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STORE HOURS: Monday – Saturday 10 am – 7 pm, Closed Sundays
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*Recipes excerpted from **Burger Bar** by Hubert Keller with Penelope Wisner. Published by John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ. Copyright 2009. Reprinted with permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.*

A classic combination: blue cheese, bacon, and pear. But these burgers are inside out – the cheese hides inside the burgers. As the burgers cook, the cheese melts and bastes them. I've used sirloin, a more expensive cut than usual for burgers, but sliders make great party food when you want to splurge on ingredients.

Build your own: You can also make the burgers with lamb. These proportions will make 8 large burgers. I've mixed bacon into the burgers and used it as a garnish, too. You can do either. Also, you can omit the grilled pear, or if it's good and ripe, use it raw. Beet pickles make a great-tasting and colorful accompaniment.

Blue Cheese-Stuffed Bacon Sliders

(Serves 12)

16 slices (1 pound) apple-smoked bacon
2 ripe, but firm pears
About 1 tablespoon sugar
3 pounds coarsely ground sirloin, chilled
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh thyme
Freshly ground black pepper
6 ounces (about 1/2 cup) crumbled blue cheese, at room temperature
2 tablespoons olive oil plus about 1 teaspoon
Sea salt
24 soft, mini-burger buns
2-1/2 cups baby arugula leaves
1 small red onion (about the same diameter as the buns), very thinly sliced
1 pint basket cherry tomatoes (optional)

In a large skillet over medium heat, cook the bacon until crispy, and then drain on paper towels. Cut 8 of the slices crosswise into 3 pieces each; crumble the remaining bacon and set both aside separately.

Peel the pears, halve them lengthwise, and core them. Cut them crosswise into thin slices and put in a bowl. Toss with the sugar and set aside.

In a large bowl, combine the meat, thyme, crumbled bacon, and 1-1/2 teaspoons pepper. Using your hands, knead together lightly. Form the mixture into 48 evenly sized balls (about 1 ounce each). Use the pointed end of an egg to make a small depression in half the patties. Fill them with a little mound of cheese, dividing it evenly among them. Top with the remaining patties, and then pinch them together around the cheese. Make sure the stuffing is completely enclosed. Pat and mold the burgers to fit the buns. The burgers can be shaped and refrigerated, covered, for several hours or overnight.



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Blue Cheese-Stuffed Bacon Sliders, (continued)

When ready to cook, heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat until very hot or build a medium-hot fire in a barbecue. Generously season the meat on both sides with salt and pepper.

Cook the burgers in the skillet, in batches, turning once or twice, about 3 minutes for medium-rare. Do not press down on the patties. Be gentle when you turn the burgers so they do not break open. With a large spoon, baste the sliders several times with the fat in the pan. To grill the burgers, oil the grate, arrange the patties on it, and cover. Cook as above.

While the burgers cook, toast the buns in a toaster oven or under the broiler, about 5 inches from the heat, until lightly toasted. Or toast them on the outer perimeter of the grill rack.

When the burgers are done, remove them to a warm platter, keep warm, and let rest for several minutes. Meanwhile, heat the remaining teaspoon of the olive oil in a nonstick skillet over medium heat and add the pear slices, or place them on the outside of the grill rack, and cook just until warm and lightly browned. Turn and repeat, then remove to a plate. They should still be crunchy.

To build the burgers, arrange a few leaves of arugula on the bun bottoms. Top each with a pear slice or two, a piece of bacon, and a burger. Add an onion slice and a bun top, and skewer securely together. Add a cherry tomato as a topknot, if you wish, on the skewer. Serve immediately.