

Crispy Fried Oyster Rolls with Zesty Tartar Sauce

People who love fried oysters in restaurants might be delighted to learn that they're quick and easy to prepare at home. All you need is a deep, heavy pot and a trustworthy deep-fry thermometer. Well-fried oysters are light, crisp, and can turn a simple sandwich into a seafood feast. If you wind up with more oysters than will fit in the rolls, just dip the extras into the tartar sauce and chow down. They're so delicious that you might want to fry extra for this very purpose.

One of the things that keeps this recipe simple, and tasty, is my use of store-bought fish fry, a ready-to-use seasoned dredging mix that you'll find at the grocery store. Smart, busy cooks understand that there's nothing wrong with buying something that works as well as homemade.

Makes 4 to 6 servings

Sauce

1/2 cup mayonnaise
1/4 cup cocktail sauce, chili sauce, or ketchup
Big pinch of garlic powder
Big pinch of onion powder
Big pinch of powdered mustard
A few drops of hot sauce or sriracha
A few drops of Worcestershire sauce
A few drops of fresh lemon juice

Sandwiches

4 to 6 crusty sandwich buns, split with a little of the soft bread removed, and warmed, if you like
Shredded lettuce
Tomato slices

Oysters

Peanut oil, for deep-frying
1 cup fish fry mix, or as needed
1 pint freshly shucked oysters, drained
Coarse salt, for sprinkling

1. For the sauce: Stir together the mayonnaise and cocktail sauce in a small bowl. Season to taste with the remaining ingredients. Taste and adjust until the sauce suits you. Cover and refrigerate until needed, or up to three days.
2. For the sandwiches: Have everything ready to assemble the sandwiches as soon as the oysters are cooked.

3. For the oysters: Preheat the oven to 200°F. Sit a wire rack inside a rimmed baking sheet lined with several thicknesses of paper towels. This is to use to drain the oysters and keep them warm. You'll be frying them in batches.
4. Pour peanut oil into a deep, heavy saucepan to a depth of 3 to 4 inches, enough so that they oysters can float freely as they cook. Warm over medium-high heat to 365°F. (A good deep-fry thermometer is a workhorse in the kitchen, but if you don't have one, test the oil by dropping in a pinch of the fish fry mix, which should sizzle and begin to brown at once. If the crumbs sink to the bottom the oil is too cool. If they pop, hiss, or spit, the oil is too hot.)
5. Pour a little of the fish fry mix into a shallow bowl. Working with a few oysters at a time, coat them lightly and evenly in the fish fry mix. Slip them into the hot oil and fry until deep golden brown, 1 to 2 minutes, depending on their size. Stir the oil gently with a wire skimmer or slotted spoon to make sure the oysters don't stick to one another. Remove to the prepared baking sheet, sprinkle with salt, and place in the oven to keep warm. Continue working in batches until all of the oysters are fried. Check the temperature of the oil between batches to ensure it remains at 365°F between batches.
6. To assemble: Line the bottom of the rolls with lettuce and tomato. Top generously with fried oysters. Drizzle with sauce and serve straightaway.

©Sheri Castle 2021