

Carolina Gold Rice Grits Cakes

Time: About 1 hour to make the rice grits, at least 1 hour of cooling time, and about 25 minutes to fry the cakes

Charleston's first rice farmers were Italian, but her first and finest cooks were African. Blend the two traditions and you get rice cakes, lowcountry style: cakes deeply crisped on the outside and quaking tender within. Rice cakes like these offer a tiny window back to the time before the Civil War when rice was cooked in a three-legged cast-iron *potjie* over hot coals. The grains that crisped and darkened on the *potjie*'s bottom—and were on top when the rice was inverted for dinner—were those most sought after.

What's our fascination with rice cakes? Rice is lighter than other grains. Done in cake form, its particular lightness makes it a fitting companion for summer fare. The leap from whole-grain rice to middlins, or rice grits was, for us, a no-brainer: the grits are so round, so diminutive, so pearly, so compliant.

Equipment Mise en Place

To make this recipe you will need a heavy-bottomed 2-quart saucepan; a heavy-bottomed 3-quart saucepan; a wooden spoon; a 6- or 8-ounce ladle; a 13 by 9-inch rimmed baking sheet, about 1 inch deep (or a similarly sized shallow sheet pan); parchment paper; an offset spatula; a small saucepan; a shallow bowl or baking dish; a 1 7/8-inch round cookie cutter; and a large well-seasoned cast-iron or other heavy-bottomed skillet and a regular metal spatula.

Ingredients

- 1 quart Ultimate Vegetable Broth
- 10 tablespoons (5 ounces) unsalted butter
- 2 shallots, minced (about 3 tablespoons)
- 7 ounces (1 cup) Anson Mills Carolina Gold Rice Grits
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1 Turkish bay leaf
- Fine sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1/3 cup finely grated Parmesan Reggiano

Cooking Notes

You could go crazy and put a bound breading (flour, egg wash, bread crumbs) on these rice cakes, then fry them just as we describe below. They would be perfectly delicious in this iteration. But the Pickled Shrimp, for which we developed the rice grits cakes recipe in the first place, asked that the cakes stay fairly plain.

The grains in rice grits are smaller than grains of whole rice, but curiously, they take longer to cook. We use straight-forward risotto proportions as well as the risotto cooking method, and stretch the timing to accommodate the grain. The hot grits are poured onto a baking sheet, spread to a depth of about 3/8 inch, and cooled. They firm up on their own. They may then be stamped out into rounds and fried.

If you're making these rice grits cakes to be tasty little platforms for Pickled Shrimp, we advise that you make a shrimp and vegetable broth infusion to use in lieu of straight-up vegetable broth. To do so, save the shells as you prepare the Pickled Shrimp. Before you begin the grits cakes, first bring the reserved shrimp shells and 5 cups

1 cup all-purpose flour

Directions

1. Bring the vegetable broth to a simmer in a heavy-bottomed 2-quart saucepan over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pan, and keep the broth just below a simmer as you cook the rice grits.
2. Melt 2 tablespoons of the butter in a heavy-bottomed 3-quart saucepan over medium-low heat until it foams. Add the shallots and cook, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon, until the shallots are soft, translucent, and have nearly melted into the butter, about 5 minutes. Add the rice grits, increase the heat to medium and cook, stirring constantly, until the grains are coated with butter and have turned opaque, about 2 minutes. Stir in the wine, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer until reduced to a glaze. Add 1 cup of hot broth, the bay leaf, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper, and stir once to make sure the grains are covered with liquid. Cook the grits uncovered at the barest simmer, stirring occasionally; when the liquid has been almost entirely absorbed and the grits begin to look dry, add about 1 cup of hot broth, stir, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the liquid is absorbed and the grits once again begin to look dry. Continue to cook the grits in this fashion until the grains have expanded, appear fairly dry, and no longer have hard, starchy centers, 45 to 50 minutes. Discard the bay leaf, stir in the parmesan, and taste for seasoning. While the grits are cooking, line a 13 by 9-inch rimmed baking sheet or a similarly sized shallow sheet pan with parchment paper (if you have no parchment paper, brush the pan lightly with olive oil) and set it aside.
3. When the grits are done, pour them immediately onto the prepared baking sheet and, using an offset spatula, smooth them into an even 3/8-inch-thick layer. Let cool to room temperature.
4. Meanwhile, melt the remaining 8 tablespoons butter in a small saucepan over low heat. Remove the pan from the heat, tilt it gently, and, using a spoon, skim off and discard the foam from the surface. Spoon the clear yellow butterfat into a small bowl, leaving the watery milk solids in the pan. Discard the milk solids.
5. Place the flour in a shallow bowl or baking dish. When the grits are firm and cooled, use a 1 7/8-inch round cookie cutter to stamp out as many grits cakes as you can (you should be able to stamp out 15 to 20). Remove the rice grits scraps from around the cakes. Gently dredge the cakes in the flour, knock off the excess, and return them to the baking sheet. Meanwhile, heat a large well-seasoned cast-iron or other heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat. When the skillet is nice and hot, add about half of the clarified butter and allow the butter to heat. Drop a grits cake into the skillet—it should sizzle. If the skillet is hot enough, add as many cakes as will comfortably fit in a

of vegetable broth to a simmer in a small saucepan and cook, covered, until the shells flavor the broth, about 45 minutes. Strain (you should have a quart of broth) and proceed with the grits cakes recipe, using the shrimp-infused vegetable broth as you would regular vegetable broth. The result will be grits cakes that harmonize beautifully with their pickled shrimp partners.

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1922-C Gervais Street - Columbia, South Carolina 29201 • tel. (803) 467-4122 • sales@AnsonMills.com

single layer. Fry until the cakes are crisp and browned, 5 to 6 minutes. Using a spatula, flip the cakes, add additional butter if necessary, and fry until the second sides are crisp and browned. Remove the cakes from the skillet and drain on paper towels. If you have additional cakes to fry, add butter to the skillet and repeat. The cakes may be held in a 250-degree oven for up to 15 minutes. Serve them hot with Pickled Shrimp or almost anything: crab, lobster, roasted vegetables, little dollops of a meaty ragu or a vinegary corn relish.

Makes 15 to 20 small cakes