

THE INDY 500 BACK WHERE IT BELONGS

Fried & True: The State's Top Tenderloins

Indianapolis

MONTHLY

Takuma Sato
Nice Guys
Finish First

+

The 500 Winner
Who Was—
Wicked, Fast



The Mug

The bigger the pig, the bigger the tenderloin—and The Mug gets its cuts down the road at Tyner Pond Farm, which raises 350-pound heritage Large Black porkers, two-thirds piggier than most. That's just the start of what makes the Greenfield nouveau diner a destination with travelers on I-70, who pass up the convenient interstate restaurants to drive downtown and fill The Mug's parking lot with out-of-state plates. The Mug—which shares a culinary team of chefs with sister business ClusterTruck—then tenderizes the 6-ounce pork medallion in buttermilk before hand-breading it and frying it in lard for the juiciest sandwich around. 117 Apple St., Greenfield, 317-477-7550, themug.com

➔ PHOTOS BY
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LOVE



ME



TENDER



You could call this an unhealthy obsession. Indiana can't get enough of pork pounded into meat pancakes, dunked, dredged, and fried crisp. The Hoosier pork tenderloin is our regional schnitzel, our year-round State Fair sustenance, our unofficial state sandwich—and we explore some of our flat-out favorites in this guide to living high on the hog.

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FRIED & TRUE

Think you know the skinny on Indiana's most iconic sandwich? Test your porcine literacy with this glossary of tenderloin terms.

Deep-fried: Contrary to popular belief, a quick dunk in a deep fryer actually makes a pork tenderloin retain less oil than other frying methods, and it ensures even browning and crispness.

Pan-fried: A homier approach of frying with a modest amount of oil in a cast-iron skillet (the way your grandmother might have made her Sunday chicken) may make for a greasier tenderloin but often results in a craggier, more tender crust.

Pressure-fried/broasted: More common for fried chicken, this industrial method of frying in a sealed, pressurized fryer can cook pork tenderloins faster, leaving them especially golden, evenly cooked, and juicy.

Grilled: With a nod toward saving a few calories, this alternative without breading and much less grease begs the question of what makes a pork tenderloin sandwich, though it allows quality pork to shine.

Flour crust: A single or more common double dusting of simple all-purpose flour may seem a bit plain, but many fry cooks prefer flour, for it adheres to the pork without flaking and holds onto seasonings.

Cracker crust: Everything from saltines to Ritz crackers to more artisan and pre-seasoned crackers can add a soft crunch to the exterior of a tenderloin, with a coarser grind making for a more pebbly crust.

Breaded crust: Sometimes a blanket term for coating or battering with any medium, the word "breaded" before tenderloin can mean various things, though Japanese panko breadcrumbs are one common way to intro-

duce a distinctive crunch and great browning.

Buttermilk-brined: Besides the tangy flavor that it adds to meat, the mild acidity of buttermilk denatures and softens protein. This is often an essential step for restaurants that use a leaner pork loin.

Saltwater-brined: A straightforward brine of salt and water, often with the addition of sugar or another sweetener, plumps the pork and allows sodium to penetrate deep into the meat to make it savory and juicy. This purer approach also allows for a less messy breading procedure and more control over the coating.

Dry-brined: Not technically a "brining" technique but a similar process, heavy salting or seasoning and then resting allows for deep flavor and tenderness, even in the high heat of the oil.

Fritter: Mechanically separated and re-formed pork makes up the typically thin filling of this pale imitation of the original, though the crust is often crunchier and perfect for soaking up condiments.

Hand-pounded: Legend claims that Jake Freienstein pounded the first tenderloin at Nick's Kitchen in Huntington with the stubbed fingertips he earned from frostbite (see page 70). But any restaurant with tenderloin cred knows hand-pounding the pork, whether with actual hands or a mallet, means the meat is more uneven and less processed.

Hand-breaded: Pre-coated tenderloins and fritters are commercially available frozen, but we won't go there. Only tenderloins seasoned and breaded in house are worthy of the state's reputation.



