

LitlJay's Diablo Rattlers

A little history: There is a dish that is served in many small Mexican (Tex-Mex, technically) restaurants around here called Diablo Shrimp. It varies from place to place, but is usually something along the lines of a giant shrimp wrapped with a fat jalapeño stem inside of a bacon strip and grilled. There is also a chain of steak houses called Saltgrass that sells an appetizer called Range Rattlers, which are HUGE pickled jalapeños that have been stuffed with cheese and a giant shrimp, battered, and deep fried. Diablo Rattlers are what the love child would look/taste like if the two dishes found themselves together one evening and succumbed to loneliness and boredom.

Kudos and huge thanks go out to Mary for her great ideas helping me tweak the details of this recipe as it evolved over about a six month period, and to her mother, Frances, for providing me the foundation that I built this recipe on.

~22 medium-sized jalapeño peppers

1 lb. raw small (not tiny) shrimp, peeled and deveined with the tails off

2 lbs. sliced bacon

1 8oz. block of cream cheese

¼ cup finely shredded colby jack cheese (substitute pepper jack if you like extra zest)

1 tablespoon worcestershire sauce

2 bay leaves

2 tablespoons finely ground black pepper

1 tablespoon thyme

4 teaspoons marjoram

1 tablespoon chili powder

2 teaspoons salt

6 cups water

Put the water into a 2 quart or larger saucepan. Cut the stems off of 2 of the jalapeños and discard. Chop the two peppers up (skin, meat, seeds, and all) and add them to the water. Add the bay leaves, black pepper, thyme, marjoram, chili powder, and salt to the pot. Heat to boiling, reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 10 to 20 minutes, stirring frequently. Add the raw shrimp and turn the heat back up. Heat to boiling and boil for ~5 minutes. Turn off the burner and let the shrimp soak for 15 to 20 minutes. Scoop all of the shrimp out with a slatted spoon and set aside. **DO NOT DRAIN THEM WITH A COLANDER!**

While the seasonings are simmering and/or the shrimp are soaking, cut the stems off of all of the remaining jalapeños and discard. Cut each jalapeño in half lengthwise and hollow out the meat and seeds.

Place the entire block of cream cheese in a microwave-safe bowl and heat in the microwave for 20-25

seconds or until the cream cheese is softened enough that it is easy to stir. Add the worcestershire and stir until it is mixed in consistently. Do the same with the colby jack/pepper jack. Do the same again with a little bit of the shrimp and repeat until all of the shrimp is mixed in. If you are crazy you can chop up some of the meat and seeds removed from the jalapeños in the previous step and mix them in, too (that's more than my gut can handle, though). This step can probably be made easier by using an electric hand blender, but I use a spoon and get along fine. There's also always the risk of the blender mangling up the shrimp and ruining everything and making you cry, so you may want to do the shrimp with a spoon if you try it.

Use a small spoon to fill each jalapeño half with the cheese/shrimp mixture, then wrap it with a strip of bacon. Secure the bacon with a toothpick all the way through to the bottom.

Arrange the stuffed, wrapped, and skewered peppers on a couple of large cookie sheets so that they do not touch each other and bake at 350 degrees until the bacon is clearly done, but still chewy. Even if you like your breakfast bacon crispy, overcooking it will take the fun out of eating these.

When you take them from the oven, you will notice a thin layer of hot bacon grease on the bottom of each cookie sheet that is probably boiling in a few spots. The peppers are soaked in this and will burn you badly if you don't let them cool for a few minutes before you take them from the cookie sheet!

Serve with each diner's choice of Tum's or Pepcid.

Yields: ~40 Diablo Rattlers