

Angels & Devils on Horseback

One of the most important aspects of the ritual that watching the big football game has become is the feasting that goes with it. So why not bring some friendly competition to the snack platter? These appetizers do just that. Angels & Devils are old school, dating back to 19th-century Britain, and divisive right down to their names. The Angels came first, oysters simply wrapped in bacon and fried. Devils followed later, with prunes replacing the oysters. They took the name “Devils” only to counter the angels, not because they were particularly spicy. British palates of that era weren’t so keen on heat. That was then, this is now, and we want a kick. So line ’em up, and feel free to wager on which disappears first.

Ingredients

angels

6 thin slices guanciale, 5½- to 6-inches long each
12 medium oysters (such as Blue Points), shucked and drained
1/2 teaspoon shichimi togarashi (Japanese 7-color chile pepper)
1 or 2 wedges of lemon or lime
12 rice crackers, preferably seaweed flavored
1 tablespoon furikake, preferably wasabi flavored

devils

12 pitted dried plums (a.k.a. prunes)
1/3 cup plum wine
6 thin slices guanciale, 5½- to 6-inches long
1 teaspoon finely grated kumquat or orange zest
Generous pinch cayenne
1/4 cup cream cheese, softened
12 thin almond crackers
Sliced kumquats, for garnish (optional) (or a quartered slice of clementine if kumquats are unavailable)
2 teaspoons finely chopped tamari almonds

special equipment

24 toothpicks, soaked in water for at least 30 minutes

Directions***for the angels***

Working in batches, cook the guanciale over medium-low heat in a large frying pan, turning once, until translucent and just barely golden in spots, but still pliable, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain.

Preheat the broiler. Sprinkle each oyster with a pinch of the togarashi. Wrap a half slice of guanciale around each oyster. Secure with a toothpick. Transfer wrapped oysters to a foil-lined rimmed baking pan and broil until the guanciale is golden, flipping halfway through, about 1 minute total. Watch carefully, as they can burn in an instant. Squeeze some lemon juice over each. Transfer each angel to a rice cracker and remove the skewer. Garnish with some furikake and serve hot.

for the devils

Soak the dried plums in the plum wine for 30 minutes, then drain. (Save the plum wine and add it to sparkling water or champagne or vodka later, if you'd like.) Meanwhile, working in batches, cook the guanciale on medium-low in a large frying pan, turning once, until translucent and just barely golden in spots, but still pliable, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain.

Preheat the broiler. Stir the zest and cayenne into the cream cheese; transfer mixture to a small (snack-size) resealable plastic bag. Push the mixture down to one bottom corner and snip off that small corner of the bag. Wiggle a chopstick (or skewer) lengthwise to bore a hole through the dried plum to make some space for the filling. Stick the cut tip of the bag into the bored holes of the dried plums and squeeze gently to stuff with the cream cheese mixture. Wrap a slice of guanciale around each dried plum. Secure with a toothpick. Transfer to a foil-lined rimmed baking pan and broil until the guanciale is golden, flipping halfway through, about 1 minute total. Watch carefully, as they can burn in an instant. Transfer each to an almond cracker and remove the skewers. Garnish each with a kumquat slice and a pinch of the chopped nuts. Let cool slightly before serving.

Cook's Notes

If you can't get guanciale, substitute with pancetta. Unroll each slice of pancetta and cut into 5½-inch long strips. Working in batches, cook the pancetta on medium-low in a large frying pan until mostly cooked but still pliable, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain.

total time: 35 minutes

active prep: 5 minutes

serves: makes 2 dozen, 1 dozen of each variety

difficulty: moderate