

Vienna sausage sounds like some European wonder - a delicate creation from a butcher that works hard to get them just so. By golly you are right.

Not just special sausages but most any kind of cooked variety fits the generic moniker of "Vienna sausage." What we use for hotdogs fits this mold exactly.

The Vienna sausage I want to talk about is far from exotic. In fact it's often not pronounced Vee-in-ah. Around here you usually hear Veye-ee-nuh. In other parts you also hear Veye-ee-ees. Regardless of how you say it, these little sausages can be a real delight.

This past weekend, the staff kicked me out of Jimmy's for Saturday and Sunday. I certainly didn't argue.

On Saturday morning we headed for the lake. First we made a stop at Wright's Market for supplies. Peaches, tomato, cantaloupe and zucchini were a good start. A tender 3-pound chicken and a small shank half of a ham (my favorite) added substance to the cart.

But I wanted something easy for lunch that I didn't have to cook for a meal. That's when I heard a whole shelf of those little cans calling me. I was a sweet tune.

There they were – lots of Vienna sausages in all sorts of versions. Armour was the ones most represented. Besides the "regular" kind there were hot and spicy, Jalapeno and smoked. Those are the ones I bought. There were also a barbecue and a lite version. I got a box of saltines and some Cheddar cheese to round out our upcoming lunch.

What a feast we had. I made a plate of tomato and cheese slices and another of saltines. Then came separate plates of the three sausages. No mixing of the liquids were going to spoil an official "weenie tasting."

The smoked version tasted quite good. It didn't have an artificial flavor. The accompanying "au jus" wasn't anything special.

Second came the Jalapeno kind. This one has a slightly hot vinegar packing liquid – like pepper sauce common in the South. These were

very good. Not too hot but nicely spiced. The liquid did a good job soaking a cracker too.

Third was the hot and spicy version. It was the best one. The sauce for this variety was like a typical hot sauce such as like Crystal. Not that hot but more so than the previous one.

We alternated bites of each with some tomato and sharp Cheddar. Those with the saltines were just right. That bottle of chilled Rosé went just fine with everything.

From the fridge came a jar of pickled Serrano peppers. I like the smaller size of these compared to Jalapenos and the fact that they have more heat. A couple of those added a spicy dimension to our Viennas.

To make some fresh pickled peppers for yourself, fill a jar with the crisp washed Serranos and add several cloves of garlic. Then pour in white distilled vinegar to within an inch of the top. Place the jar in the fridge and leave it for several weeks. The peppers will have a great flavor and still be crisp.

What makes up these little sausages? Most of them contain chicken, pork and beef. The meats are ground together into a smooth paste. The filling is seasoned and packed into casings. Then they are cooked and smoked. The casing is removed and they are cut to length. Seven are packed into each can with whatever sauce comes with that variety.

If there are downsides to Vienna sausage, one could be that vague statement about the kinds of meat. At the price these sell for, it's all trimmings. The greatest drawback for some people is the fact that they contain lots of fat, cholesterol and sodium.

Truth is that a can of Vienna sausage takes care of one third of your daily fat and cholesterol and almost half your recommended sodium allowance. The lite version reduces these numbers significantly. Good sided is they are low in carbs.

The other good side is they taste good. They have a firm yet soft texture and pleasant mild flavor. Put a slice on a cracker, maybe with some cheese and you have a great snack. Keep going and a meal will break out.

When I had Viennas growing up, Claire usually put the can in the fridge. All that was available then was the regular version. The packing juice turned into a soft jelly. It was a great bonus on a cracker by itself. We always had ours with a fresh hot pepper or two and cheese.

In college I cooked them. I always thought Viennas simmered in a spicy barbecue sauce were great. Now they make a similar version already in the can.

You can also add Vienna sausage to beans or rice. Slice and simmer them in tomato or spaghetti sauce or brown gravy. Then add to the beans or rice. You can pour the sausages over toast or garlic bread, too. That garlic bread idea sounds pretty good.

Before the summer is consider your own Vienna festival. Get a few kinds and have some for a lunch or Sunday supper. You might find out that these simple sausages are pretty good eats.

A can or two of Vienna sausage is a welcome sight in a dorm room and a backpack. It's also a welcome sight in my pantry. When a quick and satisfying lunch is called for, Viennas fit the bill just fine.