus puffs.

Steak in Peppercorn Mustard Cream Sauce

Ingredients

3 Tablespoons Slimm & Nunne Maple Peppercorn

1 Tablespoon olive oil

1 Tablespoon dry white wine or dry vermouth

1/2 cup heavy cream

2 boneless strip steaks, 10 ounces each

Directions

Dry steaks well and season with salt and pepper. Heat a sauté pan, add oil, and sear steaks on both sides. Reduce heat to medium, cook steaks to desired doneness. Remove steaks to a warm platter, cover with foil. Add wine to the pan, scrape as the wine evaporates. Add heavy cream, boil over high heat until reduced by half. Turn off heat, stir in mustard. Spoon sauce over the steaks and serve. (Serves 2)

Mrs. Mustard's Famous Triple Walnut Salad

Dressing Ingredients

6 Tablespoons International Collection Walnut Oil

1 Tablespoon Edmond Fallot Walnut Dijon

4 Tablespoons Late Harvest Riesling Vinegar

salt & pepper to taste

Salad Ingredients

6 cups mixed salad greens (romaine, bibb, etc.)

3/4 cup toasted walnuts

1/2 cup crumbled blue cheese

3/4 cup dried cranberries

2 pears, halved, cored, thinly sliced

Directions

Mix dressing in a small jar. Cover, shake and pour over the salad ingredients. Toss well and serve. The dressing can be made ahead and stored in the refrigerator for up to three days.

Plan A Trip

National Mustard Museum

Visit Middleton

Visit Madison

Travel Wisconsin

Other foodie finds in the Madison area include:

- Capital Beer and Cheese Tasting
- Culinary Dinner Theater
- Cocktail Class 101
- Madison Eats Food Tours

In Madison, stay at [The Edgewater](#), a member of the Historic Hotels of America, which overlooks Lake Mendota. The hotel is located a few blocks from the state capitol and close to the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



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