

FORK IN THE ROAD

Shrimply Delicious

Carmen Juch

When I really want to impress someone with my cooking, it isn't the Chicken Kiev or the Vichyssoise I whip up. It is when I pull out the King of all recipes, Louisiana style Bar B Que Shrimp. And no, this has nothing to do with a grill but everything to do with rich, deliciously messy and wickedly decadent. It is love drenched in butter. It's an ear-to-ear grin with grease dripping off your elbows and not caring a wit.

The best thing I ever ate in New Orleans was also the worst thing I ever put into my mouth - at least health-wise ...

Bar B Que Shrimp

The first one of this dish ever set before me had a little army of shrimp with eyes looking at me just daring me to pluck their head off and peel it out of its shell army coat. I took a deep breath and plunged in. From the first bite I was a devoted worshipper. If listed on a menu, I had to order it. An-d I was determined to be able to make it at home. And there in lied the problem.

This was many moons and years ago and I found out that getting the

recipe was near impossible (pre-internet). No cookbook had it listed and I bought them all. Friends could never quite remember or find theirs. It was one of those recipes that was passed down in a family and guarded jealously. Even the restaurants wouldn't share it - when you could find it on the menu. It took me many, many pounds of shrimp to finally decipher the flavors. One of the secrets was rosemary. I tried theme and oregano before hitting on that.

The other was one of the simplest of all - regular ground black pepper. It took a few times to realize that it was a TON of black pepper. I finally let totally lose and really layered it on and *bingo* I had it.

You know how you know you hit the recipe just right? First, if you have a boyfriend he becomes your husband. And second, when someone you cook it for is still talking about it ten years later, you have succeeded.



And yes, I have some friends who may not see me for years but when they do, that's one of the things that invariable enters the discussion.

The very best Bar B Que Shrimp I ever had was in a restaurant that no longer exists, a consequence of hurricane Katria, so I am thankful I was able to identify the ingredients before that sad event.

Probably the one thing that gets a lot of people freaked out is leaving the shrimp heads on. But I have to be adamant that it is important to the overall quality and taste of the recipe. The fat from the head aids in the development of the sauce. If you absolutely cannot abide the heads, then remove them, but there is a difference in my humble opinion to the end result. I also urge you to purchase the freshest shrimp available to you (with the heads on) and the bigger the better. I suggest Susie's in Kemah or one of the other fresh seafood stores in the Galveston/Kemah area.

The recipe varied in each of the restaurant or the friend's homes I ate at, but there were always a couple of things that remained the same. One was lots of crusty French bread for dipping. Almost always the shrimp was served in dishes of a low depth to make dipping the bread or grabbing the shrimp easy for the eater so most often it was served in a communal-family way with each person taking a shrimp from the dish and dipping bread in the sauce. Often times it was served on layers of newspaper much as crawfish is served so that plates were not necessary.

Also, a Bar-B-Que Shrimp meal includes sides of little boiled finger potatoes and corn on the cob and are also dipped and/or rolled in the sauce. (As a reminder, this meal is not heart-healthy!)

This is definitely a dish that you will want to be pretty friendly with your co-eaters, not just so shoving and pushing doesn't take place, but there will be some double dipping going on. (When you are in the moment, you won't care much.)

Pre heat your oven to 350 degrees. Once you have the shrimp ready it literally only takes minutes to cook them, so have the oven hot.

This is exactly how I make the recipe. It ain't fancy but it sure is good.

Rinse the shrimp in cold water to remove any sand, dirt or ocean junk then drain them.

Arrange in 9X12 cooking dishes so that there is only one layer of shrimp, but they can be pretty tight. Even a pound takes more than one dish. I have heard that some cooks layer 2 shrimp deep but I think it works better in a single layer to get the sauce just right. If you have a casserole dish shortage, go to the market and buy the disposable aluminum ones.

You want to end up with about a cup of "sauce" in each dish, so use ¼ cup olive oil and ¾ cup butter. Pour the olive oil over the shrimp in the casserole. You don't have to melt the butter first unless you just want to. I drop it in little globs on the top of the shrimps. (Just a note here on

your oil: You want to spring for good quality olive oil because you aren't frying it you are making a sauce. The taste is important.)

Mince a few cloves of garlic and sprinkle over all along with rosemary. Basically I open the jar and sprinkle the dried rosemary over the shrimp so that each has a very light sprinkle. You may use fresh if you wish but the dried does the job just fine. If you want a little extra heat, add cayenne. But you will be adding quite a bit of black pepper and I have never found it necessary to add more heat.

Now here's the first difficult part. Every body has a really tough time with this. Take a big container of ground black pepper and very heavily coat the shrimp. I mean heavy! When you think "this is a ridiculous amount of pepper" you're there. Really, you have to *think* that to know you have the right amount.

The second difficult part of this whole thing is *DON'T* overcook the shrimp. When they turn pink, they are done. Remember they keep cooking when you pull them out of the oven too.

The last incredibly hard part is to wait for them to cool enough that you can peel them.

You know the best thing about writing this? I have to cook Bar B Que Shrimp for the picture. Dang the bad luck!

Shrimply delicious!