Main dishes / Italy

Calamari Fritti

Crisp, airy fried squid rings and tentacles dusted in seasoned semolina and dropped in hot oil until shattering gold — served immediately with lemon wedges, because the thirty-second window between perfect and limp is real and unforgiving.

Time 30 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 500 g Fresh squid, cleaned (tubes + tentacles)
- ☐ 120 g Fine semolina (or half 00 flour, half semolina)
- ☐ 30 g Cornstarch
- ☐ 6 g Fine sea salt
- ☐ 2 g Black pepper, freshly cracked
- ☐ 1 g Cayenne pepper
- ☐ 1000 ml Vegetable oil, for deep frying (sunflower or peanut)
- ☐ 2 ea Lemon wedges, for serving

Let's make it.

01 Pull the tentacles from the tubes and discard the quill (the clear plastic-like spine inside the tube). Pull away the purple-grey skin from the tubes if it has not already been removed by the fishmonger. Cut each tube into rings about 1cm wide. Keep the tentacles whole if small, or cut the crown in half if large. Now — this is the most important step — pat everything bone-dry in multiple changes of paper towels and leave spread on a rack for 10 minutes. Wet squid = steamed, rubbery calamari. Dry squid = crisp, tender calamari.

02 Whisk together the semolina, cornstarch, salt, black pepper, and cayenne in a wide, shallow bowl or a paper bag. Working in two batches, add the squid and toss to coat thoroughly, then lift each piece and shake off every excess grain of coating — only a thin, even film should remain. Excess coating falls off in the oil, burns, and pollutes the oil while making the calamari heavy and doughy. Lay the coated pieces in a single layer on a plate until ready to fry.

03 Heat the oil in a wide, deep, heavy pot to 180–185°C (a pinch of coating dropped in should sizzle immediately and rise to the surface). Fry the squid in small batches — no more than a handful at a time — for exactly 60 to 90 seconds. Do not walk away. The rings cook very fast and overcooking by even 30 seconds makes them rubbery. They are done when golden-amber all over and floating freely in the oil. Remove with a spider strainer and place on a wire rack immediately — never paper towels on the bottom, which trap steam.

04 The instant the calamari comes off the rack — within 10 seconds — season generously with fine salt while the oil on the surface is still hot and the salt will adhere. Arrange on a warm plate lined with a paper napkin (paper underneath is fine at this stage since the calamari is already on a wire rack; the napkin is for tableside aesthetics, not to re-steam them). Serve immediately with lemon wedges alongside. Calamari fritti waits for no one — it has a window of perfection measured in minutes.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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