

# Dinger's D'Lite's

Story and Photos by Danny Fairchild

I've recently taken up a new hobby that I call "clamshell hunting." Clamshell hunting, which I've named for the clamshell containers favored by food trucks and trailers and the like, is when you go out of your way to find a food truck or trailer you haven't tried yet and then go try it. I like to think I have my finger at least somewhere in the general vicinity of the pulse of the Tri-States' dining scene. But far too often, it has happened that I stumble upon a mobile eatery I didn't know a damn thing about, only to find out that it's been around for at least a couple of years. We just somehow never crossed paths.

It's embarrassing.

Clamshell hunting is my attempt to avoid such embarrassment.

All this to say, that apparently, Dinger's D'Lite's has been serving awesome food focusing on all things fresh and local for years. And I had no clue. None. I've had my head up my butt this entire time.



ZOODLE BOWL

My friends... there are some delicious things going on in this food trailer that need to be examined and appreciated. I've always felt that the difference between a craftsperson and an artist is that a craftsperson takes the accepted rules of a medium and uses them to great effect while an artist takes those same rules and breaks them to great effect.

When it comes to sandwiches... Dinger is an artist, yo.

But before I get into the sandwiches, take a look at the bottom right corner of that chalkboard menu (pictured). I want



CREUBEN

to talk about the zoodle bowl. Zoodles, for those of you who have your head even further up your butt than I have mine, are a "noodle" made by spiralizing zucchini. It's a noodle option for people who, for any or no reason, typically say no to noodles. It's a noodle-ized vegetable. Win-win. But here's where I've had my head up my butt yet again: Why did it never occur to me to use zoodles in noodle salad? Vegetables already belong in salads, why didn't a noodle-ized vegetable for a "noodle" salad ever occur to me? It occurred to Dinger. It's occurred to a lot of people, judging by Google, but Dinger brings it to life here. This isn't a vegan option, mind you. Not if the Asiago and Parmesan cheeses have anything to say about it. But if you're looking for just a taste of freshness, this zoodle bowl is what you're after. Fresh onions, tomatoes, and zesty Italian dressing join forces with the zoodles and those cheeses to create a craveable dish that's definitely a lighter alternative to the sandwiches Dinger's gonna wow you with.

Now, be warned: Just because a sandwich comes from a food trailer doesn't mean that they're under any obligation to make it something you can easily carry and eat in your hand. For some of these monsters, you're going to want to use utensils. I'm looking at you, Creuben.

Yes, Creuben. I spelled that perfectly well, thank you. It's Dinger's answer to the classic Reuben sandwich. If you're a sandwich purist, Dinger still has you covered with a classic Reuben with your corned beef, sauerkraut, Swiss cheese, and Thousand Island dressing. Did you know Thousand Islands is a real place? That's why I'm capitalizing it. Anyway.



SPECIALTY BURGER

It's nothing new to have your own take on a Reuben. You've probably heard of the Rachel sandwich. It's a Reuben, but 'cept with creamy coleslaw instead of kraut, and pas-trami instead of corned beef. There's tons of variations on the Reuben.

But if you're going to go ahead and mess with the Reuben, one of the most beloved of sandwiches, you'd better know what you're doing. You'd better not divorce it too much from its Reuben roots. It still has to be recognizably Reubenesque. So the more you mess with the Reuben while still communicating "Reuben!"... well... that's where Dinger's artistry comes in.

You got your corned beef, sure. And you've got your kraut and your Thousand Island dressing, naturally. Oh! But here comes a bit of the Tri-States messing up your kosherness with a nice pile of smoked pork. Yes, smoked pork!

Now this next part, you're going to have to keep an open mind. Close your eyes and picture a Reuben sandwich. What kind of bread is it on? Rye bread, right? Probably marble rye? Kind of hard to imagine anything even moderately Reuben-like on anything BUT rye, yeah? I thought so, too. But remember what I said: An artist is one who knows the rules

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and breaks them effectively. And I stand by my assertion that Dinger is an artist.

Friends... The Creuben, Dinger's D'Lite's answer to sandwich royalty, the Reuben, is NOT served on rye bread, marbled or otherwise. It is served on French bread. Oh, is that where I lost you? Then you don't deserve Dinger's D'Lite's, and you should die a pedantic death to cap off your pedantic life. I hate you.

Yeah. That sandwich over there with the nice, airy bread crowning just a mess of deliciousness? I'm standing here telling you that it's a worthy variation of the Reuben. I will die on this hill.

And the pulled pork is so succulent and nummy. Mmm.

