

Baked Jalapeño Poppers

Makes 24 jalapeños

Ingredients:

- 12 fresh jalapeño peppers, halved lengthwise, stems, seeds and membranes removed
- 170 g (6 oz) cream cheese, at room temperature
- 140 g (1 1/2 cups) grated sharp or old cheddar
- 3 g (1/2 tsp) ground cumin
- pinch of cayenne, or less, to taste
- 2 large eggs
- 30 mL (2 tbsp) milk
- 8 tsp Essence, divided
- 1 cup panko crumbs
- 1/2 cup coconut flour
- non-stick spray



Directions:

1. In a small mixing bowl, combine the cream cheese and grated cheddar and mix well.
2. Toast the cumin until you can smell the aroma, allow to cool and add to the cream cheese mixture and stir well. Set aside.
3. Prepare your breading station by whisking 2 large eggs with 2 tsp of the Essence and the milk in a shallow bowl. In a second shallow bowl, mix 4 tsp of the Essence with the coconut flour. In the third shallow bowl, add 2 tsp of the Essence to the panko and mix well. Reserve remaining essence for the next time (and believe me, there will be a next time!)
4. Fill each jalapeño densely with the cream cheese mixture, being careful not to mound it too high; continue filling until you have filled all of the jalapeño halves.
5. Dredge each jalapeño half in the coconut flour, then dip into the egg mixture and repeat once more. Finally, dip each pepper into the panko and press panko into the jalapeño to coat well. Repeat until all are coated.
6. Pre-heat the oven to 375° F. Place jalapeño cut side up on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Give each jalapeño a light coating with the non-stick spray. Bake for 30 minutes or until panko is golden and crisp.
7. Serve warm with sour cream and salsa.

Notes:

8. For the vegetarian, gluten-free and dairy-free version, I simply replaced the cheeses with creamed lentils (about 1/4 cup cooked in vegetable broth and puréed with a stick blender) and the panko with shredded unsweetened coconut. Even the non-vegetarians loved them! (Sorry, no pics).
9. I use coconut flour for baked "fried" foods because the coconut has an unbelievable absorption property which makes the batter so much crispier than all-purpose flour.
10. I used gloves to protect my hands from the jalapeños as I cleaned them, you might consider doing this too.
11. Leftovers? Freeze unbaked jalapeños on a parchment-lined baking sheet and when frozen, pop them into a ziplock bag. To bake frozen jalapeños, no need to defrost, just bake for a little longer to crisp up..