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Searching For The Perfect Pizza

5 Contenders In North Central Connecticut

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To properly analyze a pizza, both the flavor and construction should be considered. Gourmet ingredients are wasted on a soggy crust, but even the perfect crust is nothing if the sauce is too dry. In my experience, the perfect pizza has a thin, cornmeal dusted crust that is crunchy, a tad chewy and the slightest bit oily.

Ingredients should be fresh and plentiful, but not so heavy as to prevent the old fold-and-munch technique. Real pizzas aren't eaten with a knife and fork. As far as I am concerned, the standard is set in New Haven, where restaurants like Pepe's, Sally's and Modern Apizza turn out world class brick oven pizza daily.

So I set out to taste how five popular north central Connecticut pizza spots fare with my favorite pie: sausage and green peppers.

(Note, the prices reflect the cost of a standard red mozzarella pie.)

Willington Pizza

25 River Road, Route 32, Willington

860-429-7433

Small \$8.00

Large \$13.00

The pizza crust here is a bit thicker and more ingredients were piled on to compensate. The crust adequately handled the dense toppings and thick cheese while maintaining a solid crunch. But it was a bit too solid for my taste. The pie is cut into squares, which make eating by hand a bit messier than necessary.

The sauce is sweet and tangy and the sausage has a slight bit of spice to it. I would definitely rate Willington's pie higher on the flavor than the construction. But the thick, tasty pie will easily stuff the average pizza-goer, so the price is a deal. Willington Pizza also offers about 20 beers on tap and some quirky interior decorating – definitely worth a look.

Barb's Pizza

575 John Fitch Blvd., South Windsor

860-291-9670

Small \$7.50

Large \$12.00

Barb's is a pleasant surprise. It's a hole-in-the-wall storefront pizzeria near the South Windsor Ice

Arena that makes a quality thin crust pie. A little put off when they said they didn't have regular green peppers, I soon found myself pleasantly surprised by the succulent roasted peppers topping half of my pizza. The crust is hand tossed, dusted with cornmeal and held together better than Willington's, with a more New Haven-style crunch. The cheese and sauce are standard quality, but well-proportioned.

The only major drawback to Barb's is the lack of places to sit. One long countertop adjacent the front window is all that's available. If you're looking for good takeout or delivery around South Windsor, however, look no further.

Luna Pizza

999 Farmington Ave, West Hartford

860 233-1625

Small \$7.95

Medium \$11.25

Large \$15.25

This place is straight-up gourmet. You can taste the oregano in the sauce, the mozzarella is the fresh soaked kind rather than the shredded, and every ingredient seems to have some extra flavor. The toppings even seemed arranged with an artful eye. Still, I won't rave about Luna and for two reasons: price and crust. For some of the most expensive pizza around, the crust on the pie I ate got too soggy in the middle.

It is a lovely restaurant though, with white walls and separated booths lending a very relaxed air. You can eat outside and watch the people walking through West Hartford Center. On the weekends, patrons can listen to live piano music inside while sipping a bit of the red.

Harry's

1003 Farmington Ave., West Hartford

860 231-7166

Small \$8.50

Large \$13.00

Harry's close proximity to Luna's might suggest the sort of rivalry that Sally's and Pepe's share in New Haven. The ingredients in Harry's pizza are great. The ratios just seemed slightly off. The sauce is very fresh tasting, with nice chunks of crushed tomato, but it was spread too thin on my pie. With the sauce too dry, the cheese taste seemed much stronger. Harry's didn't top my pizza with green peppers alone, but red peppers don't bother me much.

The crust was much better here than at Luna's. Firm, crunchy and chewy all at the same time. And this pie was one of the best reheated - often my favorite way to eat a good slice. The restaurant's pleasant atmosphere includes an open view of the kitchen and odd photos on the walls. The servers also ask if you want sorbet when you're done with your meal.

Randy's Wooster Street Pizza

1131 Tolland Tpke. Suite T (in the shopping plaza), Manchester

860-649-1166

Small- \$8.50

Medium-\$11.50

Large-\$13.50

Randy's has a real brick oven and knows how to use it. The sauce is sweet, flavorful and plentiful. True to the New Haven-style the place emulates, the pizza crust is thin, firm and perfectly crunchy. Paired with top-notch mozzarella and toppings, the combination results in a delicious slice that's easy to eat folded. Randy's was the best pie I tasted in my three-week pizza mission.

What's more, Randy's menu is crammed with a bunch of adventuresome items. Try the Killer Dillers

(fried pickle chips with a dill-infused ranch dip) or Skippy's Dare (a white pie with bacon and peanut butter).

But Randy's degree of quality doesn't come without a price. The restaurant's Hot Wheels theme draws large groups of young ones more interested in noisy arcade games and the novel small automobile décor than the nearly perfect pizza served up. If you want a quieter pizza evening out, I recommend Luna or Harry's. But if you don't mind kids, Randy's will serve you some of the best pizza north of New Haven.

About the writer: Rob Barry is a 21-year-old student of journalism and philosophy at the University of Connecticut. He lives to write, dig up new experiences and protect puppies and small children from traffic. He gladly takes on the noble pursuit of "researching" places of leisure and libation for the good of the masses. His hobbies are dynamic, cutting edge and way cooler than yours.

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