When it comes to barbecue like pulled pork, I'm firmly in Team Barbecue Sauce. I understand and agree that there are plenty of folks who make barbecue that certainly don't NEED barbecue sauce. I don't care. I LIKE barbecue sauce. If I had a religion, my head would be anointed with barbecue sauce. It's the way my father taught me. So when the cab of my car was filled with that unmistakable tangy aroma common to most barbecue sauces, I was salivating hard, my friends. And the only thing that could satiate that blood lust was sinking my teeth into that Specialty Burger.

If you want a sandwich your hand can handle, get one of Dinger's burgers, NOT the Creuben. But also make sure you get a Creuben sometime. I'm not budging from this.

I have nothing but praise for Dinger's Specialty Burger. Sure, at first glance, you've likely had a similar burger before: beef patty, bacon, onion straws, whiskey barbecue sauce. But there's a reason why this combo is so common. It's friggin' delicious. But I assure you, friends, you haven't had this burger until you've had Dinger's version. It's her specialty, after all. Because remember what's ALSO her specialty? I said it at the top. Her specialty is all things fresh and local. "Fresh" is

not a word one would use to describe bacon. It's been thoroughly cured, after all. Onion straws aren't fresh. They're hardly even onions anymore. They've transcended onionness. As for whiskey barbecue sauce, well... would you rather have a fresh whiskey or a lovingly aged whiskey? So how the hell does this burger, which isn't adorned with anything in the neighborhood of fresh, STILL communicate Dinger's fresh vision? Witchcraft?

No, you know what it is? It's that awesome flame-grilled flavor. There's this big friggin' propane tanks attached to her food trailer, do you honestly think she's not using them? So so good! Seriously some of the best burgers in the area, and we've got some sweetheart burgers around these parts.

So, get your head out of your butt and go clamshell hunting for Dinger's D'Lite's. And spread around this clamshell-hunting concept. I think we could make it a thing. ■

### Dinger's D'Lite's

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## Not Your Average Produce

By Hy-Vee Nutritionist Megan Dalsing

Be honest: What fruits and vegetables do you have at home right now? Maybe you opt for the classics like apples, bananas, carrots, and potatoes, and they are staples on your shopping list. Or perhaps you bought produce recently but you forgot about it in your fridge, and now it's too late to use in your recipe. Putting produce in your cart is just the first step in your mission to get your five servings of fruits and vegetables in a day. So let's take that produce from cart to plate and get inspired with a few produce varieties you may not have tried before!

Let's start with kohlrabi—a cruciferous vegetable that's more common in Europe and Asia but is growing in popularity worldwide. Per cup, kohlrabi is approximately 40 calories and contains both fiber and a small amount of protein. It is also a source of antioxidants such as vitamin C and contains vitamin B6, magnesium, and potassium. Look for firm, smaller to medium-size kohlrabi bulbs with hearty stems and leaves, as larger bulbs tend to be tougher and less tasty! You can eat both the bulb and leaves, but after washing, it is recommended to remove the outermost layer of the bulb as this is very tough and doesn't taste as delicious as the interior. If you are not using the bulb right away, seal tightly in a bag or airtight container in the fridge for up to one week. If you're ready to enjoy—snack on kohlrabi raw with hummus, add to salads, put into soups, or try roasting and sautéing.

Next up, collard greens! You may already be familiar with this leafy green, but did you know they are part of the cruciferous vegetable family just like kale? Collard greens contain a variety of nutrients including protein and fiber to help with satiety and blood glucose control but also vitamins and minerals such as vitamin K—important for blood clotting and bone health.

When selecting at the store, avoid those with wilted, slimy, or brown leaves. When preparing, it is recommended to remove the center rib and stem after washing and before enjoying! You can easily add collard greens to your menu by adding them to salads, sandwiches, soups, and stews, into your casseroles and omelets, or simply sautéing as a side dish.

Have you ever heard of jicama? While this root vegetable may not be the prettiest piece of produce in the department with its brown, papery peel hiding the crisp white interior, its extra crunchy texture and slightly sweet flavor is sure to impress! Jicama is also nutrient-dense, packed with fiber and is only around 50 calories per cup. Plus it contains antioxidants like vitamin C to protect our cells from damage and supports blood pressure regulation with the mineral potassium. At the store, select jicama that is firm and dry or opt to try Hy-Vee Short Cuts jicama sticks. You can enjoy jicama raw as a snack with your favorite dip or add to stir fry, slaws, or bake as an alternative to traditional fries.

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