

# Matt Allegro's Italian Fried Shrimp with 2 Dipping Shots

Text and photos (c) by Alice Alfonsi who writes [The Coffeehouse Mysteries](#) as [Cleo Coyle](#) with her husband, Marc Cerasini.

For nearly two decades, Matteo (Matt) Allegro has been entertaining readers of our Coffeehouse Mystery series. A globetrotting coffee hunter and occasional playboy, Matt is a half-Italian espresso junkie who dearly loves his octogenarian mother—the woman who owns the century-old Greenwich Village coffeehouse where our series is set.

Our readers have been asking for this recipe ever since they saw Matt cook it up in [Holiday Grind](#). And here's why he does it: Frustrated with the diet-conscious fare at a New York cocktail party, Matt is famished. But he has a plan. Abandoning his plate of leek-wrapped water chestnuts, he ducks into the hotel's kitchen, pays off a line cook, and makes off with a bag of jumbo shrimp. He then heads home to fry up a batch of these babies for himself, his daughter, and his ex-wife, Clare Cosi. Though Clare is no longer Matt's partner in marriage, she has agreed to be his partner in the coffee business—and he occasionally partners up with her in solving perplexing New York crimes. As for the crime of ruining perfectly good shrimp, Matt's recipe gives you some clues to avoiding disaster. Follow his tips and you'll have the same beautiful results as Matt. And now...

*Here is our character Matteo Allegro to guide you through his very personal recipe (to see it as a blog post, click [here](#)).*

**Makes 12 large shrimp, which Matt says will feed...**

2 people with big appetites, or 3 people with average appetites, or 4 people for appetizers, or 24 underwear models (they'll each eat half a shrimp and order more martinis)

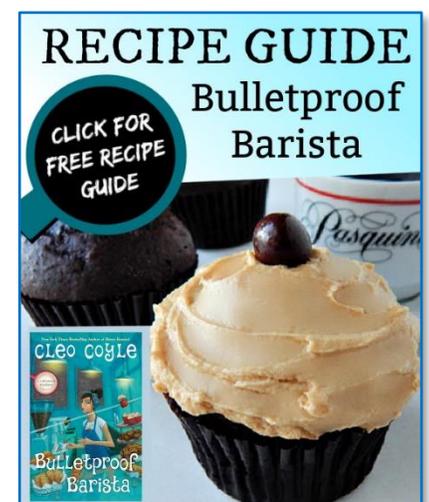
## Ingredients:

12 extra-large or jumbo shrimp  
1/2 cup all-purpose flour  
3/4 cup Italian seasoned bread crumbs  
1/4 cup grated Parmesan or Pecorino Romano cheese  
1 teaspoon dried oregano  
2 eggs, lightly beaten with fork  
Olive oil for frying (1/2 inch high in a large skillet)\*

*\*Note: Because of the expense of extra virgin olive oil, it's perfectly fine to use a regular olive oil or light olive oil for frying. You can also mix the olive oil with a regular vegetable oil to get the amount needed for this recipe.*



To meet Matt Allegro "Coffee Hunter" and more of Cleo's Coffeehouse Mystery characters, [click here](#).



Free Recipe Guide to Cleo's new culinary mystery **Bulletproof Barista**: [click here](#).

## Matt's Method:

**(1) Peel and devein** - Start with jumbo or extra-large shrimp. (I don't believe in anything puny.) If your shrimp is frozen, you need to thaw it. If your shrimp is not "deveined," you will need to remove the vein and take off the shell. I like to leave the shell on the tail, but that's your call.

Peeling and deveining shrimp are easy steps, and you should enjoy your first glass of wine as you do them. For a quick tutorial, watch this video from an old acquaintance of mine ([click here](#) to see). He's a pretty good chef, too...

Lightly rinse the shrimp and allow to drain on a paper towel. The shrimp should not be completely dry; a little dampness is good for step 3.



**(2) Now we butterfly** - This gives the shrimp the most surface area for the breading and frying, which brings the flavor. If you're a virgin at this technique, you've come to the right man. Be firm...but gentle. Take the shrimp in your hand as shown. You want the shrimp's groove (where the vein was) to be pointing up. Run a knife lightly along this crevice, splitting the two halves a bit more but without slicing all the way through the soft, delicate flesh. Use your fingers to gently pry open the eager shrimp (think butterfly with open wings). Press firmly on that special spot (see photo) to flatten.



**(3) Prep flour, eggs, and bread crumbs** – This trinity of breading is a no-brainer for longtime cooks, but (once again) if you're a virgin at this, I'm more than happy to be the man who shows you how it's done...

Place your flour in one bowl. Your eggs go in a second bowl; your bread crumbs in a third. Italians often add cheese and herbs to their breading and we Allegros are no exception. Mix the cheese and oregano into the pre-seasoned bread crumbs. (Yeah, I think that extra shot of oregano is superb with the seafood. You'll notice the bright, herbal aroma as you cook.)

BTW - If your bread crumbs are not seasoned, you will need to add more herbs and spices at this stage. Mix in oh, about 3 T. of your favorite Italian dried seasoning mix, which most spice merchants carry, including the ones who stock your grocery store's spice section.





