

Discoveries

A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE MIDWEST FINDS



We flipped for chips

It was a tough job, but somebody had to do it. To guide your summertime potato chip selections, the *Midwest Living*[®] staff valiantly tested a dozen brands, all from Midwest companies. We munched and crunched regular, barbecue and specialty chips.

Winning the regular potato chip category: Select Kettle Cooked by Shearer's Foods in Brewster, Ohio. ("Tastes buttery," one taster said.) Second place went to Art's and Mary's of Cheney, Kansas, whose chip was lauded as "a perfect balance of salt and grease." Dakota Style of Clark, South Dakota, came in a close third, with "good crunch, good salt level, nice potato taste."

In the barbecue division, Mike-sell's, the oldest potato chip company in the United States, of Dayton, Ohio, took top honors with Honey Bar-B-Que. ("Sweet, good flavor, good crunch, traditional.") Shearer's Mesquite Kettle Cooked chips landed in second place ("Yum; nice balance.") Better Made Snack Foods in Detroit took third place with Sweet BBQ ("creamy").

The choices among specialty chips were too wide-ranging (ketchup-and-fries and hot dill pickle!) to name a clear-cut (or even crinkle-cut) winner. But our favorites included Shearer's salt-and-pepper, Dakota Style's honey-mustard and the surprisingly good curry-and-garlic potato chips from Better Made.

Buying guide

Host your own potato chip tasting party! Create tasting sheets where guests can record each chip's appearance and taste. Then rate your picks. You'll be surprised how widely tastes vary. We sampled these Midwest brands, all available by mail. **Shearer's Foods** (888/

473-2824; www.shearers.com). **Art's and Mary's Tater Chips** (877/299-2787; www.artsandmarys.com). **Dakota Style** (800/446-2779; www.dakotastyle.com). **Mike-sell's Potato Chip Company** (937/228-9400; www.mike-sells.com). **Better Made Snack**

Foods (313/925-4774; www.bettermadepotatochips.com). **Season's Snacks** (630/628-0211; www.seasons-snacks.com). **Taste Apple Yukon Gold chips** (740/498-8316; www.tasteeapple.com). **Old Dutch Foods** (Order

from Bob's Produce Ranch: 800/685-0315; www.htinfo.com/secure/bobsproduce/olddutch). **Sterzing Food Company** (800/754-8467; www.sterzingchips.com).

Grippo's Snack Foods (www.grippopotatochips.com). **Ballreich** (800/323-2447; www.ballreich.com).





Go round and round

Want to feel like a kid again? Give Carousel Magic a whirl. The Mansfield, Ohio, company (70 miles northeast of Columbus) not only restores antique carousels but also custom builds new ones.

Take the nation's only factory tour of a working merry-go-round manufacturer. Owners Sherrell "Shae" Anderson and Ross Clark employ guides to tell you about the ups and downs of merry-go-round history. You'll learn insider jargon such as "jumpers" (carousel figures that move) and "standers" (ones that don't).

When the tour moves to the factory floor, visitors can watch skilled carvers and painters work wonders as they transform simple blocks of wood into enchanting merry-go-round horses or menageries of sheep, fish, frogs and other fanciful creatures.

Open May 1 through December 23 (except Thanksgiving) from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Admission charged. Carousel Magic, 44 W. 4th Street, Mansfield, Ohio (419/526-4009; www.carouselmagic.com).



Animal kingdom

You'll find a home where the elk, cougars, bobcats, wolves and bears roam at Wildlife Prairie State Park, 15 miles northwest of Peoria, Illinois. This 2,000-acre zoological park showcases native animals in a natural woodland and prairie environment.

Opened privately in 1978 by preservationist Bill Rutherford, the land became a state park in 2000. The animals, held in penned but open surroundings, are the greatest attractions. You'll also find 10 miles of nature trails, spring wildflowers and various garden displays. Join trained naturalists for interpretive programs, view a Pioneer Farmstead, take a train ride and visit a bison range and animal nursery.

To stay after hours, rent unique, rustic lodgings such as a log cabin, lake cottages converted from grain bins, rooms in a horse stable, Santa Fe Railroad train cabooses and a traditional hotel room. Several of the units have universal access. Snacks and gifts are available from the country store. Sunday brunch is served from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Pets are not allowed. Open March 1 to December 9. Hours vary by season. Admission charged for ages 4 and older. Wildlife Prairie State Park, 3826 N. Taylor Road, Hanna City, Illinois (309/676-0998; www.wildlifeprairiestatepark.com).



CAKE THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Once you've eaten them, most cakes are simply a delicious memory. But Mary Markovich's GemCakes go a step further.

Customers make several choices to personalize the cakes, starting with the size (6, 8 or 10 inches) and the flavor (cinnamon spice, lemon, chocolate or chocolate with berries).

Each moist cake comes wrapped inside a keepsake satin hand-beaded hatbox,

tied with a silky bow. Choose from seven box colors, with more hues added for the holidays.

For an extra touch, ask Mary to place one of 30 brooches, such as a dragonfly (above), on top. The diamond ring brooch makes a nifty bridal shower gift.

Cakes ordered without brooches arrive with a faux gem on the top.

Prices start at \$48 for a 6-inch cake.

To order: Gemstone Confections, 8207 North Hale Avenue, Peoria, Illinois (309/693-3891; www.gemstoneconfections.com). ■