

BUFFALOED FIDDLEHEADS

Fiddleheads are a forager's delight in mid-to-late spring in New England. They are impossible to find out of season, but in May and early June, you might be able to find them at farmer's markets. Typically they are steamed or sautéed in butter with garlic, which I dislike as they turn pretty slimy. A few years ago, I had them deep-fried in a light tempura batter, then dipped in hot sauce (like the kind for hot wings) and they were excellent.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 pound fresh fiddleheads
1/3 cup + 1 tablespoon corn starch, divided
1 cup of flour
1/4 teaspoon baking powder
1/8 teaspoon baking soda
1 1/2 cups very cold sparkling mineral water
pinch of salt
peanut or canola oil for deep frying
1/2 cup Frank's Hot Sauce (or your favorite buffalo sauce)
1/4 cup (1/2 stick) melted butter
blue cheese dressing for serving, optional

DIRECTIONS

Trim the ends of the stems of the fiddleheads. Using water to assist, remove the brown husks (sometimes they're there, sometimes they're not). Rinse and drain thoroughly (I usually rinse them 3-4 times, because they can be very muddy or sandy). Pat completely dry.

Make your tempura batter. In a mixing bowl, combine flour, 1 tablespoon corn starch, baking powder, baking soda and a pinch of salt. Using a metal whisk, add mineral water and whisk until combined, but do not over mix. Set aside for 10 minutes while you finish preparing the fiddleheads and heat the oil.

In a large heavy-bottomed dutch oven, heat oil to 350F. Toss fiddleheads in remaining 1/3 cup of cornstarch. They should have a dry, even coating. In another mixing bowl, combine hot sauce and melted butter and set aside. When the oil is hot, dip each fiddlehead in the batter and drop into the oil. Fry until golden brown on the first side, 3-4 minutes, flip and repeat. Remove to paper towels to drain excess oil and then toss in the hot sauce mixture.

Serve immediately, with blue cheese dressing, as is customary, though optional.