

= Cincinnati chili =

Cincinnati chili (or Cincinnati @-@ style chili) is a Mediterranean @-@ spiced meat sauce used as a topping for spaghetti (a " two @-@ way ") or hot dogs (" coneys ") , both dishes developed by Macedonian immigrant restaurateurs in the 1920s . Ingredients include ground beef , stock , tomato paste , cinnamon , other Mediterranean spices and sometimes chocolate in a soup @-@ like consistency . Other toppings include cheese , onions , and beans ; specific combinations of toppings are known as " ways " . The name " Cincinnati chili " is often confusing to those unfamiliar with it , who expect the dish to be similar to chili con carne ; as a result , it is common for those encountering it for the first time to conclude it is a poor example of chili .

While served in many local restaurants , it is most often associated with the over 250 " chili parlors " , restaurants specializing in Cincinnati chili , found throughout greater Cincinnati with franchise locations throughout Ohio and in Kentucky , Indiana , and Florida . The dish is the area 's best @-@ known regional food .

= = Origins and history = =

Cincinnati chili originated with immigrant restaurateurs from the Macedonian region who were trying to expand their customer base by moving beyond narrowly ethnic styles of cuisine . Tom and John Kiradjieff began serving a " stew with traditional Mediterranean spices " as a topping for hot dogs which they called " coneys " in 1922 at their hot dog stand located next to a burlesque theater called the Empress . Tom Kiradjieff used the sauce to modify a traditional Greek dish , speculated to have been pastitsio , moussaka or saltsa kima to come up with a dish he called chili spaghetti . He first developed a recipe calling for the spaghetti to be cooked in the chili but changed his method in response to customer requests and began serving the sauce as a topping , eventually adding grated cheese as a topping for both the chili spaghetti and the coneys , also in response to customer requests . To make ordering more efficient , the brothers created the " way " system of ordering . The style has since been copied and modified by many other restaurant proprietors , often fellow Greek and Macedonian immigrants who had worked at Empress restaurants before leaving to open their own chili parlors , often following the business model to the point of locating their restaurants adjacent to theaters .

Empress was the largest chili parlor chain in Cincinnati until 1949 , when a former Empress employee and Greek immigrant , Nicholas Lambrinides , started Skyline Chili . In 1965 , four brothers named Daoud , immigrants from Jordan , bought a restaurant called Hamburger Heaven from a former Empress employee , noticed the Cincinnati chili was outselling the hamburgers on their menu , and changed the restaurant 's name to Gold Star Chili . As of 2015 Skyline (over 130 locations) and Gold Star (89 locations) were the largest Cincinnati chili parlor chains , while Empress had only two remaining locations , down from over a dozen during the chain 's most successful period .

Besides Empress , Skyline , and Gold Star , there are also smaller chains such as Dixie Chili and Deli and numerous independents including the acclaimed Camp Washington Chili , probably the most well @-@ known of the independents . Other independents include Pleasant Ridge Chili , Blue Ash Chili , Park Chili Parlor , Price Hill Chili , and the Blue Jay Restaurant , in all totalling more than 250 chili parlors . In addition to the chili parlors , some version of Cincinnati chili is commonly served at many local restaurants . Arnold 's Bar and Grill , the oldest bar in the city , serves a vegetarian " Cincy Lentils " dish ordered in " ways " . Melt Eclectic Cafe offers a vegan 3 @-@ way .

The history of Cincinnati chili shares many factors in common with the apparently independent but simultaneous development of the Coney Island hot dog in other areas of the United States . " Virtually all " were developed by Greek or Macedonian immigrants who passed through Ellis Island as they fled the fallout from the Balkan Wars in the first two decades of the twentieth century .

= = Preparation and ordering = =

Raw ground beef is crumbled in water and / or stock , tomato paste and seasonings are added , and the mixture is brought to a boil and then simmered for several hours to form a thin meat sauce . Many recipes call for an overnight chill in the refrigerator to allow for easy skimming of fat and to allow flavors to develop , then reheating to serve . Typical proportions are 2 pounds of ground beef to 4 cups of water and 6 oz tomato paste to make 8 servings .

