

# StarTribune

**DO YA THINK I'M SEXY?; SAUERKRAUT SEEKS A GLAMOROUS MAKEOVER, AND IT'S NOT THE ONLY FOOD THAT NEEDS ONE.**

Bill Dawson; Staff Writer  
25 January 2005



``Suddenly, sauerkraut is SEXY."

So says a press release from an Ohio-based company that's trying to re-brand the less-than-glamorous cabbage product.

As slogans go, this beats ``Sauerkraut: The embalmed cabbage." Or ``the stringiest garnish you can buy."

But sexy? Can a food that Minneapolis City Council Member Lisa Goodman calls ``fermenting and rotting cabbage" have sex appeal?

And what, exactly, makes a food sexy?

Romantic films often have portrayed one lover feeding another berries or grapes, but Scott Pampuch, chef at the Corner Table restaurant in Minneapolis, says, ``I can't picture somebody feeding someone else sauerkraut."

Part of the sex-appeal shortfall is the appearance. Sauerkraut is ``a damn fine food product," says Jim Grell, co-owner of the Modern Cafe in Minneapolis, and ``incredibly nutritious," says Brenda Langton of Cafe Brenda in Minneapolis.

But that doesn't make it alluring. It's a stringy, viscous substance that can stick to your face like grout on a bathroom wall. Not romantic.

Nonetheless, Grell says a big plate of pork chops and sauerkraut on a cold winter night ``seems kind of sexy," and Pampuch believes in the Pygmalion powers of cooking. ``Take any ingredient and put it in the hands of a good chef, they're probably going to make it sexy," he says.

"Beauty," adds Pampuch, "is in the eye of the beholder." But what of the beholder's nose? Preparing sauerkraut can result in "a really strong, smell-the-house-up kind of thing," says Mary McGuire, who knows about funky foods: She belongs to a Liver Club.

Then there's the name. "Sauerkraut," which literally means "sour cabbage," just doesn't sound seductive. When it comes to foul-sounding food names, perhaps only "liverwurst" comes close. Lindsay Kahn of BIGfrontier Communications, which is handling the National Sexy Sauerkraut Campaign for the Fremont company, admits this defect. "That's why we in the office call it SK," she says.

Oh, and turning cabbage into sauerkraut - definitely not sexy. It takes about three weeks, and it's far from pretty. "Sauerkraut is, in fact, rotting cabbage," says Goodman, who has experience with the fermenting process. "That's how it's made."

Mmm! But the health benefits of kraut ... well, there's no doubt about that. "SK" is fat-free and low in calories, and scientists say it can reduce the risk of cancer. It also aids digestion, although you might not want to go there. "Everybody says, you know, it's a bowel loosener," says McGuire. "That's the biggest benefit of sauerkraut."

OK, TMI (too much information) is never sexy. But drink enough cocktails, and you forget about that, and that's where the **K'Tini** comes in. This is sauerkraut's first big sex-it-up step, a martini-like drink with a kraut-stuffed olive. The **K'Tini** is "the sexiest route sauerkraut has taken, probably ever," says Kahn.

She'll get no argument from Doug Anderson, co-owner of A Rebour's restaurant in St. Paul. "Almost anything becomes sexy with enough booze," he says.

Bill Dawson is at [wdawson@startribune.com](mailto:wdawson@startribune.com).

## GENGHIS KRAUT AND OTHER FACTS

- The Mongols, led by Genghis Khan, brought sauerkraut to Europe in the 13th century. It wasn't an intentional part of their terror-spreading campaign.

- Seafaring men used it to ward off scurvy.

- During World War I, it was renamed "liberty cabbage" in America to disassociate it from Germany. Kind of like the recent "Freedom fries" thing.

- Germany - no surprise - is the world's biggest sauerkraut consumer, although the nation's average annual consumption of 4 pounds per person is less than two-thirds of what it used to be. It's also popular in Russia and France.

- "There's zero sauerkraut in England," said Eckart Hengstenberg, chairman of the European sauerkraut producers, recently. "It appears to be something of a cultural issue."

## THERE'S NO GETTING DOWN WITH THESE UNSEXY FOODS

## BRAUNSCHWEIGER

Complaint: This smoked-liver sausage is a liverwurst, with the emphasis on worst, in chef Brenda Langton's view. It's enriched with eggs and milk and can be spread on bread like peanut butter. Or sludge.

Comment: ``It's a disgusting, ground-up soft sausage" - Langton.

## PICKLED HERRING

Complaint: Many love it, but those who don't think it tastes like bait - which is what some fishermen use it for. Vinegar is added in the pickling process, and that's not for everyone, either.

Comment: ``Herring is definitely not sexy, and pickling doesn't make it any better." - Minneapolis City Council Member Lisa Goodman.

## COTTAGE CHEESE

Complaint: Some people just don't like lumps in their food, although it worked for Little Miss Muffet - ``curds (the lumpy part) and whey (the milky stuff)" was just an earlier name for cottage cheese.

Comments: ``It looks like cellulite" - Jim Grell, co-owner of the Modern Cafe.

``It brings up unpleasant connotations from being ill." - Goodman.

## HEAD CHEESE

Complaint: Here's Webster's definition: ``A dish made of portions of the head, or head and feet, of swine, cut up fine, seasoned and pressed into a cheeselike mass." Anyone think this sounds sexy?

Comment: ``I've never touched it in my life, and I wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole." - Langton.

## LIVER

Complaint: Forget the taste; the odor and texture alone makes many cringe. Cooking with onions doesn't help the fragrance, and undercooking can be disastrous.

Comment: ``Grinding it up and calling it pate doesn't make it any better."

- Minneapolis City Council Member Lisa Goodman.

## MEAT LOAF

Complaint: There's no glamour in the name, it doesn't look good and it tends to spend too much time in the fridge before someone finally throws it out.

Comment: ``There's nothing sexy about it, especially when you start thinking about the process of how it's being made" - Jim Grell, co-owner of the Modern Cafe, Minneapolis.

``It's like Anna Nicole, going through its third carnation of a sexy food makeover. It's still just a bunch of meat, people." - Scott Pampuch, chef at the Corner Table, Minneapolis.

## BROWN RICE

Complaint: Not hideous or odoriferous, it's just sanctimonious. Doug Anderson objects to ``brown rice or any other dirty hippie food," being turned off by the colored rice's I'm-awful-but-I'm-good-for you vibe.

Comment: ``Hating life, having zero enjoyment in life, that's what [brown rice] reminds me of." - Doug Anderson, co-owner of A Rebours, St. Paul

Copyright 2005. Star-Tribune. All Rights Reserved.