

Shrimp Tempura

Serves 8

Do not omit the vodka; it is critical for a crisp coating. For safety, use a Dutch oven with a capacity of at least 7 quarts. Be sure to begin mixing the batter when the oil reaches 385 degrees (the final temperature should reach 400 degrees). It is important to maintain a high oil temperature throughout cooking. If you are unable to find colossal shrimp (8 to 12 per pound), jumbo (16 to 20 per pound) or extra large (21 to 25 per pound) may be substituted. Fry smaller shrimp in three batches, reducing the cooking time to 1 1/2 to 2 minutes per batch.

3 quarts peanut or vegetable oil
1 1/2 lbs colossal shrimp, peeled and deveined, tails left on
1 1/2 cups (7 1/2 ounces) unbleached all purpose flour
1/2 cornstarch
1 cup vodka
1 large egg
1 cup seltzer water
Table salt

1. Adjust an oven rack to the upper middle position and heat the oven to 200 degrees. In a large Dutch oven fitted with a clip on candy thermometer, heat the oil over high heat to 385 degrees, 18 to 22 minutes.
2. While the oil heats, make two shallow cuts about 1/4 inch deep and 1 inch apart on the underside of each shrimp. Whisk the flour and cornstarch together in a large bowl. Whisk the vodka and egg together in a second large bowl, then whisk in the seltzer water.
3. When the oil reaches 385 degrees, whisk the vodka mixture into the bowl with the flour mixture until just combined (it is OK if small lumps remain). Submerge half of the shrimp in the batter. Using tongs, remove the shrimp from the batter one at a time, allowing the excess batter to drip off, and carefully place in the oil (the temperature should now be at 400 degrees). Fry stirring with chopstick or wooden skewer to prevent sticking, until light brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the shrimp to a paper towel lined plate and sprinkle with salt. Once the paper towels absorb the excess oil, transfer the shrimp to a wire rack set over a rimmed baking sheet and place in the oven to keep warm.
4. Return the oil to 400 degrees, about 4 minutes, then repeat with the remaining shrimp.