

Recipes From Chef Leticia - Pão de Queijo

A soft chewy bread roll, about the size of a golf ball, infused with cheesy flavor, Pão de Queijo is Brazil's favorite savory snack and an excellent recipe to add to your regular repertoire. The manioc starch is what gives the cheese roll an incredible gooey and chewy texture, so try your best to find the Brazilian brand (both the regular and the sour) for you really cannot substitute it for another type of starch or flour and achieve the same effect.

I recently met a Brazilian cook who grew up in Goiás, in the heart of Brazil, surrounded by manioc. She excels at cooking all kinds of sweets and snacks using yucca and its derivatives.



Eronária de Souza is the kind of woman who cooks from the heart, with barely any recipe to consult. When I showed her my batter for Pão de Queijo, she took a little in her hands, examined with her fingers and told me: - "Nao tem liga" meaning its not well binded or the dough is not well kneaded. She then told me to put the batter back in the mixer and knead the dough with the paddle attachment at low speed for at least 10 minutes. The extra kneading gave the manioc starch the chance to develop the optimal structure in the dough. It worked wonders!

I always buy manioc starch in big quantities, so that whenever I decide to make Pão de Queijo (and that is quite often), I don't have to go hunting for it. You can prepare the recipe ahead of time and freeze the little balls unbaked for up to 3 months. Just pop one in the oven directly from the freezer and in 12 to 15 minutes you'll have deliciously cheesy treats. But be advised that when the dough is baked right after it's done, it's when it puffs the most.

Makes around 30 balls

- 2 cups (200g) finely grated fresh Parmesan cheese (or Pecorino Romano)
- 2 large eggs
- 2 egg yolks
- 1¼ cup sour manioc starch (povilho azedo)
- ¾ cup manioc starch (povilho doce)
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- ½ cup whole milk
- ½ cup water
- ¼ cup plus 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

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1. Place the grated Parmesan cheese in the bowl of a food processor.
2. Add the eggs and yolks to the food processor and blend until you have a smooth paste, about 1 minute. Set aside.
3. Place the two starches and salt in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Set aside.
4. Place the milk, water and oil in a small saucepan, and bring to a boil.
5. Immediately pour the milk mixture in one stroke into the starch mixture and turn the machine on at low speed. Mix until the dough is smooth and the starch is all incorporated, about 2 minutes.
6. Pause the machine and add the cheese and egg paste, scraping directly into the manioc starch mixture.
7. Mix the dough at low speed until it turns a pale yellow, about 10 minutes. You are trying to develop the structure of the dough by kneading it slowly, as Ernaria de Souza taught me. The dough will feel a bit sticky.
8. Transfer the dough to a bowl, cover it with plastic wrap and chill for at least 2 hours or preferably overnight in the refrigerator.
9. Pre-heat the oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or silpat.
10. Wet your hands with olive oil (alternatively, you can flour your hands with manioc starch) and use an ice cream scooper as a portion control to make 1- inch balls, rolling them with your hands. Place them on a sheet pan lined up with parchment paper or a silpat, leaving about 1 ½ to 2 inches between each roll (you can freeze them at this point by storing them in a zip-lock bag and freeze for up to 3 months).
12. Bake the cheese rolls in the oven until they puff up and look lightly golden brown, about 12 to 14 minutes. To ensure even baking, rotate the pan once during baking time.
13. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and place the rolls in a basket lined with a napkin. Serve immediately while they are still at their warmest and chewiest.