Turchetti's Delicatessen

An occasional Turchetti's special hailed as a "porkestra" by the judges on *Guy's Grocery Games*, the Triple P is owner George Turkette's trumped-up trifecta of porcine proportions. Surprisingly nuanced despite its decadent layers, it features two cutlets of rich, fat-streaked Berkshire pork double-dipped in simple flour for a light but golden touch, then topped with pepper jack cheese, bacon candied with brown sugar and molasses, and smoky-sweet bacon jam with a hint of chipotle. Leviathan Bakehouse's soft sesame-seed bun holds this behemoth together for every delectable bite. 1106 Prospect St., 317-426-3048, turchettis.com

Mayberry Cafe

The best-selling sandwich at this tribute diner that's part of the Indiana Foodways Alliance Tenderloin Lovers Trail, Andy's Tenderloin is built on an 8-ounce foundation of fresh pork loin that's been trimmed and pounded, then dredged using the standard three-step breading process. It gets a kick of special house seasoning before it's fried to crispy perfection. Like snowflakes, no two turn out exactly the same. 78 W. Main St., Danville, 317-745-4067, mayberrycafe.com



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Daredevil Hall

A mainstay on this gastropub menu, Daredevil's tenderloin may not be the biggest in town, but it's definitely sizable enough

to satisfy any serious schnitzel connoisseur. The thick-cut pork loin soaks in buttermilk before it's pounded and breaded in a flavorful mix of cornmeal, flour, salt, pepper, garlic, onion, and paprika for a satisfying chomp. A brioche bun serves as the perfect vehicle for the finished product, accompanied by lettuce, tomato, diced onions, garlic aioli, and house-brined beer pickles. 2721 E. 86th St., 317-757-2888, daredevilbeer.com



Oasis Diner

This retro Plainfield eatery relies on a time-tested breading recipe and fresh Indiana pork that's never seen the inside of a freezer. Available fried, grilled, or blackened, the sandwich arrives at the table garnished with lettuce, tomato, red onion, pickles, and housemade garlic mayo. Feeling a little intimidated by the 10-inch diameter? No problem. Just order the mini slider quartet to share. Up for more of a challenge? Go whole-hog with the Indianapolis Country-Fried Breakfast—a tenderloin smothered with sausage gravy alongside two eggs, home fries, and toast. 405 W. Main St., Plainfield, 317-837-7777, oasisdiner.com



Big Lug

Owner Eddie Sahm isn't a fan of overhyped tenderloins the size of dinnerware, opting instead for a reasonable portion of pork, properly battered with seasoned flour and Big Lug Kolsch to create the perfect bite. The restaurant even bakes its own brioche knot rolls to carry the sandwich, a welcome next-level detail for discerning enthusiasts. Watch for a "PPP" variation with pork belly, provolone, and peppadew jam to appear as a special now and then. 1435 E. 86th St., 317-672-3503, biglucanteen.com

Lumpy's Cafe

This old-school Cambridge City spot has been frying up signature hand-breaded sandwiches since 1999 as fuel for Antique Alley explorations in the neighborhood. The center-cut pork loin rests in a buttermilk bath overnight to assure maximum tenderization before it's run through the breading station and cooked to order. One local snowbird is such a fan that he orders 30 of the meaty masterpieces each year to take to Florida for when winter cravings strike. 20 S. Foote St., Cambridge City, 765-478-6510, lumpyscafe.weebly.com





The Pawn Shop

Refer to the Breaded Tenderloin Specialties section of The Pawn Shop's laminated menu for six wild interpretations of the pub's already-solid pork sandwich served with a side of chips. The Tenderloin Club sits high off its bun, piled with ham, turkey, bacon, and cheese, while The Big Buffalo gets doused in spicy sauce and embellished with cheddar, bacon, and blue cheese. The Big Pawn (a clever riff on the Big Mac) gets style points for its utilitarian construction: one tenderloin divided into three portions and stacked with special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun. 2222 E. 54th St., 317-255-5430, pawnshoppub.com



