

## Best Bites of 2009: Starter Course

Over the past year I've sampled hundreds of dishes around Portland. This is my selection of the best bites of the year in three parts, beginning this week with the starter course. These are the most memorable appetizers and small plates that I've tasted in 2009, in no particular order.

### Gratin of Roman-Style Tripe Stew at MetroVino

I couldn't stomach the stuff until I sampled Chef Gregory Denton's beef tripe, slow cooked with tomato and mint and baked with Pecorino. Spooned over slices of crusty baguette, it's simply divine.

[metrovinopdx.com](http://metrovinopdx.com)

### Wood-Fired Iron Skillet Mussels at Firehouse

Fresh out of a wood-burning oven comes a sizzling skillet full of plump mussels peeking out of charred shells with drawn butter...need I say more?

[firehousepdx.com](http://firehousepdx.com)

### Grilled Corn on the Cob at Beaker and Flask

I'm confident that anyone would agree—grilled corn on the cob, dripping with creamy, spicy poblano aioli and generously dusted with grated Grana Padano cheese, was one of the best bites of the summer.

[beakerandflask.com](http://beakerandflask.com)

### A Dozen Olympia Oysters at EaT: An Oyster Bar

Sure, many restaurants serve oysters but EaT gets rid of the middlemen to source oysters fresh from farms lining the Oregon and Washington coasts. Plus, they're only a dollar, maybe two, and the perfect amuse bouche with a glass of bubbles.

[eatoysterbar.com](http://eatoysterbar.com)

### A Basket of Cinnamon Rolls at Country Cat

Co-owner Jackie Sappington's gooey pecan cinnamon rolls are the best I've tasted, and reason enough to brunch at Country Cat, but I get a basket to share with the table before a feast of fried chicken or hash.

[thecountrycat.net](http://thecountrycat.net)