



Restaurants aim to differentiate with spicy burgers

Chefs bring the heat with burgers that have a peppery kick
Oct 8, 2014 [Fern Glazer](#)



eT Craft Burgers & Beer's Diablo burger includes Sriracha mayo, jalapenos and poblanos.

With restaurants continuing to add hamburgers to their menus, chefs across all segments are trying to give the sandwich a differentiating kick with spicy ingredients, such as chipotle, jalapeno, pepper Jack cheese and sometimes all of the above.

According to recent research from Datassential MenuTrends, barbecue, jalapeno and chipotle are among the top sauces and flavors featured on hamburgers at all segments. Of restaurants with burgers on their menus, 25 percent serve them with barbecue sauce, 13 percent serve them with jalapeno and more than 10 percent serve them with chipotle.

The heat just keeps on coming. The list of top-growing burger ingredients is peppered with all manner of spicy ingredients, including Sriracha, poblano, habanero, horseradish and chipotle-ranch.

“People just seem to be seeking something that takes the food to another level, takes it out of the mundane,” said Beef ‘O’Brady’s CEO Chris Elliott. “They’re looking for food that surprises, but delivers on taste.”

To satisfy customer desire for something bold and different, Beef ‘O’Brady’s added an Amarillo Firecracker Burger to its new menu in August. The Angus beef burger is topped with bacon, fried jalapenos, pepper Jack cheese and sweet jalapeno mayo.



M Burger offers three levels of spiciness with its Hurt Burger.

The burger, created by the owner of a Beef's unit in Amarillo, Texas, as part of the chain's annual "Burgers Across America" offering, was the promotion's best-selling burger.

At ZinburgerEast, a boutique burger and wine bar with nine East Coast locations, El Diablo, an in-house ground beef burger topped with fire-roasted jalapenos, pepper Jack cheese, caramelized onions and chipotle mayo, is a top seller.

"Spice gives some vibrancy to food," said executive [chef](#) David Maini. "If you do it right it, it brings out freshness. It makes food more exciting."

El Diablo started out as a weekly special two years ago, quickly moved to the main menu and is now one of the most popular item of more than a dozen beef burgers on the menu.

Offering a similar spicy burger is the recently opened eT Craft Burgers & Beer in Houston. The build-your-own burger and craft beer concept's Diablo is two beef patties topped with Sriracha mayo, jalapenos and poblanos, lettuce, tomato, caramelized onions and American cheese.

For diners who want more fire than freshness, M Burger, a Chicago mini-chain, created the Hurt Burger in three different degrees of spiciness.

"It's built on the basic BBQ, [but] the levels of heat are unique," said Tim Hockett, M Burger chef and partner. "It's a fun little thing to have on the menu."

All Hurt Burgers are topped with lettuce, raw onion, pickles and pepper Jack cheese. Hurt 1 adds mayo and spicy barbecue sauce, Hurt 2 adds spicy barbecue sauce and three jalapenos, and Hurt 3 adds spicy barbecue sauce on both sides of the bun and four jalapenos.

Inspired by a comment made during an early taste test that the barbecue sauce was so spicy it "hurt," the Hurt Burger began as a secret menu item, one only in-the-know customers could order. But other customers soon caught on and wanted their chance to feel the burn, so the chain moved the Hurt to the permanent menu about a year after opening. Today, Hurt burgers account for about 15 percent of the chain's burger sales.

"They feel the slight bit of accomplishment after eating something spicy," Hockett said. "After someone has our Hurt burger, they definitely come back. It becomes addictive. "

Among the many other concepts adding spicy burgers to the menu is the organic burger chain Bareburger, which recently added a Bison Burger topped with queso fresco, jalapenos, guacamole, green leaf lettuce and spicy pico de gallo. Buffalo Wings & Rings, which offers the Big Pepper Burger, made with grilled jalapeño, banana and bell peppers, pepper Jack cheese, chipotle mayo and fire-roasted salsa, recently added the Chorizo Nacho Burger, made with spicy chorizo sausage patties topped with a creamy queso sauce, crunchy tortilla strips, tomato, jalapeño and cilantro.