

Cheddar Apple Crisp, for Elisa

The key here is the cheddar: I made this twice, once with a standard medium cheddar and one with a higher quality "extra, extra sharp New York cheddar." The sharpness made a huge difference to the final flavor. Also, if you've never had an apple dessert with cheese, don't be afraid. Anyone who's ever dunked a granny smith in a pot of cheese fondue knows these flavors are 100% symbiotic.

2 pounds apples, mixed varieties (I used granny smiths, golden delicious, and pink ladies with great success), peeled, cored, and cut in small (but not tiny) pieces
2 tablespoons apple cider
3 tablespoons + 1/4 cup dark brown sugar, divided
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1/4 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup oats
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
1 stick (4 ounces) cold unsalted butter, diced
4 ounces extra sharp New York cheddar cheese, diced, divided, plus additional to be grated on top

Place the diced apples in a large bowl with the cider, 3 tablespoons of the brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and 3 ounces of the cheddar cheese. Stir to combine.

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the flour, the remaining 1/4 cup brown sugar, the granulated sugar, oats, and salt. Mix on low speed just to combine. Scoop in the diced butter and only one ounce of the diced cheddar cheese. Place the mixer on medium-low (I used speed 3 on my KitchenAid) and allow the mixture to slowly combine for about 90 seconds. You want the butter and cheese to reduce to pea-size and to absorb the other ingredients, forming moist clumps.

Coat a 9-1/2" x 1-3/4" (or comparable, 7-cup capacity) round baking dish with nonstick spray and place on a rimmed cookie sheet. Scrape in the apple mixture. Nestle the remaining 3 ounces of diced cheddar in with the apples, tucking them in and distributing them with your fingertips. Sprinkle with the crumble topping.

Bake in the center of the oven for 50 to 60 minutes, or until juices bubble enthusiastically and the top is nicely browned. Remove from the oven, grate some additional cheese on top (how much is up to you) and slip under the broiler for 30 seconds, NO MORE! After all your hard work the last thing you want to do is scorch the top.