

Recipes From Chef Leticia - Bolinho de Bacalhau

This is the granddaddy of all bar foods served in Boutequins (a type of tapas restaurant) all over Brazil. An exquisite deep-fried morsel that usually comes in a basket with multiples, cod fritters or in Portuguese bolinho de bacalhau has many versions. What makes this recipe so delicious and different from other cod fritters, are the egg whites mixed into the batter, which provide the fritters with a delicate, airy texture.



When using salt cod, always allow a bit of planning since you need to soak the cod for at least 24 hours, preferably for 2 to 3 days, in cold water in the refrigerator, while changing the water at least 3 times per day. Then the cod is gently poached in milk and cut into tender shreds before being mixed with the mashed potatoes. The result is a tender and fluffy-potato mixture surrounded by a golden crunchy crust. Once the fritters are done, they re-heat quite nicely in the oven.

I often serve this as hors d'oeuvres with a side dip of Tartare sauce (a simple mix of mayonnaise, hard boiled eggs, capers, cornichons, and parsley) or as a main course with a green salad on the side.

Makes about 25 fritters

- 1½ lbs salt cod (this will make 1 ½ cups of shredded cod)
- 3 cups milk
- 1 large Idaho potato (about 11 ounces)
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped onion
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped garlic (about 2 cloves)
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped parsley
- 4 eggs, separated
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Pinch of ground nutmeg
- 2 cups vegetable or canola oil for deep frying and a deep fat thermometer

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De-salt the cod:

1. When buying the salt cod, try to find a piece that looks very meaty. Trim away all the dark parts around the belly and tail.
2. Rinse the fish in cold water and place it inside a large container. The volume of water should be 10 to 15 times the size of the cod, so use a very big container (maybe a plastic bucket or a large pitcher). Fill it with about 2½ gallons cold water, and store it in the refrigerator to soak for 2 to 3 days (if you want to maximize space in your refrigerator, cover the container with a lid, however it is not necessary). Change the water at least 3 times per day and each time you change the water, rinse the container as well. It is very important to de-salt the cod properly, otherwise the dish will taste too salty.
3. On the day you will be cooking the cod, remove it from the container and place it in a medium sized saucepan. Cover the fish with cold milk so that it cooks gently and does not suffer any shock of temperature. Bring it to a boil over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low and cook the cod, uncovered until it becomes opaque, about 5 to 7 minutes.
4. Using a slotted spoon, remove the cod from the hot milk and discard the milk. Flake the meat with your hands into big chunks then shred the fish by either chopping it with a chef's knife or passing it through a food processor on the pulse mode. The fish will have lost about half its weight after being desalted and cooked, so you should have about ½ lb (1 ½ cups) of shredded fish. Place the cod in a plastic container covered with a tightly fitting lid and refrigerate until ready to use (you can keep the cooked shredded cod for up to 6 hours before using).

Prepare the mashed potatoes:

1. Peel the potato and cut it into similar-size pieces to ensure even cooking.
2. Place the pieces in a heavy bottomed saucepan and cover them with cold water; add a pinch of salt.
3. Cover the pan, bring the water to a boil then reduce the heat to medium and simmer until the potatoes are fork- tender, about 8 to 10 minutes; drain them in a colander. While they are still hot, pass the potatoes through a ricer or food mill. Expect about 1 1/3 cup of mashed potatoes. You should assemble the cod fritters while the potatoes are still warm.

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Assemble the fritters:

1. In a large bowl, mix the shredded cod, mashed potatoes, onions, garlic, parsley, egg yolks, olive oil, and cayenne. If this batter gets too hard to mix by hand you can use an electric mixer with the paddle attachment at low speed. Add the salt, pepper, and nutmeg to taste. In a separate bowl, use an electric mixer with the whisk attachment to beat the egg whites
2. until they form soft peaks. Be advised that egg whites without sugar can be easily over beat and lumpy, so be careful.
3. Carefully incorporate the egg whites into the cod/potato mixture by folding it in with a rubber spatula. At this point the batter should feel light, airy and a bit runny. You won't be able to shape the fritters with your hands since the dough is so light (that's what makes it so good) so you will need to spoon the batter directly into the hot oil.

Fry the fritters:

1. Pour the vegetable oil into a heavy-bottomed pot or casserole and heat the oil to 350°F as measured with a deep fat thermometer. If you don't have a thermometer, pour a drip of batter into the oil; if you hear a sizzling sound and see the batter turning golden brown, then the oil is ready.
2. Using a small ice-cream scoop or tablespoon, drop each spoonful into the oil. Only add as many as will fit without touching each other- otherwise they won't fry evenly. Turn them occasionally with a long slotted spoon, making sure both sides are browned evenly.
3. When each fritter is lightly browned all over, remove it from the oil and place it onto a half sheet pan or another large, flat tray that's been covered with a double thickness of paper towels to absorb extra oil. Pat off any excess oil. Continue working in batches until all the fritters are cooked; keep the finished batches in a warm oven until serving. Serve immediately with tartare sauce. These can be reheated in a 300°F oven for 5 to 10 minutes.