

Obatzda Beer Soup with Black Bread Croutons.

I hesitated in calling this obatzda soup, since, it may not have all that much in common with the original German cheese spread. But, it is the perfect thing with a mug of beer, on a cold, snowy night, so I'm hoping it is true to the spirit of the original. I make the soup with stout, since that's what I like to drink, but it is a very strong flavor. If you aren't a stout drinker, try it with a bock, lager or an IPA. The whole soup making process takes about an hour and half, but you can easily make the croutons, cheese spread and/or caramelize the onions ahead of time.

I made my croutons from 101 Cookbooks' [Black Bread](#), and I can't recommend that recipe highly enough!

4 tablespoons butter	4 cloves garlic, peeled
¼ cup shallots, finely chopped	2 tablespoons paprika
	2 teaspoons cayenne
6 slices slightly stale, black bread, cubed	
	4 carrots, trimmed
1½ cups farmer's cheese or Camembert, or another soft cheese	2 beets, peeled and trimmed
4 small dill pickles	3 tablespoons butter
1 cup (approximately) sauerkraut	3 medium onions cut into thin half-rings
½ cup sauerkraut liquid	
1 jalapeño, trimmed	6 cups stout – or the beer of your choice
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard	Cilantro leaves for garnish

In a sauté pan, heat the butter over medium high. Add the shallots and cook until they are just turning brown, about 3 minutes. Pour the shallots and butter into a small bowl and reserve. Return the sauté pan to the stove, and toast the bread cubes over medium low heat, in batches – don't crowd them – for about 2 minutes, stirring them frequently. Drain the croutons on paper towels.

In the food processor, blend all the Obatzda ingredients – the farmer's cheese through to the cayenne, until you have a smooth spread. Add the reserved shallot butter and blend for 20 more seconds.

Remove the cheese mixture from the processor, and grind the carrots and the beets.

In a large Dutch oven or similar pot, heat the butter over medium low. Add the onion rings, and caramelize, slowly – you are looking for an even dark brown on the edge of each slice.

Depending on your patience, this can take from 15 to 40 min. And I have to say, the longer the better.

Turn the heat up to medium high. Add the beets, carrots and beer to the pot, and let simmer, with the lid on for 45 minutes. Remove the lid, turn the heat down to low, and let the soup cool for a least 10 min.

Stir the cheese spread into the soup, either by hand, or with an immersion blender until you have a smooth, uniform texture. Taste, and add extra salt, pepper and cayenne as needed.

The soup serves 6-8, and it is really rich. Garnish each bowlful with a handful of black bread croutons and cilantro.