

The Ultimate BLT

Do you really need a recipe for this simple classic? If you want the ultimate version, indeed you do. BY KATIE LEAIRD



Doctored mayonnaise and partially toasted bread set this BLT above the rest.

ULTIMATE BLT SANDWICH

Serves 4

Buy the best tomatoes you can find that are about 2 inches in diameter. If your tomatoes happen to be larger, use only two or three slices per sandwich. Since broiler outputs vary, keep an eye on the toast in step 3. You may need more than one package to get 16 slices of bacon. Do not use thick-cut bacon in this recipe.

- 16 slices bacon
- 3 vine-ripened tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- Salt and pepper
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil
- 1½ teaspoons lemon juice
- Pinch cayenne pepper
- 8 slices potato sandwich bread
- 1 head Bibb lettuce (8 ounces), leaves separated

1. Adjust oven rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat oven to 400 degrees. Arrange bacon in single layer on aluminum foil-lined rimmed baking sheet, overlapping slightly as needed to fit. Bake until bacon is deeply browned and crispy, 25 to 30 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Transfer bacon to paper towel-lined plate; discard bacon fat and foil. Heat broiler.

2. Meanwhile, core tomatoes and cut into 16 (¼-inch-thick) slices (you may have some left over). Whisk oil, vinegar, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in shallow dish. Add tomatoes; turn gently to coat with vinaigrette. Whisk mayonnaise, basil, lemon juice, and cayenne together in bowl.

3. Arrange bread on now-empty sheet. Broil until lightly browned on 1 side only, 1 to 2 minutes.

4. Transfer bread, toasted side down, to cutting board. Spread basil mayonnaise evenly on untoasted sides of bread (use all of it). Break bacon slices in half. Shingle 4 bacon halves on each of 4 bread slices, followed by 2 lettuce leaves, 4 tomato slices, 2 more lettuce leaves, and 4 more bacon halves. Top each sandwich with 1 of 4 remaining bread slices, mayonnaise side down. Cut sandwiches in half, corner to corner. Serve.

Achieving the Ultimate

Easy adjustments go a long way with familiar components.

BREAD Use potato bread, and toast only one side.

MAYO Season it with basil, lemon juice, and cayenne.

BACON Cook it longer so that it's extra-crispy.

LETTUCE Use lightly crunchy Bibb lettuce that stays put.

TOMATO Coat them with vinaigrette for a flavor boost.

With my ingredients rounded up, it was time to optimize the architecture. I grabbed a pencil and sketched a few possibilities. While two layers of bacon were a must, one layer of tomato was plenty. The mayonnaise would serve as an edible adhesive to keep the bacon in place, the lettuce as a shield against soggy bread. My final sketch held the winning design. From top to bottom: bread, mayonnaise, bacon, lettuce, tomato, lettuce, bacon, mayonnaise, bread. With just a little extra attention and effort, I'd transformed the everyday BLT into something so much more.

IS THERE A more perfect sandwich than the BLT? Crispy, savory bacon; juicy, ripe tomato; and cool, crunchy lettuce, dressed in tangy mayonnaise and bookended by two pieces of perfectly toasted bread—it's no wonder it's a classic.

But for something so simple, so much can go wrong. The bacon slides free and the tomatoes slink out, leaving just soggy bread and sad lettuce.

I set out to solve these structural snafus. First up: bread. We chose toasted potato bread for its subtle sweetness, but toast can be brittle; soft slices hold on to contents better. So I split the difference, toasting just one side of the bread.

I wanted the bacon to be shatteringly crispy, easier to achieve with standard bacon than with thick-cut. Cooking it all at once on a foil-lined baking sheet in the oven sped things up (no batches). Of the many lettuce options we considered, lightly crunchy Bibb lettuce proved the best choice.

To ensure a bright tomato flavor, even with less-than-perfect tomatoes, I chose to briefly marinate them in red wine vinegar, olive oil, and a bit of salt and pepper. And to elevate my mayonnaise, I stirred in a bit of lemon juice, cayenne, and chopped basil.