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Franksgiving - Oyster Dressing Tarts

by Frank Davis

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Let's face it—the most Naturally N'Awlins dressing in this city at holiday time is—and has always been—oyster dressing. But this year, to give a trusty ol' standard a little pizzazz, I'm recommending that you pile the dressing into toasty, beautifully browned, pastry shells. . .almost like little tarts. All you need to do is follow my recipe to the letter and you got yourself one truly delectable Franksgiving treat!

1/2 cup unsalted butter
2 cups finely chopped onions
1 cup finely chopped celery
1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley
1/2 cup finely chopped bell pepper
2 heaping teaspoons finely chopped garlic
1/3 cup thinly sliced green-onion tops
1 quart chopped Louisiana oysters plus liquor
1 teaspoon Frank Davis Poultry Seasoning
1 teaspoon Frank Davis Seafood Seasoning
2 teaspoons dried basil
1 teaspoon black pepper, coarse ground
1 pinch thyme
1-1/2 teaspoon sea salt, if needed
3-4 cups broken stale French bread
1 whole egg, lightly beaten
12 large puff pastry shells, pre-baked
1 cup buttered Panko breadcrumbs

In a large, black, cast iron Dutch oven, melt the butter over medium heat and sauté the onions, celery, parsley, bell pepper, garlic, and green-onion tops until all of them are wilted and tender. The one thing to remember, though, is to keep the butter hot *but don't let it burn*. Keep stirring the mixture so that it cooks uniformly.

Next, gradually stir in the chopped oysters. Notice I said, "gradually stir in." The reason for this is that you do not want to reduce the heat—lowering the heat will cause excessive water to be released from the oysters and you'll have to add too much bread to the finished dish and you'll lose the *rich* oyster flavor.

Cook the oysters gently for about 4 minutes, stirring all the while. When the ingredients are well mixed, stir in the poultry seasoning, seafood seasoning, basil, pepper, thyme, and salt. *About the salt—check your oysters to see if they are naturally salty before adding the prescribed amount. You may have to reduce the salt if Mother Nature has provided her own.* Note: It's at this point that you should begin tasting the dressing and making whatever adjustments are necessary.

Now cover the pot, lower the heat, and simmer for about 5 minutes to allow time for the flavors to thoroughly blend. This is one of the secrets to making a really good oyster dressing.

After the simmering process is done, remove the pot from the fire and begin stirring in the bread a little at a time. Keep in mind that you do not have to add all of it (or you may need a little more of it). It depends on how juicy your oysters are. If you want your dressing moist, stop adding bread when you get to the texture you desire. If you want a drier stuffing, put it all in and add even more if your taste dictates.

When, in your estimation, the stuffing is just right, go ahead and rapidly stir in the egg to tie everything together. Then cover it for a few minutes to let it "set up." This is where the body comes in—it's how the final blending brings out full flavor. And you can make adjustments at this point by moistening the dish with the oyster liquor (which is why you saved it).

At this point, spoon the dressing out of the Dutch oven and into the pre-baked puff pastry shells. Then lightly sprinkle the top with a handful of buttered Panko breadcrumbs, top with butter, and bake uncovered about 20-25 minutes in a 350-degree oven.

Serve the tarts piping hot alongside slices of the "Potted Turkey."

Oh, yeah—it's perfectly okay to spoon some black pot poultry juices over the tops of the shells when they are served.