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# SOUTHERN FRIED EVERYTHING

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BY REBECCA LANG

**F**ried foods have been a Southern staple as long as grease cans have perched on the back of stoves. I remember the metal coffee can that served as my grandmother's grease can sitting next to a small plate lined with a paper towel and filled with strips of fried fatback, ready for the taking. By the time I left home for college, I must have eaten my weight in the crispy delights. (I still pile my plate high with fatback when eating in small-town restaurants that regularly offer it next to the fries on the buffet line.)

John T. Edge, director of the Southern Foodways Alliance and author of *Fried Chicken*, explains that fried foods have become part of the South's historical culinary identity for a reason. Simply put, "It is well-

PHOTOS BY DENNIS MCDANIEL

suiting to the climate and we had access to a lot of lard," he says. Heating up an oven creates a lot of heat in the kitchen. Frying is fast. Before air-conditioning, cooks had to consider how to put dinner on the table without roasting themselves in the process.

These days, a plethora of surprising fried foods can be found bubbling up at local fairgrounds and big city restaurants across the country. Few foods are exempt from being battered and fried—from macaroni and cheese to watermelon rinds and even ice cream. I'm not ashamed to admit I've even had fried alligator tail. From olives to Snickers, cheesecake to Twinkies, experimental cooks are taking frying to a new level.

It's hard to say if such foods are made simply for the wow factor or if they are truly good. Before beginning a frying rendition, start with some tried-and-true favorites. (I don't recommend moving on to fried candy bars until you're truly hooked.)

Although I fry chicken, squash, okra and the other usual suspects, I like to fry foods that are slightly more modern. New spins on old recipes make heating up the skillet exciting. Part of the cook in me does this in hopes that others will take on frying and not be led astray by health-conscious cooks who never savor a crispy indulgence.









## FRIED GREEN TOMATOES WITH RED BELL VINAIGRETTE

- 1 cup cornmeal
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 2 eggs
- 2 tablespoons milk
- Vegetable oil
- 4 large green tomatoes (about 2 pounds), peeled and cut into ½-inch slices
- Red Bell Vinaigrette

Combine cornmeal, flour, salt and pepper in a large mixing bowl. Combine eggs and milk in a small mixing bowl.

Pour vegetable oil to a depth of 1 inch in a large skillet. Heat skillet over medium heat until oil reaches 350 degrees.

Coat each tomato slice with cornmeal mixture; dip thoroughly in the egg mixture and return to coat a second time in the cornmeal mixture.

Place coated tomato slices in hot oil and fry for 3 to 4 minutes per side or until golden brown.

Serve with Red Bell Vinaigrette.

Serves 8.

### ★ RED BELL VINAIGRETTE ★

- 2 garlic cloves
- 12 ounce jar roasted red bell peppers, drained
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 packed tablespoon fresh oregano
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ cup olive oil

Finely chop garlic in the bowl of a food processor. Add bell peppers, vinegar, oregano, sugar, salt and pepper to food processor. Process until smooth.

Scrape down the sides of the processor bowl.

Slowly add olive oil to pepper mixture with food processor running.

Yield: 1½ cups



## FRIED WICKLES WITH REMOULADE DIPPING SAUCE

### ★ REMOULADE DIPPING SAUCE ★

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1½ tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- Dash pepper
- Hot sauce

In a small mixing bowl, combine mayonnaise, parsley, lemon juice, tomato paste, onion, salt and pepper.

Add desired amount of hot sauce.

Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Yield: 1 cup

16 ounce jar Wickles pickles\* (available at Publix, Cracker Barrel, Healthy Gourmet and Plain Jane)

½ cup all-purpose flour

½ cup cornmeal

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon pepper

½ cup beer

1 egg

Canola oil

Remoulade Dipping Sauce

Drain pickles. Combine flour, cornmeal, salt and pepper in a shallow bowl. Combine beer and egg in a small bowl.

Pour canola oil to a depth of 1 inch in a large skillet and heat to 375 degrees.

Coat each pickle with cornmeal mixture; dip thoroughly in the egg mixture and return to coat a second time in the cornmeal mixture.

Fry pickles for 1 minute or until browned. Serve with Remoulade Dipping Sauce.

Serves 4 to 6.

\*Wickles are a brand of thick-cut, spicy pickles.



## SWEET POTATO CHIPS WITH GORGONZOLA

3 pounds sweet potatoes, peeled  
½ cup mayonnaise  
1 teaspoon garlic powder  
¼ cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese  
5 tablespoons half-and-half  
Vegetable oil  
1 cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese  
¾ cup chopped green onions

Using a mandoline, a countertop appliance for slicing vegetables thinly, or knife, slice potatoes ⅛-inch thick. Set aside.

In a small mixing bowl, mix together mayonnaise and next three ingredients. Chill until serving.

Pour vegetable oil to a depth of 2 inches in a large saucepan or stockpot. Heat oil to 375 degrees. Fry potatoes, in batches, for about 4½ minutes or until browned. Drain on a cooling rack, placed on a rimmed baking sheet, in a single layer. The chips will crisp as they drain.

Pile chips on a platter. Sprinkle with 1 cup Gorgonzola cheese and green onions.

Serve with blue cheese dipping sauce.

Serves 8 to 10.