

by Ron James

THE AUTHOR

Grits, the humble Southern staple, have been elevated to fashionable food in high-end restaurants across America. Chefs are discovering that the flexibility, texture and delicate corn taste of grits lend themselves to countless flavor matches. One of the great pairings in the South, especially the South Carolina lowcountry region, is shrimp and grits.

NATHALIE DUPREE - Nathalie Dupree, along with co-author Marion Sullivan, scoured the South for the best recipes to go in their new cookbook, 'Nathalie Dupree's Shrimp and Grits Cookbook.' CNS Photo.
CHEESE GRITS SOUFFLE - A delicious Cheese Grits Souffle With Shrimp Sauce can be made in advance and cooked just before serving, or cooked and frozen. CNS Photo. There is probably no better authority on grits - or Southern food, for that matter - than Nathalie Dupree. Along with Marion Sullivan, Dupree has scoured the South for the best recipes that combine shrimp and grits. They also have interviewed the best Southern chefs for contemporary twists on the classic combo. The best are collected in their new cookbook, "Nathalie Dupree's Shrimp and Grits Cookbook" (Wyrick, \$21.95).

Dupree and Sullivan have worked together on culinary projects for more than 30 years. One exploit was baking a 3-foot cake replica of a folk art painting for the Smithsonian. The duo also worked together on television and several cooking shows. Dupree has written nine cookbooks including two that won James Beard Foundation Awards.

THE DISH

"Shrimp and grits, one of the South's beloved foods, leaves a lingering taste and a folkloric mystique that borders on the mythical," Dupree writes in the introduction to her latest cookbook. "Each community and ethnic group along the region's shorelines brings its own cultural influence to this dish."

"People who grew up on the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts remember catching the tiniest and most flavorful of shrimp - creek shrimp - in the salt marshes and rivers and bringing them home to top their grits, unshelled, slathering everything with butter and pepper, and relishing them all together for breakfast."

Cheese Grits Souffle With Shrimp Sauce has been selected from Dupree's cookbook for the featured dish. "A souffle is just a thick sauce to which egg yolks and beaten egg whites are added," Dupree writes in her cooking notes. "Cheese grits make a sturdy sauce base for the eggs, enabling the souffle to be assembled in advance and cooked just before serving, or cooked and frozen. This is an extraordinarily popular dish for a buffet."

THE WINE

There are lots of subtle flavors and textures in this dish. So let's chill a sparkling wine with lots of subtle flavor and texture of its own. Gloria Ferrer Blanc de Noirs (\$20) is the bubbly match for this upscale grits and shrimp dish. Its crisp acidity is a perfect foil for the cheese souffle and shrimp sauce. This wine constantly gets high marks for quality and value from the wine press.

Gloria Ferrer is a Spanish-owned company located in the Carneros area of the Napa-Sonoma wine country. The wine is a blend of 92 percent pinot noir and 8 percent chardonnay. It is a festive pink with flavors of ripe cherries and strawberries.

CHEESE GRITS SOUFFLE WITH SHRIMP SAUCE

Grits:

1 cup uncooked grits

4 cups milk

2 tablespoons butter

Souffle:

1 pound grated sharp cheddar cheese

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter

1 tablespoon Dijon-style mustard

1/8 teaspoon mace

1 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

6 eggs, separated

Shrimp sauce:

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter

1 1/2 pounds small shrimp, peeled and deveined

1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil

Yields 8 servings.

Preheat oven to 350 F. Generously butter 8 1/2x13-inch oven-proof baking dish.

For grits: Add grits to simmering milk in heavy saucepan, preferably nonstick, and stir constantly. Do not let grits overboil or "blurp" loudly. Keep an eye on the evaporation and add milk or water to thin as desired. When fully cooked to the texture desired remove from heat and add 2 tablespoons of butter.

For souffle: The grits should have the consistency of a sauce. If too thick, add more milk and heat until absorbed. Stir in cheese, butter, mustard, mace, salt and cayenne pepper. Cool slightly. Taste for seasoning, add more salt if desired.

Lightly beat egg yolks in small bowl. Stir 1/2 cup grits into yolks to heat slightly. Add yolk mixture to remaining grits and combine thoroughly. Beat egg whites until soft peaks form, fold into grits. Pour into baking dish and bake, 40 to 45 minutes, or until souffle is puffed and lightly browned. Remove from oven and cover lightly.

For shrimp sauce: Melt butter in large, heavy-bottomed frying pan. Add shrimp and cook, 3 to 4 minutes, or until pink. Add herbs and mix well.

Divide souffle among 8 plates, ladle shrimp sauce over grits and serve.