

SERVINGS
THIS RECIPE
FEEDS 4-6
of your ultimate football fans

THE ULTMATE BLT

APPLEWOOD SMOKED BACON, PANCETTA, BUTTER LETTUCE & HEIRLOOM TOMATO SANDWICH WITH CRISPY LEEKS AND AVOCADO AIOLI

BY LARA MILLER

What time is it? It's officially football season! I say "ALREADY!?" But my crew over here says "FINALLY!!!" So, here we go again.

Two of my three boys are playing in a football league and my husband is playing on an adult football team.

Who's jealous of me? I mean ... Balls, balls, balls. Everywhere I turn. Practices, scrimmages, games ... How are there enough days in a week to fit it all in?

But instead of fighting it, I am going to grab them balls, run down the sideline and bust a little dance down in the end zone.

Because football season is serious fun around these parts.

And one of the best things about football season is the tailgate parties! Beers, babes and BBQ!

Well, that's how we roll when we actually get to the stadium and get to watch the Chargers play. But that's not how it's going down for the most part.

I'm sure though, for those of you pre-kids folks, that's what tailgating looks like.

A big fun bash at the football field parking lot with lots of drinks and friends and swear words and food you can take your time grilling and eating.

But for those of us who have crossed over to the dark side, those of us who have kids, our tailgate parties look slightly different.

Instead of Chargers season tickets, we have season tickets to FNL games with our little ballers.

Instead of coolers full of fancy IPAs and poppin' bottles with models at Qualcomm, we are like undercover brothers, secretly sipping our beer and wine out of our "water bottles," while we watch a bunch of adorable little people play flag football.

We have to bring trillions of snacks for all the little brothers and sisters who have to sit through game after game on any given night.

That's what a parent's ultimate tailgating party looks like.

But, at the end of the day, tailgating is awesome, anyway you do it, and just like anything else, it is what you make of it. So besides just having fabulous drinks and fabulous friends, we need the fabulous food. And that's where I think tailgating can become more universal, regardless of whether you have kids or not.

Whether you are going to the Chargers game or your son or daughter's Friday Night Lights game, it's how strong your game is when you bring on the food to your tailgate party.

So I thought it would be fun to make a gourmet version of a BLT sandwich. I figured those of us with seats at the 50-yard line of FNL games can make them easily at home and bring them with for easy eating at the fields.

And for those of us who actually have tickets to the stadium, you can bring these puppies pre-made; when you arrive at your tailgate party in the parking lot, you can then add on a grilled burger or a piece of grilled fish to it if you wanna join in the grilling festivities.

Lots of choices you have when grilling up your favorite piece of meat to add to this

kicked up BLT.

I've started with a classic, gave it a little update with local seasonal ingredients and the rest is up to you.

Let's see what your end game is, whether you want to leave it as it is or if you want to add something more to it and make it all your own.

Either way, this will definitely up your chances of being a winner (in the food department, anyway) at your next tailgate party!



FOR THE ULTIMATE BLT

4-6 thick cut slices of pancetta (you can ask your deli person to slice the pancetta thick for you)

About 3 lbs. of thick cut applewood smoked bacon, depending on how high and porky you want this bad boy

7-8 thick cut heirloom tomatoes, about 3/4-inch thick

1 large or 2 small heads butter lettuce

1 large loaf ciabatta bread

Fresh cracked pepper

01 Preheat your oven to 400 degrees.

02 Lay the bacon on a baking sheet and season with fresh cracked pepper. Roast the bacon until golden and cooked through, about 20 minutes.

03 While your bacon is roasting, preheat a cast iron skillet or heavy bottom pan on medium high heat.

04 Lay your pancetta on your hot pan and sear until the fat renders out and it becomes crisp, about 5-10 minutes.

05 Watch it closely though because you don't want the pancetta to burn.

***Pancetta is like bacon in that they are both made from pork belly. But the difference is that pancetta is not smoked like bacon is, so it has a cleaner taste.*

I thought it would be a fun twist to combine the two pork belly products to make this the mother of all BLTs!

06 Drain your bacon and pancetta on paper towels and set aside.

07 Add 1/2 cup of the rendered bacon fat from your baking sheet to a small pot along with 1 cup of a neutral flavored oil like grape seed oil, sunflower or canola oil.