Four Day Ray

At about 9 inches across, Four Day Ray's tenderloin is one of the more manageable satellite dish-sized versions. The Fischer Farms-sourced pork loin is breaded by hand, then fried, resulting in a craggy, lightly seasoned coating. A leaf of romaine, slices of tomato and red onion, FDR's house pickles, and your preferred condiments will give the sandwich extra flavor and texture. A squishy brioche bun tries its best to hold everything together, but after enough bites, it will likely be reduced to mere slivers, no match for the heftier contents inside. This is still a tenderloin, after all. 11671 Lantern Rd., Fishers, 317-343-0200, fourdayray.com

That Place Bar & Grill

Don't let the nondescript name or the strip-mall locale of this Greenwood-area watering hole fool you. The fine crumb on its deceptively modest tenderloin sandwich gives way to some of the juiciest, most well-seasoned pork you'll find. And the thicker cut that extends only slightly beyond an uptown brioche bun means you'll need fewer napkins when you dig into one of the tidier, more sophisticated takes on the typically sloppy Hoosier classic. 8810 S. Emerson Ave., 317-888-7100, thatplacebarandgrill.com





Blind Owl Brewery

This brewpub offering meets all the classic Indiana criteria—hand-pounded, grilled, or breaded pork, served with lettuce, onion, tomato, pickles, and mayo. But that's just a suggested starting point. Chef Andrew Popp encourages customers to get creative and make each order their own. Cajun spice and a squeeze of lime? Go for it. Nashville hot seasoning? Sure. Drenched in beer cheese? Simply ask and you shall receive. 5014 E. 62nd St., 317-924-1000, blindowlbrewery.com

Log

This food-truck newcomer that usually parks behind Loom on East 46th Street is quietly becoming an insider's top source for a tenderloin standout. Buttery Ritz crackers give this generous version a tender yet crispy crust, and a cornmeal-dusted kaiser roll lends even more crunchy texture. Pork "tendies" are also a menu option—like chicken but bigger and from a different animal. Add an order of Log's creamy cole slaw and a side of State Fair-worthy battered veggies. 1901 E. 46th St.



Steer-In

With its low-slung awning and greasy-spoon patina, this historic eastside drive-in has organically achieved an enviable level of kitsch. It can attribute much of that everyman's appeal to its top-selling tenderloin, a hefty disk of fresh-cut pork sizzled into hills and valleys of golden, crackly breading and tucked inside a toasted bun. It comes standard with lettuce, tomato, and mayo and has recently been joined by a Spicy Hoosier Tenderloin with added seasoning mixed into the crust. 5130 E. 10th St., 317-356-0996, steerin.net



Muldoon's

Among the Guinness stews and shepherd's pies served at this Carmel Irish pub, a head-turning tenderloin protrudes from its toasted sesame-seed bun like a craggy halo. Offered in both full-size and mini forms, Muldoon's recipe for the classic crunchy sandwich caters to fans of the wafer-thin tenderloin. Fresh pork from neighboring Joe's Butcher Shop is seasoned nicely with pepper and pounded into a slip of pork that gets extra wispy in the fryer. 111 W. Main St., Carmel, 317-571-1116, muldoons.net

C.R. Heroes Family Pub

The decor pays tribute to heroes of the world in small but impressive shrines to the likes of firefighters, astronauts, and inventors, as well as champions of both the Marvel and DC universes. The hand-breaded tenderloin—thicker and meatier than your typical pork frisbee—has a fan club, too. The breading is seasoned simply with a little salt and pepper, and minimal pounding means the pork barely eclipses the bun, providing the perfect combination of a meaty center and crispy edge. 10570 E. 96th St., Fishers, 317-576-1070, crheroes.com



HOG WILD

Traveling musician Rick Garrett spent the last decade cataloging and critiquing the breaded tenderloins of Indiana and the surrounding pig-friendly regions. His blog, **The Tenderloin Guy**, reads like a user's manual for the food group—spotlighting crowd favorites alongside hidden gems like Indy's late Gaslight Inn, tiny Lou's Diner in Cloverdale, and Kokomo's Choo Choo McGoo's. Here, the Prince of Pork shares some of his career highlights.

