

BEST MAPLE MENU 2024

Congratulations to Phoenix House, winners of the Best Maple Menu Contest for 2024. Phoenix House is located in West Berkshire at the four corners. This award is the “people's choice”, determined by the votes cast by diners at participating restaurants. In its third year, the Maple Menu competition is sponsored by the Vermont Maple Festival. The month-long contest invites diners to complete a simple ballot, each time they order a maple-infused item from the menu. The voter is then asked to give a rating of 1 to 10, taking into consideration, appearance, creativity, maple flavor and quality. A comment, specific to their experience, may be added, providing valuable feedback to the chef.

14 area eateries completed the 2024 contest, generating 670 ballots, 190 of which came from one restaurant. Highest vote totals resulted when ballots were presented with the check. A favorability percentage, the highest of which is determined to have the Best Maple Menu, was reached by calculating the ratio of points earned to points possible (up to 10 points possible per ballot). This year, the top 5 finishers were separated by less than 1 percentage point, with most of the remaining eateries in close pursuit. Clearly, there is no lack of excellent options for dining out in Franklin County.

The Best Maple Menu Contest grew, this year, in part due to the addition of three restaurants, outside of St. Albans, in Enosburg Falls, West Berkshire and Fairfax, bringing the total to 14. Comments reflected the enthusiasm of the voters. A sampling of these comments follows.

- Maple Cheesecake, at the Travelled Cup: “Every bite got more satisfying.”
- Maple and Brown Sugar Boba Tea, from Kaiju Kitchen: “Equal parts innovative & delicious!”
- Maple Latte, by the Catalyst: “Best maple latte anywhere!”
- Maple Bacon Cheddar Burger, served by Green Mountain Cafe: “Cooked to perfection; nice portion, too....”
- Pulled Pork Sandwich, created by Off the Rails: “Maple flavor was terrific! Very tasty, and very Vermont!”
- Maple Brioche Braid, baked by Red House Sweets: “Absolutely delicious!”
- Maple Shake, from Graziers: “Great shake!”
- Sugar Makers' Melt, prepared by Erica's: “Loved the maple on the Chicken Melt – I had my doubts, but was impressed!”
- Sashay-Satay, from Mill River Taphouse: “Loved this pizza! Maple-sriracha-lime drizzle is amazing!”
- Maple Dumpling Cake, offered by Mill River Brewing: “Love @ first bite! This should be what gets you in the door!”
- Marinated Chicken Sandwich, at Kathy's Tavern: “This is an absolutely delicious chicken sandwich. The maple marinade is fabulous!”
- Maple Cream Pie, created by Maple City Diner: “Pie was light and creamy, exquisite flavor. Crust was full and flaky, as in all their pies.”
- Maple Creemee, served by 14th Star: A nicely drawn thumbs-up needed no words!
- Maple Chicken Tenders, prepared by Phoenix House: “Maple glaze on the chicken tenders was delicious!”

All 14 competing eateries plan to return next year, with maple favorites and new inspirations for voters to try. Any other Franklin County restaurant, interested in joining next year's friendly competition, may sign up at kayethecook@yahoo.com. There is no registration fee, no requirement to divulge recipes and no need to create a new menu, as long as at least one maple-infused item is offered. The winner is presented a wooden plaque, a gallon of maple syrup and is showcased in an article by the Messenger. Everyone who participates appears on posters throughout the VT Maple Festival and receives mention at the opening ceremonies.