

Roast Beef Sandwich, Grocery Store Style

by Meg Elison

as featured in *Ode to a Grocery Store Sandwich*

This recipe will allow you to recreate the perfection of a grocery-store-deli roast beef sandwich. Prepared as written, it produces one serving.

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Ingredients

- 2 slices marble rye bread
- 1 tsp butter
- 1 Tbsp mayonnaise
- 1 Tbsp mustard
- 1 tsp horseradish (optional for those who live on the edge)
- 1 slice red onion
- 3-4 slices hard cheddar cheese
- 3-4 slices rare roast beef
- 2 lettuce leaves
- 2 slices tomato
- salt & pepper

Supplies

- Spreading knife
 - Cutting knife
 - Cutting surface
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Instructions

Ahead of time

- Soften butter until spreadable.

[ed. note: The best way to do this is by leaving it out on the counter for an hour, but in a pinch, you can heat it until just melted, then whisk in a heatsafe container nestled inside a bowl of ice until just firm. Note that the latter method will leave you feeling irritable for at least ten minutes.]

Prep

- Slice the tomato and onion
- Tear and wash lettuce leaves

Step One

Lay out two slices of bread. Butter each slice lightly on one side. This is for flavor, but it also creates a barrier that will keep your bread dry if you're packing for a journey or just lunch later.

Salt and pepper the buttered side of the bread.

Step Two

Spread mayonnaise and mustard on top of each slice of bread. People try to oppose them; I say they are friends.

Add horseradish if you dare.

[ed. note: if you are unfamiliar with horseradish and want to try it for this recipe, taste a small amount before adding it to the sandwich; it has a unique heat and you'll want to gauge your tolerance.]

Step Three

On one prepared slice, **pile cheese, then onion, then tomato, then lettuce, and finally roast beef.** Try to arrange them in even layers, so that each bite tastes like the fullness of love, the intricacy of care.

Top with the other prepared slice of bread, spread-side down.

Serve

Cut on a diagonal, using a serrated knife to avoid squishing. If you're not eating right away, pack the sandwich halves in a ziploc bag, or waxed paper, or a knotted bandana. **Eat within the day.**

Best when shared. Pairs beautifully with a Diet Coke and a sense that no one can imagine the shit that you've seen.

Recommended substitutions and modifications

- **Without alliums.** Leave out the sliced onion.
 - **Without dairy.** Leave off the butter and cheese, or use a preferred dairy-free substitute.
 - **Without gluten.** Substitute gluten-free bread in place of rye bread; consider toasting ahead of time, as gluten-free bread is likelier to absorb moisture from the vegetables and become a goopy nightmare.
 - **Enhance your mustards.** This recipe calls for yellow mustard, but you can also use a whole-grain mustard like [this one](#), or a mustard that comes pre-loaded with horseradish like [this one](#).
 - **Scale it up.** Do the same thing listed above, but many times over. If you want to make a ton of sandwiches, consider an assembly-line style process: slice up all the tomatoes and onions, then lay out all the bread, then butter it all at once, then season it all at once, etc. Mix together mayo, mustard, and horseradish ahead of time in a big batch to make applying spread to many slices of bread an easier process with more predictable outcomes.
 - **Scale it down.** Use tiny ingredients, like you're a treefrog hosting a garden party. Slice up a cherry tomato and a shallot; pile all the ingredients on little rye crackers. Good luck with the horseradish.
 - **Don't cook at all.** You can find this same sandwich wrapped in plastic at your local grocery store deli counter; it won't let you down.
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Don't forget: care for yourself and the people around you. Believe that the world can be better than it is now. Never give up.