

Blue Cheese Ball with Candied Almonds

Nora Singley - special to Tribune Media Services

Palm Beach Post

TIPS:

(1). Make sure all cheeses are at room temperature before starting. If your cheeses are too cold, they won't blend into a cohesive mass. After mixing, your base will be quite soft. Scrape onto a piece of parchment or plastic wrap, place into a small bowl (which will encourage a roundish shape), chill in the fridge, and then form your ball.

(2). Make your cheese ball ahead of time which will meld and infuse the flavors and firm up the cheese ball.

(3). Make the coating separately from the ball itself.

(4). Coat with the outer crust just before serving.

CANDIED NUT COATING

2 tablespoons water

3 tablespoons granulated sugar

1 tablespoon packed light brown sugar

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 sprigs thyme (leaves only)

1/2 cup blanched, sliced almonds, toasted

1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts, toasted

additional thyme sprigs (for garnish)

CHEESE BALL

1/3 pound creamy soft blue cheese, softened

4 ounces (1/2 of 8 oz pkg) cream cheese, softened

honey (for drizzling)

salt and pepper

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Line a rimmed baking pan with a nonstick baking mat or parchment paper.

In a small saucepan, combine the water and granulated sugar. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat and boil, stirring, until sugar is dissolved. Remove from the heat and let cool.

In a medium bowl, combine the light brown sugar, cinnamon, salt and thyme leaves. Add the nuts and cooled simple syrup and stir to coat. Transfer the nuts to the prepared baking pan and spread in a single layer.

Bake, stirring every 5 to 10 minutes, until the nuts are dry and toasted, about 30 to 35 minutes. To test for doneness, remove a single nut from the oven and let cool. If crunchy and dry, the nuts are ready. Remove from the oven and let cool completely. Reserve.

Combine the blue and cream cheeses in the bowl of a food processor. Blend to combine, scraping down the sides of the bowl as necessary.

Season to taste with salt and pepper. (Blue cheese tends to be both salty and peppery, so you may not need additional seasoning.) Transfer the contents to a piece of parchment paper or plastic wrap and place in a small bowl.

Chill until very firm, about two hours, or up to three days in advance.

Using your hands and keeping the cheese in its wrapping, gently mold into the shape of a ball. If the ball becomes too soft, chill again in the plastic wrap or parchment until ready to serve. (If you are in a hurry, you can also put the cheese in the freezer for one hour.)

Just before serving, roll the ball in the candied nuts. Lightly drizzle with honey and sprinkle with additional thyme leaves, if desired. If you have difficulty making the nuts stick to the ball, the ball may be too cold, in which case let it sit at room temperature for 15 to 20 minutes, until the surface becomes a bit more tacky.

Yield: 1 ball

Per Serving (excluding unknown items): 3439 Calories; 324g Fat (83.2% calories from fat); 70g Protein; 76g Carbohydrate; 1g Dietary Fiber; 1018mg Cholesterol; 3815mg Sodium. Exchanges: 0 Grain(Starch); 10 Lean Meat; 59 1/2 Fat; 3 1/2 Other Carbohydrates.