

## **Fried Oysters with Sweet, Pancetta BBQ Sauce**

To oyster lovers who can imagine only slurping these bivalves down cold and raw, we get it. But hear us out: Dunked in a smoky buttermilk bath and tossed with cornmeal, then in and out of hot oil, these guys turn creamy and crunchy all at once. And because three times is the charm, dunk them once again, in a smoky BBQ sauce. It's totally different, and totally indulgent. You've heard that oysters are an aphrodisiac? You ain't seen nothing yet.

### **Ingredients**

#### **the bbq sauce**

- 1 or 2 thin slices pancetta, chopped
- 1/2 small onion, finely chopped (1/3 cup)
- 2 large cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup ketchup
- 1 tablespoon yellow mustard
- 1 tablespoon dark brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons chipotle hot sauce

#### **the oysters**

- Vegetable oil, for frying
- 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1½ teaspoons ground black pepper
- 3/4 cup buttermilk
- 1 tablespoon chipotle hot sauce
- 1½ cups stone-ground yellow cornmeal
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 3 dozen oysters, shucked (preferably large Cape oysters)

#### **special equipment**

- deep-fry thermometer
- baking sheet with rack
- large, deep, heavy-bottomed pot

### **Directions**

### ***for the bbq sauce***

Put the pancetta in a medium saucepan and turn the heat to medium. Cook, stirring, until the pancetta is crisp, about 3 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon to paper towels, and reserve, leaving the fat in the pan. Add the onion and garlic to the pan and cook to soften, stirring, about 3 minutes. Deglaze with the vinegar, turn the heat to medium-low, and then pour in the ketchup, mustard, sugar and hot sauce. Simmer, stirring, until the sauce thickens slightly, about 10 minutes. Keep warm. (Makes about 1¼ cups.)

### ***for the oysters***

Clip a deep-fry thermometer to a Dutch oven or large, deep saucepan. Pour in enough oil to come up about 3 inches. Bring up to 365 degrees over medium-high heat. Cover a baking sheet with paper towels and have it beside your pot of oil.

Set up 3 shallow dishes near the pot of oil. In the first dish, mix the flour with the salt and pepper. In the second, mix the buttermilk and hot sauce. In the third, mix the cornmeal and smoked paprika. Put a wire rack on a baking sheet and have near your set up.

Pat the oysters dry. Working in batches, dredge in the flour, then buttermilk, then cornmeal and set on the rack. Once the oil is at temperature, slide the oysters in 4 or 5 at a time (you don't want to crowd the oil or it will cool too much and leave you with soggy oysters). Fry until they turn a lovely shade of gold, 30 seconds to a minute. Remove with a slotted spoon to the paper towels. Fry the rest of the oysters. Eat right away, with the BBQ sauce garnished with reserved pancetta, for dipping.

**total time:** 45 minutes

**active prep:** 45 minutes

**serves:** 4 to 6

**difficulty:** moderate