



For all my Southern family and friends, here's my version of your local favorite -- Shrimp & Grits. Read all the way to the bottom, as there are tips and additional serving suggestions!

Shrimp & Grits

The inspiration for this recipe comes from two sources. The first is a recipe that I read a few years ago. It sounded good, and stuck in my head. The second, and greater influence, is a trip to Alabama and Mississippi that my family took in 2009 for our daughter to look at colleges. I ate grits with every single meal on that trip. Yep, I'm a fan. I ate loose grits, cheesy grits, buttery grits, firm grits, and pan-fried grit cakes. They all were delicious, but the best, in my opinion, were the grits with smoked gouda cheese that I ate in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. There's something about the smokiness of the cheese, with the corniness of the grits, that works on every level. Of course, the shrimp in the Gulf Region are as fresh and good as it gets. In this recipe, both the shrimp and the grits shine like culinary stars. Serves 4.

The Grits

3 ½ cups low-sodium chicken stock

¾ cup stone-ground grits (or Quaker Old Fashioned grits)

1 cup shredded smoked gouda cheese

Salt and pepper to taste

Start the grits recipe about 10 minutes before you start cooking the shrimp portion of the recipe.

Bring the chicken stock to a boil in a medium sauce pan.

Slowly add the grits, and stir the whole time. (I start with a whisk and then transition to a wooden spoon later, once the grits thicken.)

Turn the heat on very low, cover the pan, and cook for 15-20 minutes. (You can check your grits package for a more precise time.) Stir often, but not continuously. The grits will be thick and piping hot when ready.

Turn off the heat, and stir in the shredded smoked gouda. Taste, and add salt at this point, if needed. Often the cheese brings enough salt to the grits.

Let each guest add pepper to his/her own taste. Cracked black pepper is fine, but this is a case where you could also break out the fancy white pepper so that it blends in with the grits.

PS – these grits are great with a grilled pork chop on the side, if you're not in the mood for shrimp.

The Shrimp

2 Tablespoons butter (for vegetable sauté)

½ large shallot, minced

¼ cup scallions, minced

¼ cup red or yellow bell pepper, minced

¼ of a medium-size jalapeno pepper, seeded, deveined, minced (optional)

1 package of cherry or grape tomatoes (about 1½ cups); each tomato sliced in half

1 teaspoon of fresh thyme, chopped fine

1 Tablespoon of parsley, chopped fine

2 teaspoons of fresh chives, chopped fine

Peeled and deveined shrimp, 21-25 count: I allow 8 shrimp per person, plus 2 extras for the chef to taste-test for doneness.

¼ cup dry white wine or low sodium chicken stock

Juice of 1 fresh lemon

2-3 Tablespoons butter (for pan sauce)

Tabasco (optional)

Have all of your vegetables and herbs minced and ready to go, because the recipe moves along quickly.

Melt the butter (2 Tablespoons) in a wide skillet and add the shallots, scallions, and peppers. Stir them occasionally, and let them soften slightly. I like a little crunch left in my vegetables, but you can cook them to your taste. Cook for 3-5 minutes, until you get the texture you prefer.

Add the tomatoes, thyme, parsley and chives, and stir them into the mixture. You just want them to begin to warm (1-2 minutes). They will cook more, later.

Add the shrimp. Try to keep it in a single layer (if possible) so it will cook evenly. This is not the main cooking time for the shrimp! All you want to do is see the shrimp begin to turn pink. You don't want to cook it all the way through, yet. So, just when the shrimp become pink, stop cooking. (You'll probably still see some blue spots, and that's okay for now.) Empty the skillet into a large bowl – veggies, herbs, shrimp, everything.

Use the same skillet now to make a pan sauce. Add the wine (or chicken broth) and the lemon juice, heat to medium, and allow the mixture to reduce by about half. Then whisk in the remaining 2-3 Tablespoons of butter. Add the butter slowly, in small batches, and keep whisking gently until it is fully incorporated.

Take your bowl of veg and shrimp, and add everything back to the skillet. Here is where you finish cooking the shrimp. When the shrimp are uniformly pink, (no more blue spots!) test one for texture. You want it to be firm, not rubbery, and it should be hot all the way through. This will take only another 1-3 minutes, depending on how crowded your skillet is. Don't overcook the shrimp!

When your shrimp are done to your satisfaction, you are ready to serve. Plate a scoop of grits, cover with the shrimp & sauce mixture, and it's a meal! A squirt of Tabasco at this time is a nice touch, if you enjoy the heat.

Notes: The jalapeno and hot sauce are optional. In a pinch, you can substitute a 14-ounce can of fire roasted, no-salt added, diced tomatoes (drained) for the cherry tomatoes, but I recommend fresh for the proper flavor and texture. Chicken stock can almost always be substituted for white wine – just be sure to use the low sodium kind. Always use a real lemon – not the stuff that comes from a squeeze bottle. Feel free to garnish with additional chopped herbs.

Bonus Tip: If you really want to jazz this recipe up, **pre-cook** a sweet (or spicy) Italian sausage. After cooking, slice it into coins and give it a quick sauté so that the inside parts of the sausage get some nice brown color on them. Add the sausage to the meal when you give the shrimp its second and final turn in the skillet. At this point, remember that your sausage is already completely cooked and you're just trying to warm it up. As an alternative, you could leave the sausage whole, cook it either to order or warm it separately, and serve on the side.

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