

Smoky Chile con Queso

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Servings: 8

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 3 minutes

TWO-ZONE FIRE.

FOR CHARCOAL:: Arrange the coals on one side of the charcoal grate and leave the other side empty to create two heat zones. The empty side is for cooking foods that require indirect heat; you can also move food there when you get flare-ups. To smoke, once the coals are lit, scatter soaked and well-drained wood chips evenly over the charcoal. Wait for smoke to appear before you begin cooking.

FOR GAS: Gas grills are a little different because they require preheating to generate smoke, and wood chips need to be contained. You can either purchase a metal smoker box or make your own by placing wood chips in a small foil pan. Cover the top with aluminum foil, then poke holes in the foil to let the smoke out. Before you light the grill, remove the cooking grates and place the aluminum pan directly on the bars, preferably in a back corner. Replace the cooking grates, light the grill with all the burners on high, and close the lid. If you are using a box, place it on top of the grate directly over a lit burner. When smoke appears, turn one burner completely off, adjust the remainder as directed in the recipe and begin cooking.

THE KEY TO SMOKING CHEESE: is getting the smoke on right at the start. Wait to add your food until the smoke is pouring out of the grill.

12 ounces Monterey Jack cheese

12 ounces mild Cheddar cheese (do not use sharp)

4 cups mesquite wood chips, soaked in water for at least 30 minutes

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium yellow onion, chopped

1 medium jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely chopped

1 large clove garlic, finely chopped

3 plum tomatoes, seeded and diced

2 tablespoons dried Mexican oregano or regular oregano

1 tablespoon fresh cilantro leaves, finely chopped

1 bag (12 oz) tortilla chips

Prepare a gas or charcoal grill for a two-zone fire over low heat (175 degrees) For the charcoal, use fifteen briquettes, adding more briquettes if the temperature falls below 175 degrees.

In a 10- to 12-inch cast-iron skillet, place the blocks of cheese about two inches apart.

Drain the wood chunks and add to the grill. When smoke appears, place the skillet on the grill away from the coals or over an unlit burner. Cover and cook just until the cheeses melt and run together, 30 to 60 minutes. Check occasionally and rotate the pan as needed to melt both sides evenly. Do not overcook or the cheese will separate.

Meanwhile, for the salsa, in a medium skillet over medium heat, cook the onion, jalapeno and garlic in hot oil until the onion softens, 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the tomatoes and oregano. Cook until the tomatoes give off juices, about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season with Kosher salt.

Spoon the salsa over the melted cheese in the skillet and sprinkle with the cilantro. Serve warm with the tortilla chips.

Per Serving (excluding unknown items): 203 Calories; 16g Fat (68.6% calories from fat); 11g Protein; 5g Carbohydrate; 1g Dietary Fiber; 38mg Cholesterol; 249mg Sodium. Exchanges: 0 Grain(Starch); 1 1/2 Lean Meat; 1/2 Vegetable; 2 Fat.