

Deep-Fried Foods Diners Love

Among the dishes that keep diners coming back for more, deep-fried foods are no small potatoes.

By Kate Leahy, Senior Associate Editor -- Restaurants and Institutions, May 2009



Fried cauliflower is garnished with shaved pecorino cheese at L'Albatros in Cleveland

When people get a taste for something crispy, salty and deep-fried, their thoughts likely turn to going out. That's the case even now, as more Americans say they're generally curbing their restaurant visits. Why? Because fried foods remain the kind of item that's simply much easier to order on a menu than to whip up (and clean up) at home.

Besides getting customers in the door, menuing fried foods may also help boost check averages. According to Chicago-based market-research firm Technomic, 67% of consumers will order add-ons such as appetizers or side dishes with a meal when the add-ons appeal to their cravings.

Deep-fried Entrées

In many restaurant kitchens, deep fryers also are being fired up for main dishes. On the menu at Catalan Food & Wine in Houston, that's true for chicken-fried venison.

"It's a way to get people to eat more venison," says Chef Chris Shepherd. "People eat anything chicken-fried." Served with lady cream peas, mustard greens and red-eye gravy, the entrée is generously sized, even though each portion uses only about 4 ounces of meat. "It's big food," Shepherd says of the fried dish. "On the plate it looks like 12 ounces."

To prepare, he pounds pieces of New Zealand venison flat and then dredges them first in milk, next in flour and finally again in milk before dropping them in the fryer. Then the meat is fried until it's crisp on the outside and medium-rare inside.



Ebi katsu (breaded, fried shrimp) with chile-garlic sauce at Wagamama

Asian-style fried chicken has quickly become a bestseller at the three Boston-area locations of [Wagamama](#), a London-based concept. For its chicken *katsu* curry, panko-breaded chicken breast is deep-fried then simmered in a light curry sauce. The bright sauce, infused with star anise, garlic, cinnamon and turmeric, is what makes the dish "particularly addictive," says the restaurant's U.S. development chef Barnaby Godden.

Deep-fried, Italian Style

Still other chefs are gathering deep-fried inspiration in Italian-style starches and doughs. At [A Voce](#) in New York City, Chef Missy Robbins offers *panelle*, a Sicilian chickpea fritter, as a side dish. She cooks chickpea flour in water and olive oil until thick and then spreads the mixture on sheet pans to cool. Next, she cuts the base into pieces, deep-fries them and seasons them simply with salt and pepper. At The Bristol in Chicago, Chef Chris Pandel serves a similar chickpea fritter with grilled sardines.

Sondra Bernstein, chef-owner of [The Girl & The Fig](#) in Sonoma, Calif., gleaned a couple of fried recipes from Italy as well for her newest restaurant, Estate. On a recent trip, she was served *gnocchi fritti* instead of bread alongside an antipasti plate at a mom-and-pop restaurant in Emilia Romagna. The gnocchi, made from a simple dough of flour, milk, yeast, salt and water, were cut into squares and deep-fried until they puffed in the center.

"It was really authentic," Bernstein says. "We weren't at a fancy top-chef restaurant. It was comfort food." Bernstein now is working on her own version to replace the grissini she serves with a selection of antipasti at Estate.

The restaurant's other deep-fried Italian option is *zeppole*, a doughnut-like Italian dessert (made with butter, eggs, sugar, milk, yeast and water) that Bernstein offers in a linen-lined bowl with fruit preserves and a hazelnut-chocolate spread.

Will these or any of the other new fried dishes on the menu be enough to ignite customer cravings? Bernstein thinks they just might. "Even though people talk about health, we all like a little bit of fried food," she says.

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