

Butter My Biscuit

Food musings of a southern ex-pat



Derby Bites: Benedictine



The first Saturday of every May is indelibly etched on most Southerners' calendar: the Kentucky Derby! Whether you avidly watch the festivities and race, or simply check the internet or paper the next day for the winner, nearly all give a nod to the prestigious sporting event. Make no mistake though, the Derby is a SOCIAL event. And we know what social *really* means: lotsa food & booze. If you're actually going to the Derby, have sky box seating and are obliged to dress up in that très British finery, then odds are you will be hosting and/or attending pre-parties and post-parties with lots of good eats & drinks by high priced caterers. I'd say that if you're in that crowd, then this post most likely isn't for you. I'm out to appeal to the masses that are content to sit back with the remote in hand, gazing at their snazzy 52" HD, flat screen TV's ? but with the same good eats and drinks as the "tony" crowd.



Over the next several posts leading up to Derby weekend, I'll be touching on a couple of Louisville classics that can be incorporated into any Derby grazing event you are planning. The recipes are focused around the kibbles & bits strategy; finger foods to keep your stomach lined so that the bourbon you're swizzling doesn't knock you out flat (bourbon blackouts are not pretty). One such classic to share is Benedictine. Created by a Louisville caterer, Miss Jennie C. Benedict, it was made

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specifically as a filling for ladies' dainty tea sandwiches way back in the 1890's. This edible is somewhat of a chameleon since it can be used a number of ways: sandwich filling, dip or condiment. Benedictine is cream cheese based, with the addition of grated cucumber and onion. There is a requisite dash of heat, but here's the rub: you gotta add green food coloring. Mind you, you can omit the food coloring, but my Louisville connections say it just wouldn't be the same. I think the Facebook quote ran something like " ... I wouldn't dream of serving my Benedictine without the green food coloring in it!..." The upside here is that it's not flaming Leprechaun green, more of a very light pistachio gelato color. *(Post publication addendum: a Louisville based foodie authority has made the callout that my pictures indicate a heavy hand with the green food coloring. While I won't discount that at all, I think there were also some Photoshop issues here. Mea culpa everybody. Readers be advised ? make it very, very LIGHT green in color!)* I've tried out a number of recipes, and I've settled on one that was published by [Saveur](#) magazine some time ago. Seems that many other recipes call for sour cream which has a tendency to ruin the stiff consistency that I personally like; besides, the cukes and onion already add water. And, those same recipes want to dump everything in a food processor and turn it into a cucumber-cream cheese smoothie ? I like my Benedictine chunky. The version below is rather perfect as it omits sour cream and calls for hand mashing and stirring. Feel free to doctor it up to suit your own tastes. I myself used a pinch of cayenne pepper versus the Tabasco hot sauce.

So what do you do with Benedictine? If you're a purist, you would simply slip it between some soft bread slices that you've pre-cut with a cutsie cookie cutter, making some small finger sandwiches a la Miss Jennie. But if your Derby crowd has a bit more testosterone, rendering dainty tea sandwiches a bit too femme, then slice some baguettes on the diagonal and top them canape style with the Benedictine .. maybe some macho garnishment such as a sliver of a hot pepper. Of course, if you keep the stiffer consistency, it will stand as a perfect dip for vegetable sticks. I'd go out on a limb and bring in something a little different than the generic celery stick; maybe blanched green beans that still have quite a bit of snap & crunch? Some asparagus spears? Trimmed baby radishes? Carrot sticks would be good too, and the color contrast would look dynamic. Or maybe some Italian grissini breadsticks? But, here's my favorite adaptation: how about open-faced baby BBT's (Bacon-Benedictine-Tomato)? Hit up the deli aisle at your grocery and find a bag of those special little party pumpnickel breads that are about 2x2", lightly toast them and then layer some of the spread, a chunky bite of thick bacon and top with a cherry tomato (spearing it all with a toothpick)!

For what it's worth, I also found a couple of rogue Benedictine recipes that added goat cheese ... some of you might want to investigate that route if it has appeal (if so, click [here](#)). Would Miss Jennie approve? I expect she would applaud such culinary initiative. Give Benedictine a try ... and enjoy the Derby! And, check back next week for yet another "Derby Bites" installment.

"Benedictine Spread"

Adapted from [Saveur](#) Magazine

Ingredients

- 6 ounces cream cheese (softened)
- 1 medium cucumber (peeled, seeded and grated)
- 1 medium yellow onion (peeled and grated)
- 2 Tbsp mayonnaise
- 1/4 tsp Tabasco sauce
- Salt
- Green Food Coloring

Place cream cheese in a bowl and mash with a fork until smooth. Wrap cucumber in cheesecloth, then squeeze out and discard juice. Add cucumber to cream cheese and mix thoroughly. Wrap onions in cheesecloth and squeeze juice into cream cheese mixture, then discard onions. Mix mayonnaise and Tabasco sauce into cream cheese mixture. Season to taste with salt, then add 1 drop green food coloring and mix well. Serve on thinly sliced white sandwich bread, topped with another slice of bread, trimmed and cut into finger sandwiches.

Recipe provided by <http://www.buttermybiscuit.com>

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Personal Notes:

- As mentioned above, doctor this up to your own tastes. The Louisville contingency may disagree, but I love cayenne pepper versus the Tabasco (just a pinch).
- Additionally, I couldn't be bothered to measure out 6 ounces of cream cheese from an 8 ounce block; I dumped the whole block in.
- And, I couldn't hack squeezing for onion juice, so I simply took the onion to a rasp and grated what I thought was an appropriate amount.
- As for the cucumbers, I went the route of grating the evening before I needed it, then put it in a fine mesh strainer with a little salt to help draw the water out. If you put it over a bowl and let it drip drain over night, there's a lot less squeezing. BTW, I don't know why one wouldn't include the dark green peel in this as well (I'll skip peeling next time).
- My dainty tea sandwiches were built for truck drivers, as I was a little heavy handed with the filling; you may want to watch that part. And, you might want to fill ? then chill in the ice box for a bit ? so that the filling doesn't gush out at first bite.

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