This is what we are going to fry the leeks in for a little crispy onion action in our ultimate BLT. Yup, frying in bacon fat. This is ultimate people, I'm telling you.

FOR THE CRISPY FRIED LEEKS

2 large leeks, white and light green parts only

1/2 cup of your rendered bacon fat

1 cup neutral flavored oil like grapeseed or canola

01 Cut the leeks into 3-inch chunks and cut those chunks in half lengthwise.

02 You're going to julienne each half by slicing each half along the length into very thin strips with a very sharp knife.

You will end up with super thin 3-inch strips of the leeks that will make for the perfect crispy crunchity topping.

TIP: One very important step when dealing with leeks is to clean them thoroughly. They tend to catch a lot of dirt in between all their layers, so after you slice them into little shreds, rinse them really well in cold water removing all the grit and using your fingers to separate each strand.

03 Then drain them and dry them with a paper towel to remove all the moisture.

04 When the leeks are dry, heat your bacon fat and oil on medium high heat. You want about 1 1/2 to 2 inches of oil in your pot.

Your oil is ready when it's shimmering and shivering, like an old lady on a cold winter day.

Every stove is different so you need to play around with a few shreds of leeks to get just the right temperature.

05 Check to make sure your oil is ready by adding a few shreds of leeks to the oil and fry it for about 15-30 seconds, until the shreds are just golden.

06 Transfer to a paper towel to dry and cool completely.

07 You need to taste them when they've slightly cooled to make sure they don't taste burned.

You want them crispy and slightly golden brown.

If they are still soggy when you take them out, you need to up the temperature of your oil by raising the heat a bit.

If they taste anywhere near burned or if they come out too browned, you need to lower the heat on your pan or reduce your cooking time of the leeks in the hot oil.

This is a labor of love but one that is well worth it at the end when these gorgeous crispy leeks top your sandwich.

08 When you get your temp and timing right, fry the leeks in small batches and separate the shreds as you fry by stirring the leeks all around in the oil while they fry up.

Let them cool and drain on a paper towel and move on to making the avocado aioli.



ASSEMBLY TIME

01 Grab your ciabatta loaf and cut it in half lengthwise. If you want, you can toast it first.

(I prefer to make one giant loaf and then cut that into smaller sandwiches but if you want to make individual BLT's, that would be great as well)

02 Slather on some of your avocado aioli on both sides. Don't be shy now. This is mayahhh flavaaaaa.

03 Cover the bottom half with butter lettuce.

**Always start with cleaned and dried lettuce to help prevent the bread from getting soggy from the tomatoes.*

04 Put your heirloom tomatoes on top of that. Typically I would say to season the tomatoes with salt but for this recipe, the bacon is salty and the prosciutto is salty, so I skip it. But if you think you want more salt, go for the gold baby and salt away.

(I like to get all different colors of heirlooms so that the sandwich is bright and colorful and absolutely gorgeous.)

05 Add your pancetta and bacon on top of that.

06 Add your crispy leeks on top.

07 Finally, put a lid on it! Grab the top half of your loaf and place it over the top.

**Don't forget that you can add some grilled salmon or grilled burgers on this as well, but my family likes it just like this!*

08 Cut into 4-6 portions and enjoy!

This is where the party's at so come on over and get your tailgate on with this mother of all mothers: My Ultimate BLT!

01 Mash 3 of the avocados in a bowl and set aside.

02 Put the remaining avocado in a food processor with the rest of the ingredients and process until smooth.

03 Add the pureed mixture to the mashed avocados in the bowl and mix well with a spoon.

Taste for salt and pepper.

TIP: Any leftover avocado aioli can be stored by putting saran wrap directly onto the surface of the aioli and put in the fridge for about three days.



My name is Lara Miller and I am a wife to a pretty cool San Diego dude and mama to three handsome little boys. Yes, I am a lone ranger in a pad full of testosterone. Here is my thing... I love to cook. I'm not a chef, but cooking is what makes the world turn for me. It's like my therapy, and believe me... dealing with three boys on the daily requires some serious therapy!

Instagram: ChickpeaKitchen / Lara@ChickpeaKitchen.com / ChickpeaKitchen.com