

Cheese Puff

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Total Time 1¼ hours

Prep Time 15 minutes

Cook Time 1 hour

Rating ★★☆☆☆ (69)



David Malosh for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Simon Andrews.

Cheese puff is a scene-stealing side dish in which gooey grilled cheese meets cloudlike soufflé, defining itself as the ultimate comfort food. White bread, salted butter and cheese get bound together by a simple egg-and-milk mixture that coalesces these humble ingredients into a savory bread pudding. Stale bread works best for this recipe, as it absorbs the milk mixture better, but if you’re using fresh sandwich bread, simply dry it out in a low oven for about 10 minutes until stale to the touch (but not browned). Don’t be alarmed if your cheese puff deflates when you take it from the oven, as it’s normal and makes for a more custardy bite. While sharp Cheddar is a key component, any mix of firm, well-melting cheese, such as Gruyère, Gouda or provolone, will work nicely.

INGREDIENTS

Yield: 8 servings

- 2 cups/480 milliliters whole milk
- 2 large eggs
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal)
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon ground cayenne
- ⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 6 tablespoons/85 grams salted butter, softened, plus more for greasing the dish
- 6 slices of stale white sandwich bread (see Tip, if using fresh bread)
- 1 (12-ounce) block sharp Cheddar cheese, coarsely grated

PREPARATION

Step 1

Heat oven to 350 degrees. In a large bowl, mix together the milk, eggs, salt, pepper, cayenne and nutmeg; set aside.

Step 2

Butter a 2½-quart round casserole dish or 8-inch round cake pan, place on a baking sheet and set aside.

Step 3

Butter both sides of each slice of bread. Lay the first 2 slices down flat in the dish and cover the slices completely with about one third of the grated cheddar. Layer the next 2 slices of bread on top and repeat with half the remaining cheese. Cut the last 2 slices of bread in half crosswise. Fit 2 pieces of bread on either side of the stacked slices, cut-sides down, and fill any gaps with the remaining cheese.

Step 4

Pour about half of the milk mixture over the bread and cheese and let sit for about a minute, so that it begins to soak in, then pour the remaining mixture on top. Use the back of a spoon or your hands to press the top of the bread and cheese to ensure everything is completely saturated and the surface is even, just below the rim of the dish.

Step 5

Place the dish on a rimmed baking sheet and bake until the top is toasty and puffed, about 1 hour.

Step 6

Let cool for about 10 minutes before enjoying warm. (It may deflate and that’s OK!)

TIP

If bread is not stale, heat the oven to 200 degrees. Place the slices of bread on a baking sheet and bake for about 10 minutes until slightly dried out, but not golden. Let cool for about 10 minutes, and increase the oven temperature to 350 degrees to begin at Step 1.

Private Notes

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