= = = The " way " system = = =

Ordering Cincinnati chili is based on a specific ingredient series : chili , spaghetti , grated cheddar cheese , diced onions , and kidney beans . The number before the " way " of the chili determines which ingredients are included in each chili order . Customers order a :

Two @-@ way : spaghetti topped with chili (also called " chili spaghetti ")

Three @-@ way : spaghetti , chili , and cheese

Four @-@ way : spaghetti , chili , cheese , and onions

Four @-@ way bean : spaghetti , chili , cheese , and beans (beans substituted for the onions)

Five @-@ way : spaghetti , chili , cheese , onions , and beans

Some restaurants , among them Skyline and Gold Star , do not use the term " four @-@ way bean " , instead using the term " four @-@ way " to denote a three @-@ way plus the customer 's choice of onions or beans . Some restaurants may add extra ingredients to the " way " system ; for example , Dixie Chili offers a " six @-@ way " , which adds chopped garlic to a five @-@ way . " Ways " are traditionally served in a shallow oval bowl . Cincinnati chili is also used as a hot dog topping to make a " coney " , a regional variation on the Coney Island chili dog , which is topped with grated cheddar cheese to make a " cheese coney " . The standard coney also includes mustard and chopped onion . The " Three @-@ way " and the " Cheese Coney " are the most popular orders and very few customers order a bowl of plain chili . Most chili parlors do not offer plain chili as a regular menu item . Oyster crackers are usually served with Cincinnati chili , and a mild hot sauce such as Tabasco is frequently used as an optional topping .

= = Misnomer = =

The name " Cincinnati chili " is often confusing to those unfamiliar with it because the term " chili " evokes the expectation of chili con carne , which it " bears no resemblance to . " Cincinnati chili is a Mediterranean @-@ spiced meat sauce for spaghetti or hot dogs and is very seldom eaten by the bowl as is typical with chili con carne . It is common for Cincinnatians to describe it starting with , " Well , it 's not really chili ... " Cincinnati chili is always seasoned with cinnamon , usually contains allspice and cloves , and often contains some combination of cumin , paprika , nutmeg , and / or chili pepper . Many copycat recipes call for a small amount of chocolate , but according to Dann Woellert , author of The Authentic History of Cincinnati Chili , " There is no chili parlor in Cincinnati that uses chocolate in its chili . " It is normally of a thin consistency , closer to a soup than a stew , and contains no chunks of meat or vegetables , though it is common to find large pieces of cayenne pepper hulls in Empress chili . The consistency , seasonings , and serving method are more similar to pasta sauce or the spiced meat sauces used to top hot dogs in Rochester and other parts of Upstate New York , Rhode Island , and Michigan than they are to chili con carne .

= = Reception = =

Cincinnati chili is the area 's " best known regional food " . According to the Greater Cincinnati Convention and Visitors Bureau , Cincinnatians consume more than 2 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 lb (910 @,@ 000 kg) of Cincinnati chili each year , topped by 850 @,@ 000 lb (390 @,@ 000 kg) of shredded cheddar cheese . Overall industry revenues were \$ 250 million in 2014 .

National food critics Jane and Michael Stern wrote , " As connoisseurs of blue @-@ plate food , we consider Cincinnati chili one of America 's quintessential meals " and " one of this nation 's most distinctive regional plates of food " . Huffington Post named it one of " 15 Beloved Regional Dishes "

. In 2000 , Camp Washington Chili won a James Beard Foundation America 's Classics Award . In 2013 , Smithsonian named Cincinnati chili one of " 20 Most Iconic Foods in America " , calling out Camp Washington Chili as their destination of choice . John McIntyre , writing in the Baltimore Sun , called it " the most perfect of fast foods " , and , referring to the misnomer , opined that " if the Greeks who invented it nearly a century ago had called it something other than chili , the [chili] essentialists would be able to enjoy it " . In 2015 , Thrillist named it " the one food you must eat in Ohio . "

It is common for those unfamiliar with it , confused by the misnomer and expecting chili con carne , to " scorn it " as a poor example of chili . Deadspin went so far as to call it " horrifying diarrhea sludge " .

= = In popular culture = =

Country music duo Big & Rich sang about flying through Cincinnati and grabbing a bowl of Skyline chili in their song Comin ' to Your City on the 2005 album of the same name . Blues musician Lonnie Mack sang a song called Camp Washington Chili on his 1986 album Second Sight .

Cincinnati chili is used allegorically as a symbol for vapid social interaction and social disconnection in the 2015 animated film Anomalisa , as the main character when on a business trip to Cincinnati is exhorted in multiple banal encounters to try the local specialty .

= = Similar dishes = =

Chili dog , the generic term for a hot dog topped with meat sauce

Chili John 's , founded in Green Bay , Wisconsin by a Lithuanian immigrant , offers " Green Bay chili " , a dish similar to a five @-@ way created in 1913

Coney Island hot dog , a dish similar to a coney developed by Greek and Macedonian immigrants , apparently independently , across the Midwest