Homemade Soft Pretzel Bites

Make-ahead · Serves a crowd · Holiday · Makes 5–6 dozen

Ken's note: TBD

Ingredients

Pretzel bites

- 1½ cups warm water
- 2 tbsp light brown sugar
- 1 package (2¼ tsp) active dry yeast
- 3 oz unsalted butter, melted
- 2½ tsp kosher salt
- 4½ to 5 cups all-purpose flour
- Vegetable oil, for the bowl
- 3 quarts water
- ½ cup baking soda (for boiling)
- 1 egg, beaten with 1 tbsp cold water
- Coarse sea salt

- 2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1 cup beer (lager, ale, or your favorite—not too bitter)
- ½ cup whole milk
- 1½ cups (6 oz) sharp cheddar, freshly grated
- ½ cup (2 oz) Gruyère or smoked Gouda, freshly grated (optional)
- 1½ tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp paprika (smoked or regular)
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Method

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the 1½ cups warm water, brown sugar, yeast, and melted butter. Mix with the dough hook until combined; let sit 5 minutes.
2. Add the kosher salt and flour and mix on low until combined. Increase to medium and knead until the dough is smooth and begins to pull away from the bowl, 3–4 minutes. If it looks too wet, add flour 1 tablespoon at a time. Turn out and knead into a ball.
3. Oil a bowl, add the dough, and turn to coat. Cover and let rise in a warm spot until doubled, about 1 hour.
4. Heat the oven to 425°F. Bring the 3 quarts of water to a boil in a small roasting pan and carefully add the baking soda — it will boil up, so add it slowly.
5. Divide the dough into 8 equal pieces (about 4¼–4½ oz each). Roll each into a 22-inch rope and cut into 1-inch bites. Boil in batches of about 15 for 30 seconds; lift out with a slotted spoon onto a baking sheet sprayed with cooking spray, not touching. Brush with egg wash and season liberally with coarse salt. Bake 15–18 minutes, until golden brown. Rest 5 minutes on a rack before serving, with beer cheese dip.

Variation: Cinnamon-Sugar Pretzel Bites

1. Instead of coarse salt, sprinkle the egg-washed bites with cinnamon and sugar before baking. For the frosting: whisk about 3 tbsp softened cream cheese with powdered sugar, 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, and a little milk. Add more milk if it’s too thick, or more powdered sugar if it’s too thin, until the consistency is right.

Beer Cheese Dip

1. Serve warm with the pretzel bites.
2. Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Whisk in the flour and cook, stirring, about 1 minute. Gradually whisk in the beer, then the milk, until smooth and thickened. Stir in the Dijon, Worcestershire, garlic powder, and paprika. Reduce heat to low. Add the cheeses by the handful, letting each batch melt before adding the next, and whisk until velvety and smooth. Taste and season with salt and pepper.
3. Best cheeses: Sharp cheddar is essential for classic flavor and melts well. Gruyère adds creaminess and a nutty note; smoked Gouda a smoky undertone; Fontina melts easily and balances sharpness; Monterey Jack is mild and helps the melt.