

CHEESY FRITO BREAD WITH PIMIENTOS

serves 8

This cornbread is not in any way traditional, although it is, somehow, an interpretation of a beloved Southern dish: pimiento cheese, the supremely creamy dip made with sharp cheddar, mayo, hot sauce, and the cherry peppers that give the spread its name. It also happens to be made with Fritos corn chips. I probably buried the lede there. The recipe was designed for the skillet, but a vintage corn stick pan is a sweet way to present the bread (just bake them a few minutes less).

3½ tablespoons unsalted butter

1 cup yellow cornmeal

½ cup corn flour

3/8 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

½ cup packed Frito crumbs (about 2 cups Frito corn chips pulsed in a food processor)

1 large egg

1½ cups buttermilk

20 shakes of Tabasco sauce (or your preferred hot sauce), or more to taste

1 cup grated extra-sharp cheddar cheese (preferably Tillamook Vintage Extra Sharp White Cheddar)

¼ cup coarsely chopped pimientos

2 tablespoons thinly sliced scallions (white and light green parts)

Preheat the oven to 350°F with a 10-inch cast-iron skillet in it. In a small saucepan, melt 2 tablespoons of the butter over medium-low heat. Once the butter has melted, remove the pan from the heat and set it aside.

Sift the cornmeal, corn flour, salt, baking powder, and baking soda into a large bowl. Using a whisk, stir in the Frito crumbs.

In a medium bowl, beat together the melted butter and the egg. Stir the buttermilk into the egg and butter mixture to combine. Add the hot sauce (as much as you can stand) and stir again to combine. Fold the wet ingredients into the dry to incorporate completely. Fold in the cheese, pimientos, and scallions.

Remove the skillet from the oven and place the remaining 1½ tablespoons butter in it to melt. Once the butter is sizzling, use your spatula to scrape the batter into the pan, smoothing the top and giving the skillet a gentle shake to even it out.

Bake the cornbread for 30 minutes, until the edges are brown, the top is golden, and the bread has pulled away from the sides of the pan a little. You can serve it straight from the skillet, or, if you wish, turn it out onto a plate; use a spatula to loosen the cornbread from the pan to avoid any sticking.

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