

Cicadas on the menu as anticipation of Brood X arrival has some foodies buzzing

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Simon La Bozetta typically forages in nearby wooded areas for wild mushroom varieties to eat or sassafras herbs to put in tea, but in the coming weeks, he'll add another item to his search list.

That item will add some crunch to his diet, but more important, it's something he's been waiting years to find and try — 17 years to be exact.



With the Brood X perennial cicadas expected to arrive by the millions in Ohio and 15 other states this month, La Bozetta and others with adventurous palates will savor the rare opportunity to taste the little buggers, which some have hailed as the shrimp of the dirt for its seafood-like flavors.

He's not holding his breath, however, that it will taste like buttery shrimp scampi no matter how he prepares the cicadas.

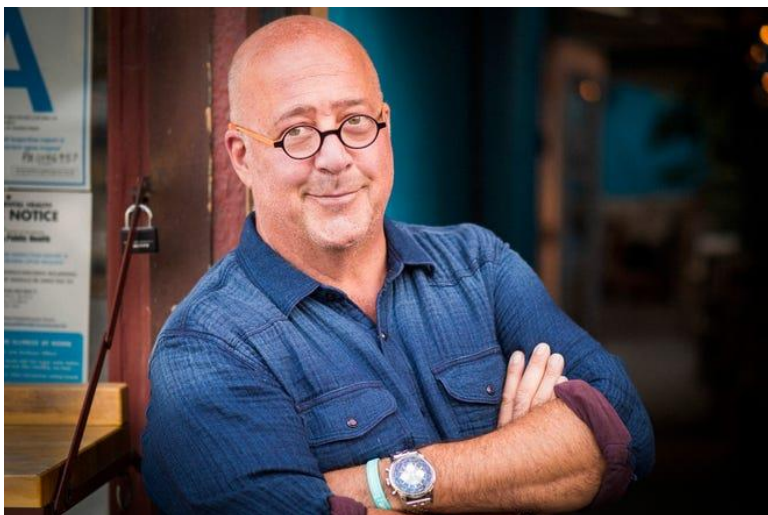
"For me, it's the novelty of the experience," said the 48-year-old Olde Towne East resident who has been foraging since he was a child. "I love to have new experiences, to travel, to see things. The curiosity is there."

And the desire to eat the insects might also be about saving face on social media, too, where he's mentioned the fact that they're edible more than once.

But who isn't talking about cicadas on Facebook and Twitter these days?

From local artisans making jewelry out of the loud winged creatures to scientists trying to predict when they'll arrive (typically when temperatures average 64 degrees), social media is abuzz with all things cicadas.

And yes, that also means people are swapping cicada recipes, including Asian-inspired cuisine, a gumbo-like dish, chocolate-covered varieties and even a version of rhubarb pie, while news articles describe their taste as nutty or similar to that of chicken.



Andrew Zimmern, creator of the Travel Channel's "Bizarre Foods" franchise, said the insects have a bold flavor.

"They're earthy, loomi (sour)," Zimmern said. "They've been living in the ground for 17 years — kind of like the taste of the forest floor. It's a strong taste, but not in a bad way. It stands up to the big flavors of garlic and ginger."

And he should know: Those are two of the ingredients in his recipe for crispy wok-fried cicadas that he made in 2013 when Brood II came to the East Coast.

He said that although the whole creature is edible, people should remove the wings (if they've matured) and it's the chef's choice whether to leave the outer shell, or carapace, depending on if they want an extra-crunchy addition to their dish.

The best cicadas for cooking are those that have newly hatched, because their shells will be softer, according to "Cicada-licious: Cooking and Enjoying Periodical Cicadas," a mini cookbook created by Jenna Jadin, who was a graduate student at the University of Maryland in 2004.

The manual advises that early morning is the best time to catch the bugs emerging and to "simply go outside with a brown paper bag and start scooping them in."

Adventurous chefs can cook with them immediately after cleaning them and removing any unwanted parts, or refrigerate them.

For Zimmern, the purpose of making the stir-fry-inspired meal and eating it was not really to entice others to duplicate it, but to show cooks that they could create the dish and, more important, that there are different ways of thinking about food sources.

"It wasn't a gimmick but a serious attempt to show people that bugs are food," said Zimmern, of Minneapolis, who currently hosts "AZ Cooks" on Instagram each Thursday. "They're food for millions of people. American eaters need an open definition of what food is."

That's what Srilatha Kolluri tries to get her students in her food science classes at Ohio State University to ponder when she teaches them about entomophagy or the practice of eating insects.

With more than 2,000 edible species of insects globally, she said many cultures dine on ants, locusts and meal worms, Kolluri said, especially because they are so high in complete protein (60% to 65%). Cicadas are no different.

“A lot of people worry about the ‘ew’ factor,” said Kolluri, a faculty lecturer who allows her students to taste protein bars made from cricket flour. “But whatever you’re used to — your culture — that dictates your preferences. If in another part of the world, you grow up eating it, it’s not ‘ew.’”

And if Americans can get over the initial disgust, eating insects is a very sustainable resource, she added.

La Bozetta has eaten insects, such as crickets, in the past so he doesn’t think these will be too different.

The most difficult part, he said, will be finding them as no one is entirely sure when they’ll start arriving or where, because central Ohio is on the edge of where scientists predict they’ll emerge.

However, La Bozetta said he’s sure people’s photos and posts on social media will alert him to the cicadas’ location.

He plans to try them a few different ways, including in a pesto sauce and sauteed in butter and garlic like shrimp, and he’ll document his feast for all his followers, he said with a chuckle.

“If I get one down, I’ll probably have had my fill,” La Bozetta said. “But who knows? That’s the great thing about trying new foods. I might find a new favorite.”

Here’s hoping cicadas don’t become a favorite dish or else he’ll have to wait another 17 years to eat them again.

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