

Asheville, NC Restaurants are Serving Calamari

Patrons to Asheville restaurants are finding calamari more and more on local menus. Its light, delicate flavor fits into every cuisine from Baja to Thailand. George Baxevanis, owner of Asheville restaurant, Fisherman's Quarters II, serves calamari at his place.

"We serve calamari a number of ways, but the most popular is always fried with a little marinara."

The little, and sometimes not so little, cephalopods live in all the world's seas, along with their cousins, octopus and cuttlefish, both of which are also delicious. All species have a remarkable ability to squirt "ink" as a defensive method; the ink is also quite good as food.

Calamari/Calamaro

Calamari, the Italian word for squid, is popular around the world. The Italian word was popular throughout the Mediterranean, came to America, and that is why we call it calamari today. Regardless of what it's called, it's good and versatile. Found around globe, it has made its way into the hearts and souls of many. One of the most popular is fried, and you can find it this way on the menu of many Asheville, NC seafood restaurants. Fried calamari is good with just a slice of lemon, or some French aioli, or maybe a spicy Greek marinara – even with sesame and soy.

Where Are Asheville Restaurants Getting Calamari?

The marvels of modern refrigeration and shipping have made calamari available to Asheville restaurants and home shoppers alike. You can get calamari whole, cleaned, cut, fresh, frozen, pre-breaded, etc. The best is always whole and fresh.

Calamari Prep

Preparing whole calamari is easy. There are two parts to a squid: the head and the tentacles. In between the two, there is an eye on either side of the body. Simply cut or pull the two pieces apart, separating them between the eyes and the body. Once removed, cut the eyes off and then look inside the tentacles and remove the "beak," found at the center.

With this done, you can move on to the head. Remove all of the insides and rinse it out. You can save the ink and use to color pasta and rice or to make sauces and stews. The size of your squid and what you want to make will tell you how to proceed from the cleaning to the cooking.

For fried calamari, small pieces that cook quickly are best. Usually the body is cut into rings, the tentacles are left whole, all are battered or breaded and then flash fried.

Fried Calamari with Spicy Marinara

1 pound of small to medium sized calamari, cleaned and tubes cut into ½ inch rings
2 cups of buttermilk

1 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon garlic powder
½ tablespoon crushed red pepper
pinch of salt and pepper

Marinate cleaned calamari in buttermilk with all the paprika, garlic, salt and pepper.

1 15-ounce can of diced tomato in juice
2 tablespoons fresh garlic
¼ cup of white wine
8 leaves of basil, cut in thin ribbons
salt and pepper

Place the tomatoes in the food processor. Using olive oil, gently sauté the garlic. When it's soft and well cooked, add the wine and allow to come to a brief simmer. Add the basil, take off of the heat and add to the food processor. Blend all together, season to taste.

2 cups all-purpose flour
4 cups of canola oil

Carefully heat the oil in a large sauce pan. Drain the excess buttermilk from the calamari and discard, dredge the calamari in the flour making sure to thoroughly coat each piece. When the oil reaches 375F; use a thermometer. Temperature is important. Fry the calamari for about a minute. Drain on paper towels and then serve with lemon wedges and your marinara sauce.