

Pheasant Fingers with Sriracha Aioli Dip

By Jim Pashby | Preparation time: 15 minutes | Cooking time: 10 minutes | Serves 4-6



Now that the Longest Winter—or so it seemed to me—is over, people are emerging from their homes. We're all pale and dazed, glancing about to see if anyone else came out alive. Mostly they did, and what better way to celebrate our collective survival than with a backyard party.

There's an endless list of fancy, delicious main dish, appetizer, or dessert recipes online, but the most popular one I make is a plate of crispy brown breaded pheasant strips with sriracha aioli dip.

I use pheasant or blue grouse “tenders,” though regular breast meat cut into strips works fine. The tender, or tenderloin, is an independent secondary muscle that lies directly under the breast. Running down the center of the tender is a long, pale, narrow tendon that looks like a flat egg noodle. Though the tendon is edible, it gets a bit rubbery when cooked. I remove mine by grabbing the end with a paper towel and pulling it through the tines of a fork that holds the tender stationary.

Aioli (*ae-OH-lee*) is mayonnaise seasoned with crushed garlic. I add a little sriracha sauce (found in the Asian food aisle) and lime juice to jazz it up.

This simple appetizer also works with thin strips of venison loin or chicken (de-tendon the tenders the same way as described above). ■

—Jim Pashby is a writer in Helena.



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INGREDIENTS

2 lbs. pheasant tenders or breast meat cut into 1-inch-wide strips. Or substitute venison loin or chicken.
2 c. vegetable or canola oil
2 eggs, beaten lightly
1 t. water
½ c. flour, seasoned with salt and pepper
1 c. panko bread crumbs
1 c. mayonnaise
1-2 T. sriracha sauce
1 T. fresh lime juice
1 large garlic clove, crushed or finely grated
Pinch kosher salt

DIRECTIONS

In a deep cast-iron skillet or Dutch oven, heat oil over medium heat to 350 degrees F.

Meanwhile, de-tendon the tenders (see instructions at left). Pat dry.

Put flour in a shallow plate. Beat water and egg with a fork in another shallow plate. Put panko in a third plate.

When the oil reaches temperature, dip tenders in flour, then egg-water mixture, then panko, pressing the bread crumbs firmly with your fingers.

Place in the hot oil, being careful not to splash. Turn up the heat slightly, as the oil will cool with the addition of the tenders. Cook 4-6 minutes, until underside is light brown. Flip with a fork and continue cooking until browned on both sides.

Remove with slotted spoon or spatula and set on wire racks over paper towels. Salt liberally. Best served when hot or warm.

SAUCE

Add mayo, 1 T. sriracha, lime juice, and garlic to a medium bowl, whisking to combine. Season to taste with kosher salt. If it's not spicy enough, whisk in the second tablespoon of sriracha. Refrigerate up to two weeks. Serve at room temperature.

SERVE

If you have to transport or delay serving, re-heat the fingers in a toaster oven at 350 degrees F. for five minutes. You can heat them in a microwave on high for 30 seconds, but any longer and the breading turns soggy. ■