

Writing Sample Excerpt: *Basics with Babish: Recipes for Screwing Up, Trying Again, and Hitting It Out of the Park*

Bacon-Roasted Brussels Sprouts

This one's all Kendall—the mad little genius dropped this gem on me with days to spare before Thanksgiving 2021. As such, she's going to write the headnote and stuff!

Kendall, take it away!

Hello readers – this is admittedly an odd place to greet you, but this is my time! I wish I could tell you this was a time-honored Beach-family tradition, but it's not. Back in the year 2019, my mother, my aunt Lynn, and I were preparing the traditional Thanksgiving sides (don't worry, I've since been promoted to turkey duty). One of us, let's just say it was me, suggested that we add bacon to the Brussels sprouts. This obviously isn't a novel idea but I had just learned in school that fat molecules inhibit our taste buds from "reading" bitter flavors; since Brussels sprouts are rife with bitter compounds, fat is a natural pairing. One of us, let's just say it was me again, then tacked on the idea of placing the strips over top of the Brussels sprouts so that as the fat renders, it coats the sprouts in delicious bacon flavor. This was largely a time-saving idea because we were already running late and the 45 seconds it would take to cut the bacon into pieces and then toss them with the Brussels sprouts was simply too much. At any rate, it turned out super well and who says traditions have to be old anyway? We've made it at every Thanksgiving since! (Plus, it earned me some real brownie points at work.)

How I've Screwed this Up

This one is fairly simple, but please heed my only warning. You may be tempted to go for the extra-thick deluxe heritage bacon, as I have been many times before. While in theory, this might be a good idea, in practice, not so much. What I ended up with was flabby bacon (please see troubleshooting), oil-slicked Brussels sprouts, and honestly,

the bacon flavor was just overwhelming. I know Brussels sprouts aren't everyone's cup of tea, but you do still want a semblance of a vegetal flavor.

Troubleshooting

My bacon is limp. I'm sure Andrew has already made the limp meat joke by this point, if not, I am also disappointed, dear reader. Anyway, fear not, if at the end of the cooking period the Brussels sprouts are cooked and crispy, but the bacon is not quite done, just remove the bacon strips and set them aside on a plate. Transfer the cooked sprouts to a serving vessel, then return the par-cooked bacon strips to the hot sheet tray and place it back into the oven for another 5 to 8 minutes. Make sure to keep an eye on the bacon because it will go quickly!

My sprouts are mushy and sad. This is truly the worst thing that can happen at your Thanksgiving dinner table. However, there is a pretty easy fix. Due to manufacturing discrepancies and the magic of modern technology, your oven might run cooler than our studio oven. Simply increase your oven temperature by 25 degrees and give the sprouts another 7 to 10 minutes in the oven. If you have a convection fan setting on your oven, that's even better. Although, I don't suggest increasing the temperature and turning on the fan because that's effectively increasing the cooking temperature by 50 degrees.

My sprouts are too crispy. There is no such thing – well there is, if you burnt them. In which case, you should start planning the funeral now because those Brussels sprouts are taking a trip to the gleaming composter in the sky.

Bacon-Roasted Brussels Sprouts

Serves 4 to 6

2 pounds Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved

Olive oil, as needed

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 (16-ounce) package thick-cut bacon (not extra thick) or 16 ounces homemade bacon, sliced (see page 000)

1. *Preheat the oven to 425°F.*
2. *In a large bowl, toss the Brussels sprouts with enough olive oil to coat, salt, and pepper.*
3. *Spread Brussels sprouts, cut-side down, in an even layer on a large rimmed baking sheet. Lay the bacon strips across the top.*
4. *Bake 30 to 35 minutes, until the sprouts are crisp and just beginning to char.*
5. *Remove from the oven. Once the bacon is cool enough to handle, chop into small pieces and toss with the Brussels sprouts.*