

WHY

Britain is considering introducing compulsory lessons on “core British values” for children **because of last July’s suicide bomb attacks** on London, the government said this week. Education minister Bill Rammell said a six-month review would examine whether all 11- to 16-year-olds should be taught about freedom of speech, civic responsibility and democracy. “If we are to get a proper modern sense of

British identity, which, I think, is the best way to tackle extremism, then I think that’s very important,” Rammell told BBC radio. After meeting with Muslim students and academics to listen to their views and grievances, Rammell said there was a consensus for debate on the issue. “What are those things that are essential to all cultures within British society?” he asked. *Reuters*

FOOD

SHELF LIFE · A. Brouwer & A. Wilson

Pickles: What’s the dilly-o?

Shelf Life had that dream again — the dream that’s more like a nightmare. We’re in a huge, ultra-modern grocery store, happily going up and down the aisles, when an image consultant appears and seizes control of our shopping cart. Consultant Guy is not to be messed with. He knows exactly which products succeed and which products fail in today’s ruthless foodapalooza world of retailing. He takes one look at our shopping list and pronounces it full of doomed old-school items. Cake mixes, for example, and spices and seasonings. “Too needy — these products are asking you to do stuff with them,” scoffs Consultant Guy, “Kids today don’t want the responsibility.” As we trudge past graveyards of untrendy pudding cups and last year’s granola bars, our guide stops in his tracks. “Dill pickles. Perfect candidates for a makeover. There’s something geriatric about them: I see Grandma handing me a paper plate. Even worse, I see linoleum. I’d start with a re-think of the whole category — maybe a sports tie-in. Like, imagine your sports shoe comes with a compartment you could put your pickle in. Picklz!”

Consultant Guy waved his arms excitedly. “Or — Japan is hot. Kids love those little gadgets. Your brand mascot could be a cute green toy. Dillboy! It smokes and has a scar on its forehead.” Dazzled by these exciting concepts, Shelf Life became inspired to try some ideas of our own. We gazed at the jars of briny green logs — familiar, comforting, 29¢ off — and created our own edgy new name for dill pickles. We love you just the way you are, Wartz and All. Not to be outdone in the name-that-product department, and each keen to contribute a suggestion — Swamp Noodles; Xtrem Green; If I Point It At You, Will You Hold My Pickle? — are this week’s expert judges: Elizabeth Baird, food editor, Canadian Living Magazine; Dufflet Rosenberg, chef and founder of Toronto’s Dufflet Pastries and Dufflet Small Indulgences products; and Johanna Weinstein, mistress of munch and co-host of Prime TV’s Countertop to Table Cuisine. Space limitations prevent us from evaluating every brand in a given category; entries reflect the luck of the draw. Items are blind taste-tested and awarded between zero and five stars.



STRUB'S FULL SOUR KOSHER DILLS
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BUBBIES PURE KOSHER DILLS
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VLASIC KOSHER DILLS
1L, \$3.49

Widely available



MOISHE'S KOSHER DILL PICKLES
1L, \$3.99

Available at some Loblaws stores, gourmet and specialty retailers

Elizabeth Recently, I taste-tested Canadian cheeses — 107 of them — so sitting down to a peck of pickles is easy. My ideal pickle? I always go for the small ones, the ones that look like they belong on a relish tray, or on a plate beside a sandwich. This brand is a dark grey-green, and the brine is cloudy. Salty on the tongue, garlic smell — overall Brand 1 is more garlicky than dilly. ★★★

Dufflet I agree with Elizabeth — the best pickles are the ones you get on an old-fashioned relish tray. Remember that Toronto restaurant called the Nosherie? You’d get great relish trays and wonderful marbled bread. I think this brand is Strub’s. The brine contains lots of garlic chunks floating around — Strub’s are very garlic — and there’s something about the murkiness ... I’m betting these are Strub’s. ★★★

Johanna Strub’s for sure. These are not so much about the dill — they’re the garlic experience in pickles, which I like. Fantastic crunch. They’re very Jewish, or Jewy, as Jon Stewart says. ★★★★★
TOTAL: 12 stars

Elizabeth Slightly cloudy brine, some dill seeds and bits of hot pepper floating around, a fresh smell and a deep salubrious green colour — so far Brand 2 looks mouthwatering. The flavour is excellent; it lasts, and it really fills the mouth. These are almost as good as my mother’s recipe, which came from an extremely unlikely place, the machinists’ welding union my father belonged to. And my father helped make our pickles; he was in charge of the garlic. ★★★★★

Dufflet I like the heat; Brand 2 reminds me of a New York deli. The best part of these pickles is the balance between saltiness and garlic; you don’t get one over the other. Great pucker too. These would be ideal as a side order with one of my favourite dishes, cold roast chicken. ★★★★★

Johanna Brand 2 is a bit sour for me. There’s one big advantage with them though — you can actually taste the bits and pieces floating around in the brine. I’m picking up traces of the red pepper. Nice size, good noisy cracking chew. Are these Moishe’s? ★★★★★
TOTAL: 14 stars

Elizabeth They don’t have a very assertive crunch. And the bright green colour in the brine doesn’t say “natural” — it looks like the water you used to buy pet turtles in. The pickles are on the pale yellow side and translucent. Very vinegary, not much garlic — kids might like Brand 3. It could be their starter pickle before they go on to more challenging dills. ★★

Dufflet The smell is OK, but you get a lot of vinegar. Look at that green colour — very vibrant — it’s psychedelic. Brand 3 gives you lots of pucker, but absolutely no dill, or garlic. This pickle goes in the Harvey’s category, i.e., the industrial ones they slice and put on burgers in fast food joints. ★½

