



WINE COUNTRY COCKTAIL PARTY

Bite-Size Dungeness Crab Cakes

Here in Northern California, we eagerly await Dungeness crab season in late fall, when the local catch becomes available in markets. These bite-size crab cakes showcase the buttery, sweet, delicate flavor of this prized crustacean. We like to serve them with lemon aioli, but our chile aioli (page 211) or another of our flavored mayonnaises would also work well. If you prefer larger cakes, use a 2-tablespoon scoop to shape them.

MAKES ABOUT 24 SMALL CRAB CAKES

1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 shallot, minced
½ red bell pepper, seeded and diced
1 Fresno chile, seeded and minced
1 small clove garlic, minced
1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh thyme leaves
¼ teaspoon ground mustard
⅛ teaspoon smoked paprika
⅛ teaspoon Old Bay Seasoning
Finely grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
½ cup heavy cream
1 lb fresh-cooked lump crabmeat
1 large egg, lightly beaten
2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh chives
1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves
1½ cups panko or fine dried bread crumbs
Canola oil, for frying
Lemon wedges, for serving
Lemon Aioli (page 212), for serving

Line a sheet pan with parchment paper.

In a large frying pan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the shallot, bell pepper, and chile and cook, stirring, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic, thyme, mustard, paprika, Old Bay, and lemon juice and cook gently, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the flour and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes. Add the cream and simmer, stirring, for 2 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl and let cool completely. Wipe out the pan.

Pick over the crabmeat for shell shards and cartilage. Add the crabmeat, egg, lemon zest, chives, and parsley to the cooled cream mixture and stir gently to mix. Add ½ cup of the panko and stir gently just until evenly blended; do not overmix.

Scoop up a large tablespoonful of the crab mixture for each cake (a 1-tablespoon scoop works well for this) and press gently into a ball. Transfer to the prepared sheet pan. You should have about 24 cakes total.

Pour the remaining 1 cup panko into a shallow bowl. One at a time, press the cakes into the panko, coating the entire surface lightly, and flattening them slightly. Return to the sheet pan.

Return the frying pan to the stove top and pour in oil to a depth of ½ inch. Warm over medium-high heat to 350°F on a deep-frying thermometer. Line a large sheet pan with paper towels.

Working in batches to avoid overcrowding, fry the crab cakes, turning once, until golden brown, about 4 minutes total. Using a slotted spatula, transfer the cakes to the paper towel lined sheet pan to drain.

Serve the crab cakes hot with the lemon wedges and aioli on the side.

