



Use bolder beers, such as Bass or Samuel Adams, to give the coating toasty, malty flavors.

ON A RECENT NIGHT out with friends, I ordered beer-battered onion rings and hoped that for once I'd avoid disappointment. (In my experience, good onion rings are rare.) Several minutes later, eight fat, golden onion rings arrived at the table to "oohs" and "ahhs." To my surprise, these tasted as good as they looked. The coating had maximum crunch with the barest trace of bitterness; the onions were tender and sweet. I was inspired to head into the test kitchen to make some myself.

What a disaster! Not a single recipe produced rings nearly as good as those I'd eaten with my friends, despite the (beer) battering the kitchen took. They offered up a litany of frying flaws: soggy, doughy, heavy, raw—and where had that distinctively yeasty, malty undertone gone?

I started by stirring together a basic batter of flour, beer, and salt. I'd finesse it later; first I wanted to figure out which onion to use. I coated the onions in batter and fried them in 350-degree peanut oil. Sweet onions creamed the competition; tasters preferred their gentle flavor. I turned my attention back to the batter.

Beer gives the coating flavor. Also, the carbonation in beer provides lift to the batter. But with just beer, my rings were doughy. Clearly, I'd need a second leavener. Recipes are split on whether to

use eggs or baking powder. Eggs (either whole or separated) did little, but baking powder yielded a coating that was thick and substantial, yet light. To add crunch to the coating, I used cornstarch, a technique I knew worked from test kitchen experience. I gradually substituted cornstarch for flour until I had a 1:1 ratio. Now my rings shattered when I bit into them.

Unfortunately, part of that crunch came from the onions, and while a crunchy coating appealed, crunchy onions definitely did not. Some recipes call for soaking the onions in water, milk, or buttermilk to soften them. They all worked, but I wondered if I could use the soak to build flavor, too. Since these were beer-battered onion rings, I soaked them in beer for an hour before proceeding with my recipe. At last, I had nicely flavored rings with crisp coating encasing tender slices of onion.

But did I really have to wait an hour?

To shorten the soaking time, a colleague suggested adding salt, which works by breaking down, thus softening, the exterior cell walls of the onion. To build flavor, I added 2 teaspoons of white vinegar to the soak. In one final test, I tried malt vinegar, which subtly echoed the caramel beer notes of the batter. These rings ran circles around the competition.

Beer-Battered Onion Rings

The soggy, doughy reality is that onion rings fried in beer batter are rarely good. We hoped to improve the odds. BY LYNN CLARK

BEER-BATTERED ONION RINGS

Serves 4 to 6

In step 1, do not soak the onion rounds longer than 2 hours or they will turn soft and become too saturated to crisp properly. Cider vinegar can be used in place of malt vinegar. Use a candy thermometer to make sure the oil gets to 350 degrees. Ordinary yellow onions will produce acceptable rings here.

- 2 sweet onions, peeled and sliced into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick rounds
- 3 cups beer
- 2 teaspoons malt vinegar (see note)
Salt and pepper
- 2 quarts peanut or vegetable oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon baking powder

1. SOAK ONIONS Place onion rounds, 2 cups beer, vinegar, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper in zipper-lock bag; refrigerate 30 minutes or up to 2 hours.

2. MAKE BATTER Heat oil in large Dutch oven over medium-high heat to 350 degrees. While oil is heating, combine flour, cornstarch, baking powder, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper in large bowl. Slowly whisk in $\frac{3}{4}$ cup beer until just combined (some lumps will remain). Whisk in remaining beer as needed, 1 tablespoon at a time, until batter falls from whisk in steady stream and leaves faint trail across surface of batter.

3. FRY RINGS Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 200 degrees. Remove onions from refrigerator and pour off liquid. Pat onion rounds dry with paper towels and separate into rings. Transfer one-third portion of rings to batter. One at a time, carefully transfer battered rings to oil. Fry until rings are golden brown and crisp, about 5 minutes, flipping halfway through frying. Drain rings on paper towel-lined baking sheet, season with salt and pepper, and transfer to oven. Return oil to 350 degrees and repeat with remaining onion rings and batter. Serve.

Troubleshooting Beer-Battered Onion Rings



PROBLEM: Crunchy Onions

SOLUTION: Soak in Beer

Soaking the rings in a combination of beer, vinegar, and salt softens and flavors the raw onion.



PROBLEM: Bad Battering

SOLUTION: Add Beer Gradually

If the batter is too thick, the rings will be doughy; too thin and it will run off. Add the beer gradually until the batter falls from a whisk to form a ribbon trail.



PROBLEM: Fused Onion Rings

SOLUTION: Don't Crowd the Pot

Fry the battered onion rings in small batches and transfer them one at a time to the hot oil so they don't stick together.