

Awendaw Spoonbread

Time: 20 minutes active, plus 30 to bake

Comprised, as it is, of grits and cornmeal, spoonbread represents the height of corn flavor in casserole form; the best spoonbread falls midway along the continuum from common mush custard to elevated grits soufflé. During sweet corn season, Charleston cooks add raw kernels to the batter, creating a triumvirate of cascading corn flavor and texture. The marriage of corn and dairy creates dizzy-rich texture and flavor to begin with and, in this version, is enhanced further with a shiny patent-leather glaze of straight heavy cream.

Spoonbread made with our recipe and product tastes equally sublime with white or yellow grits and cornmeal, but it looks slightly prettier in yellow.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe you will need a heavy-bottomed 2 1/2-quart saucepan (preferably Windsor); a fine tea strainer; a mixing bowl; a balloon whisk; a wooden spoon; a well-seasoned 9-inch cast-iron skillet, a heavy 9-inch cake pan, or a 1 1/2-quart casserole dish; and a rubber spatula.

Ingredients

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature, plus more to grease the skillet

3 large eggs, lightly beaten

1/2 cup (3 ounces) Anson Mills White or Yellow Carolina Quick Grits

2 cups spring or filtered water

1 1/4 teaspoons fine sea salt

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

2 cups whole milk

1 cup Anson Mills Fine White or Yellow Cornmeal

1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder

1/4 cup heavy cream

Directions

1. Adjust an oven rack to the upper-middle position and heat the oven to 450 degrees. Grease a 9-inch cast-iron skillet, a 9-inch cake pan, or a 1 1/2-quart casserole dish with butter and set aside. Crack the eggs into a mixing bowl, whisk them lightly, and set the bowl aside.

About Spoonbread

Although the term spoonbread is a child of the 20th century, the dish is distinctly Native American. A combination of eggs and cornmeal mixed with liquid and baked, spoonbread is called Awendaw in Charleston, named after the Awendaw Indians who lent their name to the river and the area 15 miles up the coast. Some of the best native corn and, later, the best settler corn came from this region

Cooking Remarks

Because the grits in this recipe are cooked twice, once in the pot and once in the oven, they do not need to be soaked.

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2. Place the grits in a heavy-bottomed 2 1/2-quart saucepan (preferably a Windsor pot) and cover with water. Stir once. Allow the grits to settle a full minute, tilt the pan, and skim off and discard the chaff and hulls with a fine tea strainer. Set the pan over medium-high heat and bring to a simmer, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the first starch takes hold, 5 to 8 minutes. Reduce the heat to low and cook, stirring frequently, until the grits are just tender and hold their shape on a spoon, about 25 minutes. Beat in the remaining butter and the salt and pepper. Whisk in the milk in three additions.

3. Bring the grits slurry to a simmer, covered, over medium-high heat, whisking frequently, quickly lifting and replacing the lid. Whisk in the cornmeal and remove the pan from the heat. Ladle about a cup of hot grits mixture into the beaten eggs and whisk them to warm. Pour the egg mixture back into the grits. Stir in the baking powder. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top. Spoon the cream over the top. Place the pan in the oven and bake 10 minutes. Lower the heat to 375 degrees and bake until the spoonbread is nicely risen and golden brown, 15 or 20 minutes more. Remove from the oven and serve without delay.

Serves 6 to 8 as a side dish