**(4) Bread the shrimp** – Time to have another sip of wine, and one at a time...

- \* Dip a butterflyed beauty in the flour and shake off the excess.
- \* Next dip the flour-coated shrimp in the egg and allow excess egg to drain off.
- \* Finally drop the egg-covered shrimp in the bowl of bread crumbs. Coat well, turning the shrimp and using the fingers that God gave you to get those seasoned bread crumbs hugging as much of the shrimp surface as you can.



**(5) Perfect pan frying** – This is not deep frying. It's pan frying, so place only about **1/2 inch of your oil into a skillet or (ideally) a sauté pan.**

The key to great frying is the oil temperature. It must heat up first. If you start with oil that's too cold, your breaded shrimp will absorb too much grease and the breading may be soggy (and nobody likes soggy).

**Hot is good, but in this case, too hot is not...** If your oil is too hot, your breading will burn on the outside and your shrimp will be cold in the center—not a very romantic prospect. Watch the oil closely. As it begins to ripple, test it by

adding a few drops of water to the pan. If the water "dances" on the oil, it's ready. (And who doesn't love to dance? Ladies? Shall I put on the music?) If the oil smokes, however, you've blown it. It's far too hot and your shrimp will likely burn.

**No crowding, please. You want an intimate gathering...** The more shrimp you place in the pan, the more you are reducing the oil's temperature and risking a soggy end (we spoke about soggy, remember?). Once those breaded beauties hit the oil, you should see some hot tub action, yes, the **oil should bubble** like a glass of young Prosecco.

**Fry the shrimp quickly, about two to three minutes**, flipping them in the process so both sides cook evenly. When golden brown, remove from pan and drain on paper towels.

This is (admittedly) a tricky endeavor. You may need to decrease the heat a bit if your lovelies are cooking too quickly. Conversely, you may need to increase that heat if the temperature in your pan is dropping too fast. (There's a relationship lesson in here that transcends cooking, but that's another post.) If you are making more than one batch (for a larger gathering or those two-date evenings), hold finished shrimp in warm (200 degree F.) oven while you cook additional batches.

If you're cooking many batches, the oil should be replaced. When it becomes brown or full of crumbs, pour it out, wipe the pan, and start with new oil. (And, yes, I see a relationship lesson there, too.)



Serve hot (of course) with...  
 Matt's dipping shots (recipes below),  
 A little wine (fruity Chianti or bubbly Prosecco),  
 Some music (Matt's suggestions [here](#) and [here](#)),  
 Low lights, a fire in the hearth, and...

"We're ready for a perfect evening." –Matt Allegro



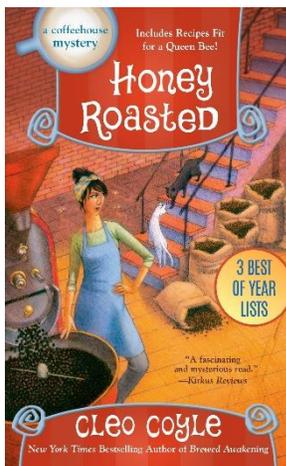
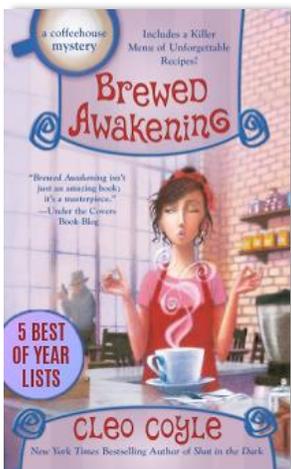
## Matt's Dipping Shots

### (1) Easy Mexican-Style Chipotle Dipping Sauce and Sandwich Spread:

Get the recipe by [clicking here](#) for the free PDF (pictured right). >>

### (2) Fast Garlic Mayo Dipping Sauce

Directions: Peel and gently smash **6 cloves of garlic**. Sprinkle the smashed garlic with sea salt. Place  $\frac{1}{4}$  **cup extra virgin olive oil** and the 6 cloves of garlic in a small pot and heat over LOW (3 to 5 minutes, do not boil). Cover with a tight-fitting lid and remove from heat. Let stand and steep for 30 minutes or until oil is cool. Remove (or strain) the smashed garlic and discard. Stir this garlic-infused oil into  $\frac{3}{4}$  **cup mayonnaise**. Add  $\frac{1}{8}$  **teaspoon cumin**. Blend until smooth, and...

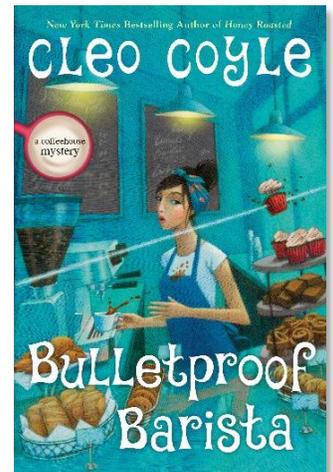


*Eat with joy! ~ Cleo*

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](http://www.CoffeehouseMystery.com)

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