**THE PERFECT BURGER**

The perfect burger has simple white-bread buns with creamy white mayo, iceberg lettuce and red tomato, red onion, pickles, and patties cooked rare. Seems simple, but the truth comes about in the preparation of all the ingredients that go into that perfect burger. The pickles, the mayo and cooking the onions on one side only and the meat that goes into the burger patty.

Serves 4

**INGREDIENTS:**

1. 2 cups distilled white wine vinegar
2. ½ small yellow onion thinly sliced
3. 3 garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
4. 2 whole cloves
5. 1 star anise pod
6. ½ Tsp. each of coriander seeds and caraway seeds
7. Kosher salt
8. 1 English cucumber, sliced ¼ inch thick
9. 4 dill sprigs
10. 2 large egg yolks
11. 1-1/2 Tbs. Apple cider vinegar
12. 1 cup vegetable oil
13. ½ cup finely grated aged white cheddar, such as Cabot
14. 1 Tsp. hot mustard powder Pepper
15. 4 medium white or brioche burger buns
16. Softened unsalted butter, for brushing
17. 1 red onion, sliced ¼ inch thick
18. 1-1/2 lbs. ground beef chuck (25% fat)
19. Sliced beefsteak tomatoes and iceberg lettuce, for serving

**DIRECTIONS:**

In a medium saucepan combine the white vinegar, yellow onion, garlic, whole cloves, star anise, coriander and caraway seeds and 2-1/2 tablespoons of salt and bring just to a boil, stirring to dissolve the salt. Add the cucumber slices and dill, remove from the heat and let cool completely. Transfer the cucumbers and brine to a jar and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 3 days.

Meanwhile, in a blender or a mini food processor, combine the egg yolks with the cider vinegar and 2 tablespoons of water and puree until smooth. With the machine on, add the oil a few drops at a time until the mayonnaise starts to thicken, then add the remaining oil in a very thin stream until the sauce is emulsified. Add the cheese and mustard powder and puree until smooth. Season the mayonnaise with salt and pepper and scrape into a bowl. Refrigerate until chilled, about 30 minutes.

Heat a cast-iron grill pan until very hot. Brush the cut sides of the buns with butter and grill over moderately high heat until lightly browned, about 1 minute; transfer to a platter. Add the red onion slices to the pan and grill until lightly charred on one side, about 2 minutes: transfer to a plate.

Gently form the ground beef into four ¾-inch patties, packing them loosely as possible. Season generously with salt and pepper and grill over moderately high heat, turning once, until lightly charred on the outside and medium-rare within, about 4 minutes total. On each bun, set 3 pickle rounds, 1 slice tomato and 1 slice grilled onion and top with the burger and an iceberg leaf. Generously brush the bun top with the cheddar mayonnaise, close the burgers and serve right away.

**MAKE AHEAD:** The mayonnaise can be refrigerated overnight.