

Courgette anarchy | John Gardner

There are three main influences on this recipe. First, as I write this in August, courgettes are almost too plentiful on our family allotment here in Oxford. We have to find endless ways to use them up! Second, my brother David is a restaurateur and hotelier in Italy, and some of my interest in cooking comes from that source. The simple flour-and-water batter here has Italian origins. But the general thesis that all food can be (and should be!) fried in batter comes from my home town of Glasgow. That is the third influence. Batter-fried sausages, batter-fried haggis, even batter-fried Mars Bars. Why not batter-fried courgettes?

(Interestingly, the frying shops of Glasgow were, for most of my childhood, run by Italians, who found their way to the Clyde in large numbers during the great migrations (1890-1920, 1945-1970). So can we blame the Italians themselves for the barbarian practice of deep-frying entire pizzas in batter?)

My daughter Audra (8) conceived and made the sauce for this version. She also typed the recipe!



Note: Courgette flowers can also be stuffed with ricotta or feta and coated in the same batter for frying. But that is best attempted as a separate operation.

Serves 4 as a starter or light meal

Ingredients:

For the sauce:

2 red bell peppers
1 shallot ('banana shallot')
1 clove garlic
1 tbsp white wine vinegar
2 tbsp olive oil
3 sprigs thyme
150ml soured cream
Salt and pepper to season

For the courgette fries:

3 medium courgettes
150g plain flour
250ml water
1 tsp paprika
Salt and pepper to season
Vegetable oil for frying

Courgette flowers to garnish

1. First make the sauce, which can be prepared in advance. Chop the shallot, garlic and peppers. Gently sauté in 1 tbsp of the olive oil until soft. Using a blender, combine with the thyme, vinegar and the rest of the olive oil. Season to taste and leave to cool. Once cool, stir in the sour cream, and divide into individual ramekins for service.

2. While the sauce cools, slice the courgettes into rounds 5mm thick and toss in 50g of the flour. This helps the batter to adhere to the courgette.

3. In a dish with a flat base (a lasagne dish is ideal) prepare the batter: mix 100 g of flour with some of the water, stirring as you go. Keep adding water (you can also use beer!) and stirring until you have a smooth paste that can coat the back of a spoon. Stir in the paprika and season.

4. Heat the vegetable oil, about 2mm deep, in a wide frying pan over a medium flame. (Ideally the courgettes would be deep fried but shallow frying also works and is healthier and less wasteful.)

5. While the oil heats, coat individual rounds of courgette in batter by laying flat in the dish. Using tongs, add coated rounds to the hot frying pan in a single layer, flipping each piece when the underside is crispy.

6. While each batch is frying, you can be coating the next batch in batter to repeat the process until all the rounds are crispy and golden. Add extra oil to the pan as necessary.

7. It is important to serve the courgettes as soon as possible after frying. They do not keep their crispiness for long. If you have several batches, try keeping the early batches in a hot oven (150°C), spread out evenly on flat baking sheets. But better still is to be quick!

8. Serve the courgettes alongside the ramekins of sauce, garnishing with a courgette flower (which is edible) if available.



Junk food, junk law | John Gardner

'That isn't food, that's junk,' parents sometimes say. Should we take them literally? Can't there be junk food? Yes, of course there can. 'Junk food' is food that scores very low in respect of all food values. When we hear of 'food values' nowadays, we often think first of nutritional scores. But that is a pity. For with food there are also questions of gustatory and culinary quality. Some great food is bad for you. It excels in taste and foodcraft without excelling, or even passing muster, in nutritional benefit. Junk food is more depressing. It passes muster in none of these dimensions. Quite apart from providing poor nutrition, it is culinarily and gastronomically pathetic. It is, we might say, food that fails all the foodiness tests.

What makes it food if it fails all the foodiness tests? The answer is that it has other properties (for example: it can be ingested and digested and it can mitigate hunger) that make it *subject* to the foodiness tests. To understand what food is, it is not enough to grasp these other properties. To understand what food is, one also needs to understand the foodiness tests. One needs to understand what food ought to be, or in other words the distinctive ideals of food. It does not follow that all food is what food ought to be. How could that follow? It makes no sense. If there are any standards for judging food, it must be the case that food can in principle fail to live up to them. Otherwise they are not standards for judging food.

Similar points apply to understanding what law is. To understand what law is, one needs to understand what, *qua* law, it ought to be. One needs to hold it subject to the ideal of legality ('the rule of law'), and more generally to the applicable standards of legitimacy, of which legality is only a small part. Philosophy of law cannot be separated from political philosophy any more than philosophy of food can be separated from philosophical aesthetics. Someone with no value-sensitivity would not make a very good philosopher of law. For standards of legal excellence are implicated in the subject at every turn. The mistake is to think that something is only law if it actually lives up to these standards. No, there can be junk law as well as junk food.

A common allegation against those who work in my tradition of philosophy of law (known as 'legal positivism') is that we deny legal philosophy its proper place inside political philosophy. We try to hive it off to some autonomous space where political questions, moral questions, perhaps all questions of value can be disregarded. I like to think that my work lends the lie to this charge. For my work, including my work on the nature of law, is rife with political, and more generally evaluative, questions. The charge is anyway stupendously misguided. Consider an analogous debate about democracy. Some people say that democracy, like justice, is analytically good. Others say that, while the word 'democracy' is often used approvingly, both entirely laudatory and entirely condemnatory views of democracy are intelligible, as well as all options in between. Democracy-haters may be morally misguided, then, but they are not conceptually confused. Is this a debate within political philosophy? Surely it is. By the same token, the debate about whether law is analytically good is a debate within political philosophy. Dworkin said that legal positivists make 'little attempt to connect their philosophy of law ... to political philosophy generally.' Would he have said that about someone who denies that democracy is analytically valuable? And would he have said, about someone who denies that all food is good food, that they fail to locate food theory inside value theory?