

Cheddar Olives

These small cocktail party nuggets have huge (salty, cheesy) flavor.

If we could just cut the grease . . . BY SARAH GABRIEL

RECENTLY, A COWORKER told me about a recipe for cheddar olives—pimento-stuffed cocktail olives swaddled in nuggets of cheesy biscuit dough—that his mom used to make. As soon as I heard about them, I had a feeling they would have the cheesy, pickle-y pluck to rival the usual pigs-in-a-blanket and mini-quiche party fare. After testing a few recipes, I saw clearly that while the idea was clever, the reality wasn't. At least not yet.

The cheesiest, most tender, and most delicious of the doughs liquefied in the oven, leaving the olives on top of greasy (but admittedly tasty) lumps of dough. The tidiest-looking cheddar olives stayed neatly tucked inside the dough after baking, but this dough was so dry and tough that some tasters peeled it off before eating the olives. Getting cheddar olives to be either tasty or neat was no problem. But could I have both?

With two sticks of butter and 4 cups of cheese in the dough, the problem with the tasty but messy recipe from the first round was too much fat. As for the dry yet neat dough, it contained less than a quarter of the cheese and butter and was held together by an egg, so neither its resilience nor its unappetizing texture was surprising. I decided to take a moderate approach: I used 7 (rather than 2 or 16) tablespoons of butter and 2 (rather than 1 or 4) cups of shredded cheese, plus one egg. That fixed the grease problem and helped the dough hold its shape yet still keep decent cheese flavor. Some chilling time prevented the butter from leaking out when I baked the olives. Much better.

Having gotten the major issues under control, I circled back to try some of the seasonings I'd seen in other recipes. After a few tests, I found that a teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce, along with some paprika and cayenne, improved the flavor. Move over, cocktail franks and mini quiches, and make room for just-try-to-stop-at-one cheddar olives.

CHEDDAR OLIVES

Makes 40 wrapped olives

Use regular-size, not colossal or queen, cocktail olives. The cheddar olives must chill for at least 1 hour before baking.

- 40 pimento-stuffed green olives, rinsed
- 1 cup (5 ounces) all-purpose flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon paprika
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 8 ounces extra-sharp cheddar cheese, shredded (2 cups)
- 7 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 7 pieces
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

1. Spread olives on dish towel and roll around to dry. Pulse flour, paprika, pepper, and cayenne in food processor until combined, about 3 pulses. Add cheddar and butter and pulse until mixture resembles coarse crumbs, about 12 pulses. Add egg, water, and Worcestershire and process until dough ball forms, about 20 seconds.

2. Working with 2 teaspoons dough and 1 olive at a time, pat dough into 2-inch circle, place olive in center of dough; form dough around olive; and roll cheddar olive between your hands to make uniform ball. Place cheddar olives on large platter, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 1 hour or up to 24 hours (or freeze to bake later).

3. Adjust oven racks to upper-middle and lower-middle positions and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper. Space cheddar olives evenly on prepared sheets. Bake until bottoms are well browned and tops are golden, 16 to 18 minutes (if baking from frozen, increase cooking time to about 25 minutes), switching and rotating sheets halfway through baking. Transfer cheddar olives to wire rack and let cool for about 30 minutes before serving.



They look like miniature biscuits, but take a bite: A surprise hides inside.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE

Shaping Cheddar Olives



After you've patted 2 teaspoons of dough into a circle, place an olive in the center and encase it in the dough.