

Zucchini + Nigella Fritters

SERVES 4

The small victory here is nailing a basic fritter batter, which means you can start any meal off on a memorable note. Plus, fritters are the greatest vehicle for little bits of things lurking in the fridge—chopped kimchi, leftover roast pork, grilled corn cut from the cob, grated cheese—anything can be a fritter! I've included nigella seeds here because I love them, they're onion-y and striking looking (they resemble black sesame seeds and are sometimes labeled "black caraway seeds," "onion seeds," or "kalonji"), and they remind me of the way Syrian string cheese tastes, something my mother adores. I am fully aware that they are hard to track down, and I don't expect you to lose your mind looking for them, but if you see them, try them! They're also great on hummus, eggplant dip (see page 122), or sprinkled on a simple tomato and onion salad. You can also leave them out of the fritters. Or add two thinly sliced scallions or a minced shallot to the batter (either will add the pleasant onion-flavor vibe). Another small victory is to be sure to keep the fritters little and thin so that by the time they get crisp on the outside, they are fully cooked inside. Note that you can make these ahead and warm and re-crisp them on a baking sheet in a 400°F [200°C] oven for about 10 minutes.

GARLIC SAUCE

½ cup [120 ml] sour cream
1 small garlic clove, minced
2 Tbsp minced fresh mint or dill, or a combination
1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
½ tsp kosher salt

FRITTERS

Kosher salt
1 Tbsp nigella seeds (see headnote)
½ cup [60 g] all-purpose flour
½ tsp baking powder

1 lb [455 g] zucchini, ends trimmed, coarsely grated
1 egg, beaten
Neutral oil, such as canola, grapeseed, or safflower, for frying

Lemon wedges for serving

To make the sauce: In a small bowl, whisk together the sour cream, garlic, mint, lemon juice, and salt. Set aside.

To make the fritters: In a large bowl, combine 1 tsp salt, the nigella seeds, flour, and baking powder and whisk together. Wrap the zucchini in a clean kitchen towel and wring out all the liquid over the sink. Transfer the zucchini to the bowl with the nigella seed mixture, add the egg, and stir until everything is well combined.

Line a plate with paper towels and set aside.

In a large heavy skillet, preferably old and well-seasoned cast-iron or heavy nonstick, set over medium-high heat, warm enough oil to completely cover the surface, but it shouldn't be more than ¼ in [6 mm]

deep. Once the oil is hot (a little bit of the fritter mixture will sizzle upon contact), drop tablespoonfuls of the batter into the skillet, without crowding them, and use the back of the spoon to press each mound into a flat pancake. Cook the fritters until the undersides are browned, about 3 minutes, then carefully turn them and cook until the second sides are nicely browned, about 2 minutes. A thin, flexible spatula, such as a fish spatula, or two forks are the best tools for this. Transfer the fritters to the prepared plate and fry the remaining batter in batches, adding more oil to the pan as necessary.

Sprinkle the warm fritters with a little salt. Serve immediately, with the sauce for dipping and the lemon wedges for squeezing over.

SPIN-OFFS

Substitute a peeled and coarsely grated SWEET POTATO for the zucchini (leave out the nigella seeds). Fry and top with applesauce!

Substitute 8 oz [230 g] JUMBO LUMP CRABMEAT AND A HANDFUL OF CORN KERNELS for the zucchini (leave out the nigella seeds). Serve topped with sour cream mixed with lime juice, hot sauce, and chopped cilantro.

Substitute 1 cup [150 g] FINELY CHOPPED CABBAGE KIMCHI AND FOUR THINLY SLICED SCALLIONS for the zucchini (leave out the nigella seeds). Serve with a dipping sauce made of equal parts soy sauce and rice wine vinegar with a little toasted sesame oil.