

## Cheese Straws

Time: About 45 minutes active work, plus short resting periods for the dough; 15 minutes to bake

Consider the wiles of cheese straws: They are crisp, cheesy, salty, buttery. They stick in your teeth and make you wipe your fingers—or at least lick them. It's no wonder these leggy beauties come with a warning label and a cult of obsession. (The warning label is from your physician.) We're not sure of their exact provenance, but the first cheese straws were almost certainly the result of a stolen moment between a scrap of biscuit or pie dough and a bit of cheese. Later they were burdened by the sweeping nostalgia induced when the adjective "Southern" gets ahead of any culinary noun. From then on cheese straws were anybody's game, anybody's recipe, anybody's cottage industry, anybody's cute little gift box. Bottom line: There are cheese straws—and then there are cheese straws. The best cheese straws result from a perfect proportional balance between good butter, soft flour, and the right amount of the right kind of cheese. This precludes, in our opinion, pastry so loaded with butter you have to pipe it out like a cookie.

## Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe you will need a tea strainer, a digital scale, a food processor, a rolling pin, a bench knife, parchment paper, and two baking sheets.

## Ingredients

1 egg

4.7 ounces Anson Mills Fine Cloth-Bolted Pastry Flour

3.5 ounces 1- or 2-year-old sharp cheddar cheese, coarsely shredded (about 2 very loosely packed cups)

1/8 teaspoon (or less) cayenne

1/2 teaspoon smoked or hot paprika

1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt

3.5 ounces cold, unsalted European-style butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

## Directions

1. Beat the egg in a small bowl and pour it through a tea strainer set over a glass measuring cup. When the egg has dripped through, discard what remains in the tea strainer.
2. Place the flour, cheese, cayenne, paprika, and salt in a food processor and process until the cheese is broken down into small bits, about 10 seconds. Scatter the butter pieces over the surface and process to a fine meal, about ten 1-second pulses. With the food processor running, add the egg one drop at a time (you may need only a couple of drops) and process just until the dough forms a mass and clears the sides of the bowl. Transfer the dough to a clean, dry, lightly floured work

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surface. Roll the dough out into a plank 12 inches long by 6 inches wide. Fold the top third of the dough down and the bottom third of the dough up, then rotate the dough clockwise one quarter turn so that the open side is on the right and the rectangle resembles a book. (View photos under Step 2 of the Caramel-Baked Apple Dumpling recipe.) Very lightly flour the work surface and again roll and fold the dough. You have completed two turns. Use a bench knife to block the sides of the rectangle, wrap it in plastic wrap, and refrigerate until slightly firmed, 15 to 20 minutes. Repeat this process two more times. You have now given the dough six turns.

**3.** Adjust the oven racks to the lowest and upper-middle positions and heat the oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Lightly flour the work surface and roll the dough out to a plank 10 inches long by 7 inches wide and ¼ inch thick. Using the bench knife, trim the edges and cut the dough crosswise into ¼-inch-wide strips. On an area of the work surface that is not floured, form each strip into a twist by positioning your palms on the ends and gently rolling in opposite directions. Lay the strips on the sheet pan, spacing them about 1 ½ inches apart. One baking sheet at a time, bake on the lower rack for 8 minutes. Rotate the baking sheet, place on the upper rack, and continue baking until the cheese straws are pale golden and firm to the touch, 6 to 7 minutes longer. Cool the cheese straws on the baking sheet. Serve with cocktails. (The cheese straws will keep without complaint for a few days in an airtight container, but they are truly superb the day they are baked.)

**Makes about 2 ½ dozen**