

Garlic Cheese Grits/Polenta

Grits and polenta are a corn-based platform for flavor and ingredients akin to pasta, rice, and risotto. Polenta is a finer grind of corn that cooks quickly. Grits and polenta are delicious plain; extraordinary with complementary ingredients. Here is a simple and flexible recipe that makes two main course servings. Great for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Tools

2 quart enameled cast iron or heavy stainless steel pot with lid
Flat bladed wooden stirrer

Ingredients

2 cups Stock or Shrimp Stock
2/3 cup grits or polenta
1 recipe Crushed Garlic made with a pinch of Herbes de Bubba
6 ounces aged sharp white cheddar cheese, coarsely chopped (or your favorite cheese or a mixture of those you have on hand)
Three 4-8" long chicken, pork, or beef sausages (country, italian, andouille, kielbase etc. as you please) (optional)
Four slices bacon or lardons (optional)

Method

Brown sausages or bacon in pot. When done, remove and wrap in paper towels to withdraw fat. Pour off and discard free fat left in the saucepan, taking care to keep flavorful browned bits in pan.

Add stock to pot. Cover, place on medium heat, and watch until simmer is reached (stock will steam when lid is removed; small bubbles will break sporadically in pot). Once simmer is reached, slowly pour grits into pot in a stream whilst stirring to prevent clumping.

Cover, and stir frequently.

As you stir, scrape the bottom of the pot so the sausage/bacon brownings are incorporated.

If grits clump, break them up against the side of the pot with the stirrer.

When grits begin to simmer again, reduce heat until bubbles are just breaking.

If grits begin bubbling/erupting volcanically, stir quickly and reduce heat.

When grits become thick and smooth, add crushed garlic and cheese, cover, and reduce heat to low.

Serve and sprinkle with a twist or two of fresh ground black pepper.

If using bacon, crush or chop into small pieces and sprinkle over each serving.

If using sausage, cut into individual bite size pieces and sprinkle over each serving.

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Variations

If you like tart grits, add 2-3 finely diced sun dried tomatoes when you add the grits to the pot.

Substitute about ½ pound leftover chicken, turkey, ham, or pork, coarsely diced, for sausages/bacon. Stir them into the grits once cheese melts, and allow them to reheat for a couple of minutes before serving.

If you like spicy-tangy grits, de-seed and finely dice 2-3 fresh or pickled hot spice peppers like aji limon, bird, fish, or jalapeno. If using fresh peppers, put them in a small bowl with just enough red wine vinegar, white wine vinegar, or raspberry vinegar to cover them while the grits are cooking. Then stir hot pepper/vinegar mixture or diced pickled hot peppers into the grits just before serving.

Comments

Choose your grits and polenta wisely. The flavor of those traditionally milled from quality heritage corn varieties is exquisite. Your local specialty food store is likely to be a good source.

Coarsely ground grits require more time and stock to cook than polenta.

If grits get away from you and start to stick/dry out/solidify, reduce heat, add stock in one tablespoon increments, and stir until reconstituted.

The first few times you prepare this dish, make it with either sausages or bacon. Experiment with different ingredients and combinations based on your taste and what you have in the refrigerator.

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