



ANSON MILLS

Polenta Fries with Slow-Roasted Tomato Mayonnaise

Yield

4 to 4½ dozen polenta fries

Time

40 minutes to cook the polenta, at least 4 hours to let it chill, and about 45 minutes to cut and fry

Cooking Remarks

Polenta will stick if you don't stir it. Bottom line. Before embarking on this recipe, make sure you have time to return frequently to the stove for a stir. Once poured into a baking sheet and chilled, the polenta keeps well in the fridge, before or after slicing, and can be fried in smaller batches when needed.

A few frying pointers: Don't crowd the polenta in the skillet, and when adding the pieces to the hot oil, give them some space! They have a near-magnetic pull toward each other and will glue together if they touch. They are also quite delicate, so avoid poking and prodding. Once the polenta forms a crust and begins to brown, the fries will not stick. If for some reason a few pieces fuse to the skillet upon entry, don't worry. Leave them to fry quietly for a few minutes until the exteriors begin to glaze and harden, then use the tip of a thin metal spatula to nudge them free.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe, you will need a heavy-bottomed large saucepan, a 12 by 8-inch rimmed baking sheet (aka a quarter sheet pan) or a 13 by 9-inch metal baking pan, parchment paper, a fine-mesh strainer, a large bowl, a whisk, an offset spatula, a chef's knife, a 10- or 12-inch cast-iron skillet, a wire rack, a digital instant-read thermometer, a thin metal spatula, and tongs.

Ingredients

24 ounces (3 cups) whole milk

16 ounces (2 cups) Rich Homemade Chicken Stock

6 sprigs fresh thyme

2 sprigs fresh rosemary

4 medium garlic cloves, smashed

3 Turkish bay leaves

9 ounces (1½ cups) Anson Mills Artisan Handmade Coarse Rustic Polenta Integrale

1 ounce (2 tablespoons) unsalted butter, plus additional for greasing the pan

¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Fine sea salt

Peanut oil, for frying

Slow-Roasted Tomato and Garlic Mayonnaise, for serving

Directions

1. In a heavy-bottomed large saucepan, combine the milk, chicken stock, thyme, rosemary, garlic, and bay leaves. Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer over medium heat. Cover, remove the pan from the heat, and let steep for 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, grease a 12 by 8-inch rimmed baking sheet (aka a quarter sheet pan) or a 13 by 9-inch metal baking pan with butter, then line it with parchment paper so the parchment runs up and extends past the two long sides of the pan. Butter the parchment where it is pressed against the bottom and sides of the pan. Set the pan aside.

3. Pour the milk-stock mixture through a fine-mesh strainer set over a large bowl, then return it to the saucepan; discard the solids in the strainer. Whisk the polenta into the liquid, then set the pan over medium-high heat. Bring the mixture to a simmer, whisking constantly until the first starch takes hold, 5 to 8 minutes. Turn down the heat to low or medium-low, cover partially, and cook, stirring frequently, until the polenta is thick enough to hold its shape on a spoon, about 20 minutes. Add the butter, pepper, and 1½ teaspoons salt, then stir until the butter is fully incorporated.

4. Working quickly, pour the polenta into the prepared baking sheet. Using an offset spatula, spread the polenta to the corners and sides of the pan and smooth it into an even layer. Cover and refrigerate until cold and firm, at least 4 hours or up to 3 days.

5. Remove the chilled polenta from the baking sheet by lifting it out with the parchment extensions; set the polenta on a cutting board. Using a chef's knife, cut the polenta slab crosswise into fourths, then cut each quarter into batons about ½ inch thick. (At this point, if you don't plan to fry all of the polenta, refrigerate the portion you'll be saving in an airtight container for up to 3 days.)

6. Pour enough peanut oil into a 10- or 12-inch cast-iron skillet to reach a depth of ½ to ¾ inch, then set the pan over medium-high heat. Meanwhile, line a wire rack with a doubled layer of paper toweling. When the oil reaches about 325 degrees, add a few polenta batons one at a time. Don't crowd them and allow a generous amount of space between the pieces; once in the hot oil, don't disturb the batons—they are rather delicate—until their surfaces begin to brown and crisp. Some may stick to the pan but will eventually loosen with continued cooking and when nudged with a thin metal spatula. Fry the batons until deep golden brown on all sides, 5 to 6 minutes, occasionally turning pieces. As the fries are done, use tongs to transfer them to the prepared rack to drain. Sprinkle with salt and serve with the mayonnaise for dipping.