

YUMMY NORTHWEST

MARY ROSEWOOD, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER
LESLIE PHILLIPS, COPY EDITOR
KENT, WASHINGTON

Chowing down in Montana

This month *Yummy Northwest* moves east to officially include Montana. The geographical area between the Cascade Mountains (eastern Washington and Oregon) and the Rockies (western Montana) has always been known as the Inland Northwest.

So no one will feel left out, where possible, even eastern Montana will get a mention. Who wants to miss all the good food in this great state?

This issue is a salute to the fine cooks who feed hungry travelers and locals in the fourth largest state in the U.S. Although only 900,000 people live in Montana, an estimated 9 million tourists pass through each year, so there are, in fact, a lot of mouths to feed.

Naturally, not every great food venue could be included here. But enjoy this small taste of Montana and plan to visit soon to find your own favorites.

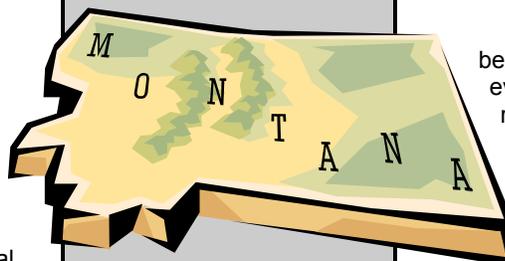
Au naturel

If you enjoy the simple things in life, you'll find plenty of local fresh produce in season.

This time of year, roadside stands in western Montana offer huckleberries, thimbleberries, and Flathead Lake cherries.



You don't want to pass by the cherry stand in Arlee. Those rich, deep-flavored local cherries



Mmm... Montana

The following show how Montana ranks in some food production in the U.S., according to 2005 statistics.

Flaxseed – 2nd in the U.S., with 918,000 bushels

Honey – 6th in the U.S., with 8.7 million pounds

Lentils – 2nd in the U.S., with 85,000 tons

Sugar beets – 6th in the U.S., with 1 million tons

Wheat – 3rd in the U.S., with 192 million bushels

In total crop production, Montana ranks 31st.

Farms and ranches comprise 60,100,000 acres, making the state 2nd in the U.S. (Total size of Montana: 147, 046 square miles, or 94,109,440 acres.)

beat out store-bought Bings by a mile. And everything's washed and ready to eat – a real treat for travelers.

Cowboy coffee

Independently owned espresso stands dot the landscape like sagebrush. In far-flung Wibaux, the eastern gateway to Montana, Pony Espresso serves 60 cups of designer coffee to local ranchers daily. Try a taste of Connie's cleverly named blends, including her tribute to George Strait: "Amaretto by Morning."

Clear on the other side of the state in Alberton, Jackie will get you started in the morning with her smile and assorted hot beverages at Railroad Espresso. The hot chocolate is pretty good, made with Bellagio chocolate.



Restaurants and other places

This list could go on as long as that big blue sky, but here are a few places to try.

For breakfast, the omelets at the Great Northern Coffee Shop in Malta are worth the drive from anywhere. The waitresses are friendly, and the clientele will amuse you with ranch stories, which you can believe or not.

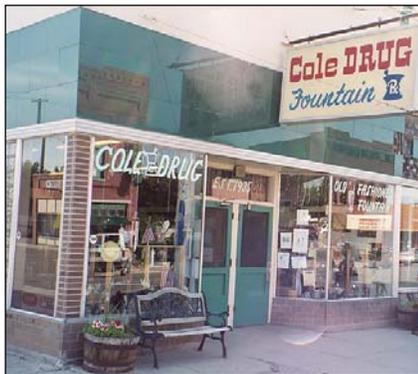
I'm told the Buffalo Café in Whitefish is known for its breakfast spread. Indeed, when I came in at 11 a.m., most folks were ordering just that. But I opted for the Montana Burger, laden with BBQ sauce and a side order of darn good fried potatoes.

