

THE PIMENTO CHEESE CAKE



SAVORY SPICE SHOP

Most new customers who walk into Savory Spice Shop in Raleigh ask owners Bob and Cindy Jones the same question. "Does your house smell like this?" "No," Cindy says. "But our pantry does."

For any recipe, they have a spice, and for every spice, there is a scent. Savory Spice Shop has 400 spices and herbs on the shelves, and 140 of them are proprietary blends. The Joneses take customers' recipes and measure out specific amounts. Or, they just let customers sample.

Home cooks these days want to know where their meat and vegetables come from, and now, they can even know where their spices come from.

They're fresh, gluten-free, and ground weekly.

Savory Spice Shop started as one store in Denver, Colorado, in 2004. The owners decided to expand in October 2010, and when they looked to open their first shop on the East Coast, they chose Raleigh. The Joneses applied, and they were awarded the Raleigh market. They're already looking to expand, and other Savory Spice Shops have opened in Greensboro and Charlotte.

And if customers want that sample, great. But if they pour too much into their hands, the Joneses ask that they just drop it on the floor. It adds to that smell.

Savory Spice Shop

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PIMENTO CHEESE & CORNBREAD CAKE

CAKE LAYERS

- ¾ cup House-Autry yellow, self-rising cornmeal
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup melted butter
- 2 tablespoons Cloister honey
- 4 eggs, slightly beaten
- 1 cup milk
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 2 cups grated Colby-Jack blend
- 1 jalapeño, finely diced
- 1 tablespoon Savory Spice Shop cheddar cheese powder

FROSTING

- 2 (8-ounce) blocks cream cheese
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons Savory Spice Shop dill dip mix
- 1 tablespoon Savory Spice Shop dried green onion flakes
- 1 tablespoon Savory Spice Shop chopped garlic flakes
- 1 pinch salt

FILLING AND GARNISH

- ¼ cup Cloister Arbol Chili Pepper Infused Honey
- 2 (10-ounce) packs MyThreeSons Pimento Cheese, divided

Preheat oven to 350°. Spray a 12-inch x 9-inch pan with nonstick baking spray.

CAKE

1. Sift together cornmeal, flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a mixing bowl. Add oil, butter, honey, eggs, milks, cheese, jalapeño, and cheese powder; stir to combine. **2.** Pour batter into prepared pan, and bake in preheated oven for 30-40 minutes, or until lightly browned. Remove from oven, and let cool for 10 minutes in baking pan. **3.** Turn out on wire rack, and cool completely.

FROSTING

Combine all ingredients in medium bowl, and mix well.

TO ASSEMBLE CAKE

1. Cut cake crosswise into 3 equal pieces. Place first layer onto plate. **2.** Warm pepper-infused honey, and brush onto first layer. **3.** Frost layer with cream cheese mixture; spread layer of pimento cheese over frosting. Repeat honey, frosting, and pimento cheese on second layer. **4.** Place third layer on top, and brush with honey. **5.** Cover top and sides of cake with remaining cream cheese frosting. **6.** Garnish with piped pimento cheese.

It seems like it should be a fundamental quality of anything with cheese in its name: If you make something called cheese and sell it as a cheese product with cheese on the label, then, without question, the most prominent ingredient in your cheese, the thing that gives it its name — cheese — should not be mayonnaise.

Where did we go wrong with pimento cheese? It's one of our foods, Southern and social, but the varieties in the grocery store are more business-driven than homespun, and business minds know one thing: Mayonnaise is cheaper than cheese. So companies thin the product, mayonnaise becomes the top ingredient, and pimento cheese loses its identity as, well, cheese.

Cheryl Barnett had a best friend when she was growing up in Alabama, and that best friend had a mom named Emmy who made the best homemade pimento cheese. Emmy kept a tub of the cheese in the fridge at all times.

After high school and college, Barnett came to North Carolina in 1988 and went to dental school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to become an orthodontist. Her grandfather was a dentist, and she had the same perfectionist

OTHER NORTH CAROLINA PRODUCTS USED



House-Autry Mills Cornmeal
house-autry.com



Reliable Cheese Company
reliablecheese.com



Cloister Honey
cloisterhoney.com

personality. “We like straight teeth and everything lined up in a row,” Barnett says.

She launched a career in Greensboro and started a family with three sons — Michael, John, and William.

Barnett tried to eat store-bought pimento cheese when she moved here, so far away from Emmy’s fridge. But she couldn’t stand it. So she called and asked Emmy for her recipe, the one she grew up on. Barnett began making it in her home, at night, after fixing people’s teeth.

Barnett worked for 14 years as an orthodontist before back pain forced her into early retirement. It broke her heart to quit her career. She made pimento cheese to cope.

This pimento cheese is real, packed with extra-sharp

Vermont cheddar, aged nine months, and all-natural mayonnaise. This cheese melts.

She gained state permits to sell her pimento cheese and had her kitchen inspected. She called both farmers markets in Greensboro, but neither one had a space for her. Then she gave a taste to executives at The Fresh Market. They loved it. They began stocking their shelves with it in October 2010.

Within a year, MyThreeSons pimento cheese was on sale at several Lowe’s Foods and Whole Foods in the Triad and Triangle. Most recently, Harris Teeter added Barnett’s pimento cheese to all 207 stores in eight states. In 14 months, Barnett’s cheese has spread across the South. Real sells.

Here’s one more thing about Barnett: When she was in dental school in 1989, she became the mascot for the UNC basketball team. So the savior of our Southern cheese is a woman from Alabama who became a Tar Heel, a retired orthodontist who became a mother of three, and a start-up cook who became a businesswoman by making pimento cheese, real pimento cheese — the cheese that reminds her of who she’s always been. ■



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