



Shirred Eggs with Spinach and Crisp Bread Crumbs

For the crisp bread crumbs:

2 tsp. unsalted butter

3/4 cup (1 1/2 oz./45 g) fresh sourdough bread crumbs

1 large garlic clove, minced (optional)

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

1 1/2 lb. (750 g) spinach, well rinsed and stemmed

1 Tbs. unsalted butter

1/2 cup (4 fl. oz./125 ml) heavy cream

1/2 tsp. fine sea salt

Freshly ground pepper, to taste

4 extra-large or jumbo eggs

To make the crisp bread crumbs, in a small fry pan over medium-low heat, melt the butter. Add the bread crumbs and garlic, and season generously with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring constantly, until crisp and golden brown, 7 to 8 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool. The bread crumbs may be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 24 hours before using.

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Bring a large saucepan three-fourths full of lightly salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the spinach, submerging it completely, and cook until wilted, about 2 minutes. Immediately drain in a colander and rinse under cold running water until the spinach is no longer warm. Gather into balls and squeeze very firmly to extract as much water as possible. Chop coarsely.

Preheat an oven to 350°F (180°C). Generously butter an 8 1/2-inch (21.5-cm) round gratin or similar-size shallow baking dish.

In a large fry pan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the spinach and cook, stirring frequently, until any excess moisture has evaporated, about 4 minutes. Stir in the cream, the salt, a generous amount of pepper and the nutmeg. Cook until thick and dry, about 2 minutes more. Remove from the heat.

Transfer the spinach to the prepared dish and smooth the top into a perfectly even surface. Using the back of a large tablespoon, form 4 evenly spaced, egg-shaped pockets, each 1 inch (2.5 cm) deep, in the top of the spinach. Break an egg into each depression.

Carefully transfer the dish to the oven and bake until the whites of the eggs are set and the yolks are still distinctly runny, 18 to 20 minutes. Scatter a few tablespoons of the bread crumbs over the top of the dish and serve directly onto individual plates, scooping up the base of spinach underneath each egg. Serves 4.

Note: This dish contains eggs that may be only partially cooked. They run a risk of being infected with salmonella or other bacteria, which can lead to food poisoning. This risk is of most concern to small children, older people, pregnant women and anyone with a compromised immune system. If you have health and safety concerns, do not consume raw eggs.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Collection Series, Breakfast, by Brigit L. Binns

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