How did you become The Tenderloin Guy?

My wife and I were having dinner at a little place called Jimmy B's on the north side. I bit into my tenderloin, and there was just something really special about it. I told my wife that it was the best tenderloin I had ever eaten, and she offhandedly said, "You should start reviewing these." So I created my blog, thinking I would do maybe four or five reviews and then let it go by the wayside. But 10 years later, I'm still writing about tenderloins. I have a little over 200 reviews up on my website.

After a decade of evaluating tenderloins, have you developed a palate for the various styles?

I tend to be a traditionalist. There is a place in Illinois that offers a pizza on a breaded tenderloin crust. I don't go for stuff like that. I like a cornmeal-type breading and a more peppery seasoning. If you ever go down to Oldenburg, which was founded by German immigrants in the mid-1800s, a lot of the food is still heavily German-influenced. All of the tenderloins down there are very peppery, and I like that.

What are the basics of a good tenderloin?

Fresh meat hand-breaded right before it's cooked. And texture is important. One of the things I like about tenderloin sandwiches is that you have that soft bun and then the crunch of the breading and the firmness of the meat. As for seasoning, all a good one really needs is salt and pepper.

Do you have any tenderloin pet peeves?

A lot of folks don't understand the difference between a tenderloin and a fritter. A tenderloin is a solid piece of meat, and a fritter is a ground pork product. Think of it as the difference between a steak and a hamburger. I've been to restaurants where they've had a breaded tenderloin on the menu, and they bring out a fritter.

What are the telltale signs of fritter fraud?

Fritters are usually a uniform shape and thickness. When you order a tenderloin, they take that piece of meat, and they pound it out until it's sort of ragged and misshapen. So it's not necessarily a pretty sandwich—though to me, tenderloins are beautiful, of course.

What were your most memorable tenderloins?

A couple years ago, my wife and I made a pilgrimage to Riverside, Iowa, which is the future birthplace of Captain James T. Kirk, according to the *Star Trek* movies. I had a tenderloin in the bar where Captain Kirk was conceived in 2233. I also remember the first tenderloin I ever had 60 years ago. When they brought it out, I was like, *What is this thing?* I have been hooked ever since.



The Friendly Tavern

Always crowded and true to its name, this Main Street Zionsville standard occupies a former wagon-builder's workshop that dates to the 1870s. Its breaded tenderloin has some juicy lore as well. From your first bite into its ragged edges and jagged crust, you will understand why this obviously hand-butterflied pork cutlet lands on as many state tourism lists as any other. 290 S. Main St., Zionsville, 317-873-5772, friendlytavernzionsville.com

Plump's Last Shot

Arguments about the best tenderloin will never be settled. But if you want a primer on what makes a breaded pork sandwich a state classic, head to this shrine to Indiana's other obsession: basketball. The bar is a tribute to Bobby Plump, the Milan High School point guard made famous in the movie *Hoosiers*. Comically sprawling to the edges of the plate, it's thicker and meatier than a fritter. This textbook version with a soft crunch mocks its pedestrian bun to the point you want to scrap it and just enjoy the meat—so obviously hand-cut that it sometimes splits in half. 6416 Cornell Ave., 317-257-5867, plumpslastshot.com



The Willard

Named one of the top three tenderloins in Visit Indiana's "Best of Indiana" contest in 2017, the menu topper at this Franklin watering hole has grown by inches over the years. And locals are just fine with that. The expertly hand-pounded tenderloin gets its lacy, crispy crunch and deeply savory flavor not from any fancy breading but from a simple flour coating, along with tangy buttermilk and just the right spices that make it a cut above the rest. 99 N. Main St., Franklin, 317-738-9991, thewillard.com