Johanna What a strange, scary colour. This pickle looks radioactive — danger! Do not touch perimeter fence or pickles! Brand 3 looks and smells very cucumber. The taste is Wasp: yellow turmeric, and no garlic or dill to speak of. These are play pickles. Didn’t Elvis like deep-fried pickles — to go with his peanut butter and bacon sandwiches? It’s a miracle his private jet could take off. ★½
TOTAL: 5 stars

Elizabeth I prefer Brand 4’s smaller size, rather than those other big bulbous ones. The smell is inviting. Right in the first bite you get a very full and very bold flavour. I like this brand, it’s confident and unto itself — you could eat these pickles on their own. If you have a case of the midnight munchies, Brand 4 would be worth getting out of bed and going downstairs for. ★★★

Dufflet Nice and sour. That’s how I know these aren’t Strub’s, they’re too sour for Strub’s. I think they’re Moishe’s. This is the kind of thing you serve with chopped liver. Brand 4 is a very good artisanal pickle with lots of pucker, plenty of garlic, a bit of dill and a great tangy smell. ★★★★★½

Johanna These pickles are helping me get rid of memories of the previous brand, which left a big green puddle in my stomach, like the crocodile pond at the zoo. Having said that, Brand 4 pickles are fine but not my favourite. They have all the right qualities, but I still prefer Strub’s — I love what they do with the garlic. ★★
TOTAL: 10½ stars

The Results The people’s choice turned out to be Bubbies, the no-fluke cukes from south of the border. Ontario’s Strub’s (second place) and Montreal’s Moishe’s (third) added some juice to the game, while lowest-scorer Vlasic proved that it really isn’t easy being green.

Off the Menu When it comes to dill pickles, there is really only one question: shelf or refrigerated? The industry name for pickles featured in the condiment aisle is “processed,” these are made by placing cucumbers in a salt solution, where they undergo a lengthy lactic-acid fermentation process. By contrast, the refrigerated variety is the result of a different preservation method, which produces pickles with a relatively short shelf life. Many of these tend to be heavy on the garlic. Ladies and gentlemen, choose your greens: Refrigerated pickles are for people who look for maximum crunch, or who love garlic, or who crave a genuine, deli-style, total-meshuggeneh dill pickle experience. Processed pickles are something else — they work well as ingredients and garnishes, and offer flavours such as bread-and-butter or the mysteriously named yum yum. It’s all down to taste: different pickles for different people. Shelf Life likes the chilled variety. We ♥ Chillz.

Weekend Post

The Chinese love coffee (except for the taste)

Pass the sugar: Starbucks to open 10,000 outlets in China

BY PETER GOFF
in Beijing

For centuries, the Chinese have delighted in the simple rituals of making and serving tea. Now they are having to learn a new skill: the intricacies of producing a state-of-the-art cup of coffee.

So many of China’s middle classes have begun drinking cappuccino and cafe latte that the country’s labour ministry has declared an official skills shortage. About 10,000 trained coffee makers and servers are needed in Beijing and Shanghai alone, according to a government survey.

There is no lack of bar-men and waiters looking for good jobs — but most of them have never made a cup of coffee in their lives. “Before, I worked in Chinese restaurants,” said James Gao, 24, who used to pour tea in his home town



of Shenyang, in north-eastern China, before moving to Beijing to work in a fashionable cafe.

“When I came here a few years ago, coffee was starting to become popular,” he said. “But it was very basic — just instant varieties and coffee machines, where you just pushed one button and a coffee came out. But then tastes changed and it became more complicated. Now the bars all

have huge coffee machines that make several different types of coffee. It’s really a skill to learn. You must study it.”

Like hundreds of others who have served tea all their lives, Gao had to take a course in coffee making before he could start work at the Bookworm cafe. He learnt the names and origins of the beans, how to froth milk, and the difference between a cappuccino and a frappuccino.

Once barmen such as Gao have mastered the skill, they are likely to have a job for life. Since Starbucks first ventured into China six years ago, it has opened 230 branches across the country, and plans to open a further 10,000 outlets over the next few years.

“It traditionally has been a tea-drinking country, but we turned them into coffee drinkers,” Howard Schultz, the chairman of Starbucks, said of China earlier this year.

Although coffee’s bitter tang is an alien taste on the tongues of the tea-drinking nation, the burgeoning middle classes see coffee — which, at the equivalent of \$4.18 a cup, costs as much as the daily wages of an unskilled labourer — as an essential status symbol.

“People start drinking coffee because they think it’s the cool thing to do,” said Serena Lee, a 23-year-old manager of an English-language school. “It’s a statement. They feel sophisticated. Everyone is afraid of looking like a farmer.”

Zhang Hui, 28, a computer analyst, who was strolling out of a cafe with a steaming paper cup in one hand and a Louis Vuitton handbag swinging by her side, said: “A few years ago when I tasted coffee first, I thought it was disgusting. I never wanted to drink it again, but my boyfriend told me I would look backward if I refused to drink it. Later I got hooked. I don’t know if I really like it, but sometimes I just need it.”

Linda Liu, the manager of the Bookworm cafe, observed that most of her customers do not seem to like coffee, but they keep buying it.

“As long as there is milk and sugar added, they can normally drink it,” she said. “But the Chinese people can’t stand espressos.”

“One girl nearly died with fright when she tasted it. And some regulars order coffee all the time, but never finish it.”

The Sunday Telegraph

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