

Six people sitting around a table trying eight barbecue sauces one evening is not what anyone would call an exhaustive, scientific survey. But, going by the results of a tasting I recently conducted along those lines, you'd have to come to this possibly surprising conclusion: The best barbecue sauces produced in Greater Cincinnati are made by women.

Diane Creech's Pit to Plate sauce and Kelly Mozingo's Kelly's sauce were the top scorers in a little experiment I did with a panel of testers.

I wasn't surprised by the Pit to Plate showing, as Creech's Mount Healthy spot has earned a lot of followers in the last 10 years. The taste panel hailed it as "balanced," with "just enough heat."

But the Kelly's high-scoring finish was a surprise. Made and marketed by Hamilton resident Kelly Mozingo, it's a low-carb, low-calorie, low-sodium sauce, with zero points on some diets. It's even gluten-free.

Mozingo created it in 2007 to give healthy eaters a better sauce choice, simply by taking out a lot of the sugar and salt. (She used some molasses for depth of flavor) Apparently, you don't need all that stuff to get a good flavor: Tasters praised it as "sweet but balanced" with "deep flavor, rich and thick."

They were the top two in a field of eight locally made barbecue sauces, all produced by food entrepreneurs, chefs, restaurants or barbecue spots.

A couple of sauces stumped our panelists: the most "gourmet" versions, from David Cook of Daveed's restaurant, and Joby's, which local cook Joe Bollman makes in small batches and sells at farmers' markets, seemed too different to judge. They praised them as marinades or glazes, however.

Cincinnati is lucky to have so many good sauces made right here. Some are available in grocery stores, some you have to make a special trip to find. Our tasting session stopped short of comprehensiveness, but we feel we got a broad sampling.

Barbecue sauces have such a range of flavors and styles that your favorite may turn out to be completely different than ours. In some cases, one tester rated a sauce at 5, while another gave it a 2.

This weekend, if you're planning to smoke ribs, or cook some chicken or pork chops on the grill for a July 4th cookout, try a few of these sauces and do your own taste test. You might even try a sauce made by a man.

The scores

We tried traditional barbecue sauces, all tomato-based, with sweet and spicy seasonings. The panel tasted them blind; that is, they did not know which sauces they were tasting. They first tried them plain, on a fingertip or a piece of bland melba toast.

Then they tried them on grilled chicken breasts. I slathered some almost-cooked chicken with sauce and gave them another 5-10 minutes on the grill. I served a little extra sauce on the side. Panelists scored

them simply on a scale of 1-6, and wrote down their impressions. I added up the points from both tastings to arrive at the scores. These were the results:

Pit to Plate BBQ medium BBQ sauce: 53 points

Comments: "sweet but nice burn," "glazes nicely on grilled chicken," "nice balance of flavors, just enough heat," "spicy and sweet and salty"

Available only at the restaurant, 8021 Hamilton Ave., Mount Healthy

Kelly's Gourmet BBQ sauce, Hickory flavor: 50

Comments: "crazy thick, sweet but balanced," "deep flavor, rich and thick," "a little too much smoke flavor"

Available at Kroger, bigg's, Remke's, other markets-www.kchf.biz

Bubba Brothers: 45

Comments: "mellow tomato," "very sweet, tastes a little "manufactured." "dark color, nice texture and consistency"

Available at bigg's and other markets

Daveed's Fatty and Skinny Spicy Bar-B-Que: 38

Comments: "unusual, nice flavor," "more of a specialty sauce," "cinnamony," "fruity," "nice as a marinade, not really bbq"

Available at Daveed's, 934 Hatch St., Mount Adams, and at www.fattyandskinnybrand.com

Walt's Barbeque regular sauce: 34

Comments: "too sweet, cloying," "syrupy," "thick, smoky, not a lot of flavor."

Available at the restaurant, 6040 Colerain Ave., (also in Hamilton and Harrison) or at www.waltsbarbecue.com

Joby's: 31

Comments: "different in a good way," "more like salad dressing." "would offend a purist." "orange flavor would make it a perfect marinade," "orange, spicy"

Available at the Strauss & Troy market on Fountain Square and Wyoming Farmers market, both on Tuesdays.

Montgomery Inn: 29

Comments: "Is this ketchup? No real bbq sauce flavor," "a little too sweet for me." "could be pleasant if served with a nice spicy rub"

Available at many local grocers

Jim Dandy's: 23

Comments: "strange, interesting, flavor a little muddy," "too thin, tomatoey"

Available at the store, 2343 E. Sharon Road, Sharonville