

Consider the Bagel

By Arthur Shapiro



Ah, that wonderful and uniquely Jewish item that the world has come to love deserves a moment of your time. Let's take a close look.

Bagels have a rich history that dates to Jewish communities in Poland in the 17th century. They were traditionally made by boiling the dough before baking, which gives them their distinctive chewy interior and shiny crust. The word "bagel" is derived from the Yiddish word "beygl," which itself came from the German word "böügel," meaning "ring" or "bracelet."

Bagels gained popularity in Jewish communities and eventually made their way to North America with Jewish immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The bagel's versatility and appeal led to its widespread adoption.

I like Bagels, but they're a bit over the top in calories. Worse, too many people are selling non-authentic bagels. When someone says, "East Coast Bagels," they are full of it and just looking to get your business. There is no such thing. Oh, and bagels sold in packages in food stores... that would be 'no,' just no.

For Bagel aficionados, the bagel has a story and provenance that represents authenticity, not marketing hype.

In the *New York Times* a few years ago, [Ed Levine](#) wrote, quite factually and descriptively:

A bagel is a round bread made of simple, elegant ingredients: high-gluten flour, salt, water, yeast, and malt. Its dough is boiled and then baked, and the result should be a rich caramel color; it should not be pale and blond. A bagel should weigh four ounces or less and make a slight cracking sound when you bite it

instead of a whoosh. A bagel should be eaten warm and should ideally be no more than four or five hours old when consumed. All else is not a bagel.

I think three places produce the best bagels — New York, Montreal, and Los Angeles, in that order. I believe it's all about the water since boiling the dough is crucial. Yes, the water. Bagels are boiled before baking. Allow me to explain further.

New York City is often considered a bagel mecca, known for its large, flavorful, and chewy bagels. The city's tap water, which is believed to contribute to the dough's distinct taste, is often cited as a factor. Montreal, on the other hand, is famous for its Montreal-style bagels, which are smaller, denser, and sweeter than their New York counterparts. They are typically boiled in honey-sweetened water before baking, giving them a unique flavor.

The top places in NYC include, among others, **Russ & Daughters** and **Ess-A-Bagel**.

In Montreal: **St-Viateur Bagel** and **Fairmount Bagel**.

Now, before you, Angelinos, throw bagels at me for omitting places there, please understand that while there are many bagel stores, I don't have firsthand knowledge of them. However, a few years ago, the New York Times ran a story with the headline "*The Best Bagels Are in California*" (Sorry, New York) and named four: **Boichik Bagels**, **Courage Bagels**, **Midnite Bagel**, and **Pop's Bagels**.

Closer to home in Coachella Valley, Costco is known for offering a variety of baked goods, including bagels. Costco's bagels are typically available in bulk packaging in various varieties. The taste and quality of Costco bagels can vary, but they are generally well-received for their convenience and affordability.

While I love all bagels, I reserve eating them only on certain occasions. They can be between 250 and 400 calories. Do you have any idea how many hours on a treadmill that takes?

Finally, here's an interesting (but fictitious) story about Bagels.

Once upon a time, there was a wannabe gangster named Bobby who started his criminal life running numbers on the Lower East Side of NYC. He would go to a nearby bagel store to hide cash as he made his rounds, buy a bag, and put the money in. He didn't remove the bagels; he just stuffed the cash in. One day, he was in a hurry and grabbed a bag without looking into it. It was full of garlic bagels. The money in the bag stank of garlic at the end of the day. So much so that his bosses said the bills might just as well have been marked.

From that day on, he was known as Bobby Bag of Bagels.