Mini Soft Pretzel Bites with Cheese Sauce

Printer-Friendly Version

Ingredients:
For the dough:
1 ½ cups warm water
1 Tbsp. sugar
2 tsp. salt
2 ¼ tsp. instant yeast
about 4 ½ cups all purpose flour
4 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
Vegetable oil, for greasing the bowl

For Finishing:
Cooking spray
10 cups water
2/3 cup baking soda
1 egg yolk, beaten with 1 Tbsp. of water, or melted butter
Pretzel or kosher salt

Cheese Sauce:
2 Tbsp. butter
2 Tbsp. all purpose flour
1 cup milk
8 oz. extra sharp cheddar cheese, best if you shred your own
salt to taste

Directions:
In order to make the dough you will need to combine the water, sugar, salt and yeast in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Mix on low speed until the yeast is dissolved. Let sit for 1 minute. Now, gently pour in the flour and melted butter and mix just until the dough begins to come together. Switch from the paddle attachment to the dough hook and knead on medium speed until the dough is smooth and clears the sides of the bowl (this should take about 5 minutes). Transfer the dough to a bowl that has been lightly greased with vegetable oil, turning once to coat. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let rise in a warm place for about 1 hour, or until doubled in bulk.

To Bake:
Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. Prepare two baking sheets by lining them with parchment paper, spraying them with cooking spray and then placing aside for later use. Bring the water and baking soda to a boil in a large saucepan or stockpot. While you are waiting for the water to boil, divide the dough into 8 equal pieces. Working with one ball of dough at a time, roll it out into a 24-inch long rope. Slice each rope into 1 inch pieces. Repeat with the remaining pieces of dough. As you are working, make sure to cover the bites with a damp paper towel, so that the pieces don't dry out.

Gently set the pretzel bites into the boiling water, 10 or so at a time, for 30 seconds. Remove pretzel bites from the water with a slotted skimmer and place onto the prepared baking sheets. Once all the pretzel bites have been removed from the water, lightly brush the tops of them with the egg wash (or melted butter) and sprinkle with salt. Bake in preheated oven until they turn a nice golden brown. This should take about 10-12 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack for cooling.

While the pretzels are cooling it's time to make the cheese sauce!
For the Cheese Sauce:
Melt the butter in a small saucepan, over medium heat. Whisk in the flour and cook for about 30 seconds making sure to whisk constantly.

Slowly whisk in the milk until no more lumps of flour remain. Bring the milk to a simmer over medium-low heat until it begins to thicken. Make sure to stir constantly. This should take about 3-5 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the shredded cheese until melted. Add salt to taste. Serve warm. If the cheese begins to harden, place in the microwave for 30 second increments. You may store leftovers in an airtight container in the refrigerator.