Edward's Drive In

To get the true retro experience of this '50s-inspired diner, drop some money in the jukebox, top off your root beer, and dig into the gigantic, cornmeal-coated tenderloin served in high volume. Edward's places this meaty manhole cover inside a jumbo-sized bun that, though proportionally correct, creates a bit of an optical illusion. 2126 S. Sherman Dr., 317-786-1638, edwardsdrivein.com



Dooley O'Toole's Bar and Restaurant

Open since 1985, Dooley O'Toole's dates back to Carmel's halcyon pre-City Center days. Its flagship sandwich is timeless as well. Made with pork cut fresh every morning, it's golden-brown and buckled, usually hanging over the sides of its plate. Don't want to get crumbs in your ears? Order the slightly smaller mini version. 160 E. Carmel Dr., Carmel, 317-843-9900, dooleyotooles.com



Upland Brewing Company

Upland demonstrates its dedication to the breaded tenderloin genre with an assortment of iterations, from the basic (but delicious) Hoosier Classic Tenderloin sandwich that gets an automatic upgrade of tangy-sweet chow-chow relish, housemade pickles, whole-grain mustard aioli, shredded lettuce, and red onion. The Three Little Pigs lavishes the same pounded and seasoned puck with Fischer Farms pulled pork and applewood-peppered bacon (plus gouda, red onion, and barbecue sauce). And a meatless Seitanderloin made with wheat gluten from Indy's Three Carrots has enough flavor and heft to fool die-hard carnivores. Wash down any of the above with one of Upland's house beers. 1201 Prospect St., 317-672-3671; 4842 N. College Ave., 317-602-3931; 820 E. 116th St., Carmel, 317-564-3400; uplandbeer.com

Opie's Deli

Break up a northbound road trip with a stopover at this renovated department store in downtown Plymouth. Pressed and pounded into a lacy wisp, its relatively delicate rendition wears a saltine crust and gets a hit of aromatics from peanut oil. 114 N. Michigan St., Plymouth, 574-935-3366, opiesdeli.com





Nick's Kitchen

For champions of Indiana's indigenous dishes, the details of the first tenderloin sandwich are as much a part of the annals of Hoosier history as racing dynasties and state basketball titles. We know that German immigrants to Indiana adapted their beloved wiener schnitzel with readily available pork in the late 1800s. Then, food cart operator Nick Freienstein slid his cutlets onto more portable buns, with onions and pickles, in Huntington just after the turn of the century. This is where the story takes a slightly macabre turn. Nick's older brother, Jake, who apparently lost the tips of his fingers to frostbite, realized he had ready-made tools (the stumps of his hands) for pounding out the pork to make it thinner and more "tender," a bit of confusing nomenclature that is more about the end result of the sandwich than the actual cut of meat used (most diners and taverns start with pork loin, not tenderloin, which tends to tear when flattened). The recipe for these legendary tenderloins hasn't changed since the Freiensteins' original. Marinated overnight, the cutlets are then dunked in milk and eggs before being floured and enrobed in coarsely crushed saltines. The end result is a crackly, crunchy tenderloin that is deeply golden and a little darker around the edges, topped simply with those most German of condiments, pickles and mustard (and best served only with a slice of the diner's gooey, caramel-rich sugar cream pie with a super-flaky crust). Nick's tenderloin is a beguiling curiosity of American regional gastronomy that is absolutely worth the hour-and-a-half drive up I-69. 506 N. Jefferson St., Huntington, 260-356-6618, nicksdowntown.com



Twin Archer Brewpub

It's called the Hoosier Cardiologist on the menu, which is appropriate for this colossal tenderloin that is as serious as a heart attack. The kitchen starts with a 6-ounce cubed Munsee Meats tail-end loin file and plunges it into seasoned panko crumbs. All jagged browned edges jutting far beyond its brioche bun, it usually clocks in at 10 inches across and is at its best when topped with the prescribed onion, mayo, and pickle—along with a side of Belgian-style fries. 117 W. Charles St., Muncie, 765-216-6982, twinarcherbp.com