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If you're in Big Timber, you can have an excellent meal at the Grand Hotel, which has been taking care of travelers since 1890. I can tell you the sweet rolls alone are worth the trip. I doubt you'd be in Montana to stargaze Hollywood-style, but local ranch-owning celebrities do hang out here.

Across the street, Montana's oldest drug store is the place to get a huckleberry shake...or an old-fashioned phosphate...or a hot dog. Don't pass by Cole Drug without stopping in for refreshment.



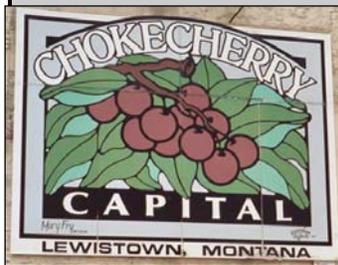
In Glendive, the Book'n'Bear Nook doesn't look like much from the outside. But inside are books by Montana authors, cheerful employees, and good, cheap food. For 75 cents, I got a small piece of yellow sheet cake with chocolate frosting that had the taste of my childhood.

Up in Montana's far northeast corner, you can't miss the Rolling Hills Winery and Car Wash in Culbertson. Sadly, it was closed when I went through town. But give the door handle a jiggle when you're there; you might be in luck.

And last, but in no way least, is my favorite place: Mark's In and Out drive-in in Livingston, just off I-90, north on Highway 89. They serve the best huckleberry shakes in the state and have a decent selection of fast food. The friendly folks behind the counter make you feel you made a good decision to stop there for lunch.



All photos by Mary Rosewood



A central location

In Lewistown, you can stand on the plaque at Montana's geographical center in the Yogo Inn. While there, enjoy a delicious meal in the inn's comfortable restaurant.

Chokecherries, a native plant that the Lewis and Clark expedition used for medicinal purposes, are celebrated the weekend after Labor Day. Taste pies and jellies! Thrill to the pit-spitting contest!

During the same weekend, artists compete in the "What the Hay" contest to create fine art from bales of hay.

Lewistown Chokecherry Festival Sept. 9, 2006

Where are the addresses?

The businesses in this issue don't need addresses spelled out. Just go into town – if you don't see the place you're looking for right away, ask someone. Chances are, you're already parked nearby.

A couple, however, do have Web sites:

The Grand Hotel
www.thegrand-hotel.com

Yogo Inn
www.yogoinn.com

Good Morning Cinnamon Rolls

This recipe is courtesy of Julie S., Big Timber, who enjoys feeding family, friends, and neighbors with wholesome food. There's a lot of work to do on a ranch, so Julie has learned plenty of shortcuts over the years.

- 1 teaspoon yeast
- 1 1/3 cup warm water
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 4–5 cups flour
- 1/3 cup butter
- 1 beaten egg, room temperature

About 5 p.m., make dough: Dissolve yeast and sugar in water until bubbly. Stir in salt. Knead in flour, butter, and egg. Let rise in warm place. Punch dough down at 7 or 7:30 p.m. At 9 p.m., pat dough out in 9-by-13-inch pan. Spread with soft butter and sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar. Roll in pan and cut into about 12 rolls and set aside. Pour syrup (below) into same pan and lay rolls on top. Let stand on counter overnight. (Note: They might look scrawny but will surely puff up by morning.) Bake in the morning at 400 degrees for 15–20 minutes.

Syrup

Mix in pan and cook until dissolved:

- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup butter
- 2 tablespoons light corn syrup

Whole pecans can also be sprinkled on top of syrup before putting rolls in pan.

Baking tips from Julie

You know bread dough or pie crust is kneaded enough when it feels like the back of your hand.

Freeze dough shaped into bread, rolls, or cinnamon rolls. Set out the night before and let thaw to bake in the morning.

About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest. Online at rainydayrose.com.

Contact the editor

Comments, corrections, topic ideas, and submissions are all most welcome at Yummy_Northwest@hotmail.com.

