Cleo Coyle's
Queso Fundido
(Mexican Cheese Dip)

Photos and text © by Alice Alfonsi who writes The Coffeehouse Mysteries as Cleo Coyle in collaboration with her husband, Marc Cerasini.

In Spanish, fundido means molten; consequently, queso fundido means molten cheese, and if you've sampled it, you may agree that it's about the best cheese dip on the planet. Its culinary roots take it back to campfire eating, which is why queso fundido is presented while still bubbling hot. Some restaurants serve it flambé, adding a flammable alcohol and lighting it. My husband and I prefer the broiler method of finishing this dish, which is much easier—and you don't need to have a fire extinguisher on hand. As for the ingredients, some cooks splash in tequila, but our Hispanic neighbors in Queens (NYC) believe cerveza is the way to go, and we do, too. That's why we've gone with beer in our recipe. If you would like to add meat, chorizo, or your favorite sausage, see our note at the end to prevent the dip from becoming greasy. May you eat (and read) with joy!

~ Cleo Coyle, author of The Coffeehouse Mysteries

Ingredients

1 plum tomato, chopped
1 yellow onion, chopped
1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped *(For more options on peppers, see my note at the end of this recipe.)*
Splash of olive oil
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1/4 teaspoon sea salt
Dash of black pepper
1/2 cup Corona or another pale lager beer *(Never measure the foamy, white head when using beer in a recipe; allow the beer to settle first.)*
2 teaspoons cornstarch *(promotes better melting for your cheeses)*
6 ounces Monterey Jack, roughly chunked
6 ounces extra sharp cheddar cheese, roughly chunked
Tortilla chips
(optional topping) **chorizo or your favorite sausage**
(optional addition) **lime or lemon wedges** *(to prevent cheese from clumping)*

Variation: For white cheddar dip, replace the extra sharp cheddar with 6 ounces of Queso Blanco (or white cheddar)

Free Recipe Guide to Cleo's new culinary mystery ***No Roast for the Weary***: *click here*.

Directions:

Step 1 – Rough chop the cheeses: Break your block cheese into 1-inch pieces. Set the cheese aside.

Step 2 – Prep the veggies: Chop your tomato, onion, and jalapeno pepper. We recommend using only the green part of the jalapeno in this dip, discarding the seeds and the white membrane, which hold more heat than flavor. *(For advice on working with jalapenos and suggestions on other peppers you might prefer to use in this dish, depending on your taste, see our notes at the end of the recipe.)*

Step 3 – Cook the veggies: Toss the vegetables into a nonstick, oven-safe saucepan with a splash of olive oil. Or use a well-oiled, cast iron saucepan (use the oil to prevent sticking). Cook over medium heat. Sauté veggies until the onions are soft and translucent, about 6 minutes.

Step 4 – Simmer: When the veggies are soft, add the oregano, salt, and pepper to the saucepan. Then add the 1/2 cup of beer *(do not measure the white head, wait until the beer settles before measuring)* and heat the mixture to a simmer, stirring occasionally and scraping browned bits that may stick to the pan. Let simmer 3 to 5 minutes, until half the liquid evaporates.

Step 5 – Add the cornstarch and cheeses: Stir in the cornstarch until dissolved (this will help promote better melting of your cheeses). Do not add cheese all at once. Add your chunks, a handful at a time, while stirring gently. Allow each addition to melt and the mixture to become blended and smooth before adding more. When all the cheese is added, melted, and blended, you're ready for the next step.

If you'd like to add chorizo, sausage or bacon bits, now is the time. For directions on how to add it for best results, see my note on Page 3.

Step 6 - Finish under broiler: With the cheese melted and blended, you can now finish the dip. Broil the cheese dip until the top just begins to go golden brown—**about 2 to 5 minutes** *(see my final photos on page 3 for appearance)*—and serve immediately, bubbly and hot.

Final Tips:
Keep the cheese dip hot for best results. To prevent clumping on reheating, squeeze in a bit of fresh lime or lemon juice or even a splash of tequila. (Acidic liquid prevents melted cheese from clumping.)

Serving tips and chorizo note: Use tortilla chips for dipping. You may also garnish the finished fundido with cooked chorizo, sausage, or bacon bits. For the chorizo or sausage, slice open the casings, and cook the meat inside, mashing with a fork until it resembles ground meat. Drain the meat and sprinkle it over the queso fundido before it goes under the broiler. Adding it this way will prevent the meat from making your finished dip taste greasy.

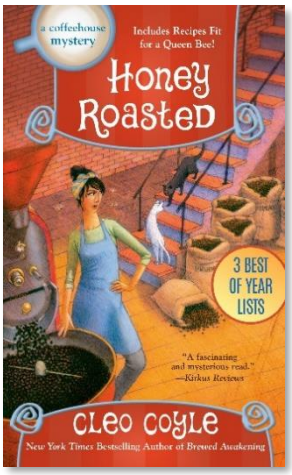
Pepper options: Jalapeno is our favorite pepper for this dip. If you'd like zero heat, go for a bell pepper. For milder heat than a jalapeno, use a banana, cherry, or poblano pepper. For more heat than a jalapeno, try a fresh Serrano, or sprinkle in some dried cayenne. *Suicidal heat?* Try a Thai chili, Scotch bonnet, or habanero. To see a visual guide to common chili peppers, click here, along with their heat rating on the Scoville scale.

Pepper safety: Take care when cutting jalapenos or any hot pepper. The capsaicin in the peppers can burn skin. If you have a tiny scratch or chapped skin, the burn can be painful. Should you absently touch your nose, lips, or your eyes while cutting hot peppers, you will surely regret it (ask me how I know). To protect chapped hands, use latex gloves; otherwise, work with care.

FYI: Reply to those who have asked about the cute baby cast iron pans in my photos.
They are Lodge brand (6-1/2 inch size). For more info or to purchase for yourself, click here.

Eat (and read) with joy! ~ Cleo

The Coffeehouse Mysteries are bestselling culinary mysteries, set in a landmark Greenwich Village coffeehouse. Each includes the added bonus of recipes.
To learn more and see more recipes, visit Cleo Coyle's online coffeehouse at www.CoffeehouseMystery.com
And her recipe blog at www.CleoCoyleRecipes.com



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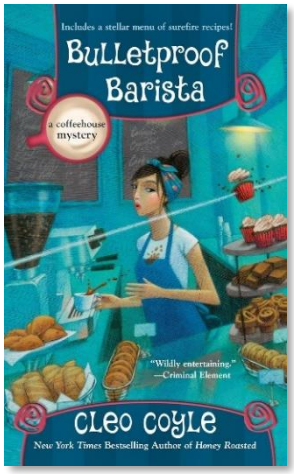

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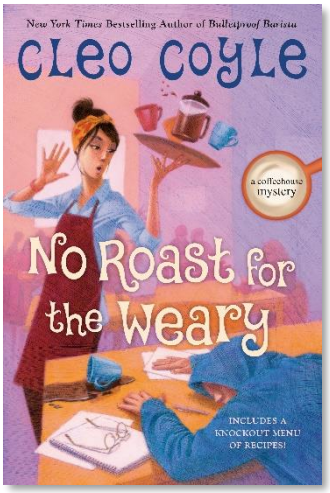

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