Out of the Ordinary Restaurant & Hickory Sports Bar

Nashville tourists can rest their rain sticks at this popular Brown County refueling spot that serves a modest, thicker-than-most tenderloin on a honey kaiser bun. 61 S. Van Buren St., Nashville, 812-200-1999

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Sugar Creek Brickhouse

For pork purists who like a tenderloin with just a touch of seasoning, Sugar Creek delivers a thick sandwich reminiscent of a really good pan-fried pork chop. The lightly grilled bun adds a touch of texture. If you are brave (or bored), order it topped with a fried egg. 5821 W. Highway 40, Greenfield, 317-947-6571, sugarcreekbrickhouse.com



Pull Up Grill

Petite by most standards, the tenderloin at this southside barbecue spot might have to compete for attention with the smoky and saucy stars of the show. But the sandwich's peppery, fried chicken-like coating and meaty girth make it a worthy sleeper. 2412 E. Raymond St., 317-419-3515, pullupgrill.com

RECIPE

SMALL WONDERS

Indiana's diners and taverns might have mastered the pork tenderloin, but home cooks can claim some of the glory by whipping up these fun-sized sliders, using homegrown Hoosier ingredients.

Hoosier Pork Tenderloin Sliders

Makes about 8 sliders

- 1 pork tenderloin (approximately 1 to 1 1/4 pound), preferably from a local source like Gunthorp Farms (gunthorpfarms.com)
- 2 cups buttermilk
- 2 teaspoons Food Love Tog (foodlovetog.com)
- Garlic Goodness Seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper (or more to taste)
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 3 cups fine crumbs made from Broad Ripple Chip Co. (broadripplechip.com)
- Sweet & Spicy potato chips or 4 Birds Bakery (4birdsbakery.com) spent grain crackers crushed in a plastic bag or ground in a food processor
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups vegetable oil
- 8 small buns—try the fresh dinner rolls at Amelia's Bread (653 Virginia Ave.)



Cut

1. Mix buttermilk, garlic seasoning, salt, sugar, cayenne, and pepper in a wide shallow dish or glass pie plate.
2. Trim any large pockets of fat from tenderloin and slice crosswise into 1 1/2-inch pieces, trimming tapered end into a 3-inch piece.
3. Butterfly each piece by slicing down the middle but not cutting all the way through. Open each piece like a book and press down gently.
4. Place each piece in a plastic zip-top bag and flatten gently with a rolling pin or meat pounder to a thickness of about 1/4 inch.
5. Place cutlets in buttermilk mixture, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least an hour or up to four hours.

Coat

1. Heat oven to 200 degrees. Place a rimmed baking sheet lined with paper towels in oven.
2. Place flour and crumbs on separate plates.
3. Remove pork from buttermilk marinade, letting excess marinade drip back into dish, and then set aside.
4. Add eggs to marinade and mix to combine thoroughly.
5. Place a rack in a second rimmed baking sheet.
6. Dredge pieces of pork in flour, shaking to remove excess, then dip in buttermilk-and-egg mixture, and then place on plate with crumbs, patting with your hand until crumbs adhere in a thin but complete layer.
7. Place pork pieces on rack in baking sheet.

Fry

1. Heat oil in a 10-inch cast-iron skillet or a large Dutch oven to 360 degrees (oil should shimmer but not smoke).
2. When oil is heated, place three to four pieces in skillet or Dutch oven. Use metal tongs to hold each piece of pork above the bottom of the pan until a crust forms so that pieces do not stick to pan.
3. Fry 3–4 minutes on first side, shaking pan gently while holding handles with pot holders to let oil come over the top of the tenderloins.
4. Turn tenderloins and fry an additional 1–2 minutes or until coating is golden brown and meat is cooked through.
5. Place tenderloins on baking sheet in oven. Repeat frying with remaining pieces.

Serve (immediately)

Suggested Toppings:

Grateful Gourmet's spicy-sweet Habanero Pickles (gratefulgourmetfoods.com)

Batch No. 2 Ballpark Mustard (batchno2.com)

St. Elmo Steak House Truffle Dijonnaise (store.stelmos.com)