

Kentucky Hot Brown Swirls – Comfort du Jour

If you're entertaining friends for the afternoon leading up to the "most exciting two minutes in sports," may I suggest these adorable little puff pastry swirls? They have all the flavors of the beloved Kentucky Hot Brown, including roast turkey, bacon, tomatoes and Mornay, plus a touch of sauteed shallot and (in a nod to the catering kitchen where I worked so long ago) a "pinch of thyme."

You can put these together in the morning or afternoon, even the night before, all the way up to slicing them into swirls, and then refrigerate them until about a half hour before your guests arrive. A quick egg wash and some extra sprinkles of gruyere just before they hit the oven, and, well—riders up!

INGREDIENTS

3 slices smoked bacon, cut into pieces and cooked until crispy
1 smallish shallot, peeled, halved and cut into half-moons
1 cup chopped, cooked leftover roast turkey breast
3 Tbsp. tomato jam (store-bought or homemade, if you have it!)
1 heaping cup shredded gruyere cheese (or Swiss), divided
A few sprigs fresh thyme, leaves stripped
1 sheet store-bought puff pastry, thawed according to package instructions
1 egg, whisked with a teaspoon of water, for egg wash just before baking

RECIPE NOTES

Whether you plan to bake these right away or prep ahead, you'll have best results working with cold ingredients. Give the cooked components of this recipe, including bacon and sauteed shallots, some time to chill down in the fridge before assembling.

INSTRUCTIONS

Cook bacon pieces in a cast-iron skillet until most of the fat has rendered and bacon pieces are crispy all over. Transfer bits to a paper towel-lined plate. Pour off all the excess grease, keeping only what sticks to the skillet. Add the shallots to the skillet and sauté over medium heat until softened and slightly caramelized.

Cut up the roast turkey into pieces no larger than sugar cubes. In a small bowl, add tomato jam to the turkey pieces and stir to coat them. If you have a sweet tooth, consider adding an extra tablespoon of tomato jam.

Roll out the puff pastry sheet onto a flour-dusted piece of parchment paper that is large enough to line a full cookie sheet. Keep it as close to rectangle shape as possible, about 12-by-15.

Layer the filling ingredients, beginning with 3/4 of the shredded gruyere, then tomato jam-coated turkey bits, bacon, shallots and thyme leaves. Keep about 1 1/2" of a far, long end of pastry open, with no fillings. This will be the edge that will be the seam to hold your pastry roll closed.

Roll up the puff pastry, beginning with the near, long edge. Keep it as tight as possible but take care not to stretch or tear the pastry while you roll. When you get to the clean, open edge, lightly brush that edge with a slightly wet pastry brush. Fold it up onto the pastry roll and press firmly to seal it.

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If you're planning to bake right away, preheat the oven to 375° F. Slide the pan into the freezer for 15 minutes while the oven preheats. If you plan to bake later in the day, cover loosely with plastic wrap and keep it in the fridge until the oven is preheated at baking time.

Use a sharp knife to cut off the excess ends of the pastry roll—they won't have much filling in them, so it's good to clean it up before slicing into pinwheels. Slice the trimmed pastry roll into rounds about one-inch thick, give or take, depending on the overall length of your pastry roll. Arrange the rounds, cut sides up, on the baking sheet. Keep a couple of inches between the slices. My recipe yielded 12 swirls.

Brush the rounds with egg wash, being sure to brush up the sides of exposed puff pastry, and across the top, so that every edge of pastry will take on a warm, golden color. Sprinkle the remaining shreds of gruyere over the top of the rounds. It's good to have the shreds hanging off the sides a bit, so they will melt down onto the pastry in the oven. Mmm, I love pretty food!

Bake on center rack at 375° F for about 25 minutes. If your oven runs hot, check at 20 minutes. Watch for the rounds to be golden brown on the sides, bubbly underneath, with deep golden melted cheese on top.

Transfer the pastry swirls to a cooling rack to let them set up without steam wrecking the beautiful golden, tender crust. As with all puff pastry items, these will be best served right away. They will be delicious warm or room temperature.