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BY TERESA TAYLOR

New day for buttermilk

Author applauds rediscovery of its many uses in Southern cooking



Blossom chef Adam Close

Buttermilk on menu

Among the local chefs using buttermilk is Adam Close of Blossom on East Bay Street. Several items on Blossom's menu list buttermilk prominently, and Close says people frequently ask about it.

He says the kitchen employs buttermilk mainly for frying. "It serves a similar purpose as mustard for breading fish, to coat the outside. It just adds a tart flavor and also helps the breading to stick. You have to use something viscous like that. Buttermilk fits the bill and adds a flavor."



WADE SPEES/STAFF

One of buttermilk's many uses is for marinating meats and seafood before frying. Here is Blossom's Buttermilk Fried Calamari With Red Pepper Remoulade, a fixture on the menu.

Blossom's Buttermilk Fried Calamari With Red Pepper Remoulade

Makes 4 servings

For the red pepper remoulade:

1 red bell pepper, seeds and ribs removed
¼ cup chopped parsley
4 green onions, chopped
Juice of 1 lemon
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1 cup mayonnaise

For the calamari:

1 pound squid (rings only)
1 cup buttermilk
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon garlic powder
½ teaspoon paprika
½ tablespoon white pepper
2 tablespoons kosher salt
1 gallon peanut oil
Lemon wedges, for serving

Directions

To prepare the red pepper remoulade, combine all the ingredients in a blender and puree until smooth. Cover and refrigerate. The remoulade may be made a few hours ahead.

To prepare the calamari, rinse the squid, drain well, and pat dry with a paper towel. In a stainless steel bowl, combine the squid and the buttermilk and let it marinate in the refrigerator overnight.

When ready to cook, combine the flour, garlic powder, paprika, white pepper and salt. Remove the squid from the buttermilk and add it to the seasoned flour, tossing to coat well. Make sure all the moisture is absorbed by the flour.

Put the oil in a pot large enough to contain it with plenty of room to spare. Heat the oil over medium heat to 350 degrees. Use a thermometer to monitor the temperature, keeping in mind that the calamari will somewhat cool the oil once it is added.

Shake off the excess flour from the calamari and add it to the hot oil. Cook for 30 seconds, being careful not to overcook it, then remove with a slotted spoon. Place the calamari carefully on a plate lined with a paper towel to absorb any excess oil. Serve with lemon wedges and Red Pepper Remoulade.

— Adapted from "Buttermilk" by Debbie Moose (UNC Press, 2012)