



Top the nachos with the works only if you're sure people are ready to eat. If you are dealing with a crowd of picky eaters or grazers, keep the post-oven toppings on the side and deploy them as "dippins." You don't want things to get soggy and gross.

NIGHT OWLS

PARTY NACHOS

— SERVES 6 —

Similar to the Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Chorizo Burgers (page 178), and a world away from Desperation Nachos (page 132), this is my improvement on a dish that has so much potential but is so often underwhelming. Take the recipe as more baseline than bible, and build your own tower of crunch.

The key to great nachos is spreading them out in a thin-enough layer so that every chip (or almost every chip) has some form of topping on it. Nothing makes me angrier than a pile of nachos with delicious cheese and filling *only on the chips that are lucky enough to be on top*. Brutal.

- 1 (13-ounce) bag tortilla chips
- 1 (10.5-ounce) bag Fritos Scoops (Scoops are essential)
- 6 cups shredded or grated cheese, such as a mixture of Monterey Jack, sharp cheddar, and cotija (about 1½ pounds)
- 1 (16-ounce) can refried beans or 2 cups Bean Dip (page 174)
- 1 (15.5-ounce) can black beans, drained
- ½ pound ground meat, cooked with a packet of taco seasoning
- 1 poblano pepper, seeded and cut into thin strips
- 1 medium Spanish onion, chopped
- 1 (16-ounce) jar taco sauce (I like Ortega brand)
- 1½ cups tomato salsa
- 2 cups sour cream
- 1 (12-ounce) jar pickled sliced jalapeños, drained
- 6 scallions, thinly sliced
- 2 ears corn, kernels removed
- 2 avocados, halved, pitted, peeled, and thinly sliced
- 1 cup loosely packed fresh cilantro leaves

This is a lot of sauce, probably more than you need.

Skip this when corn is out of season.

Depending on the packet, you may not need to use all of it.

Or set up a nacho bar, so everyone can add their own toppings.

1. Set the oven to broil.
2. Arrange the chips and Scoops in a single layer on a baking sheet or in your largest baking dish, ensuring an even distribution of chips and Scoops. (If necessary, divide them between two baking dishes.)
3. Shower the chips with the cheese. This will act as a crucial moisture barrier to protect them from everything else. Add the two types of beans. Next up, scatter the meat evenly over the beans. Top that with the poblano and onion, scattered evenly for optimum flavor distribution.
4. Pop the whole mess under the broiler until the cheese is melted and starting to brown around the edges. This happens fast—3 to 5 minutes—so keep watch!
5. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and top the nachos with the taco sauce, salsa, sour cream, jalapeños, scallions, corn, avocado, and cilantro, evenly distributed, of course. Serve immediately.



If you want to play around with flours, like whole wheat or rye, reduce the quantity to 1½ cups, as heartier flours hydrate and bind differently than all-purpose flour.

If you want to bake up my childhood chocolate chip cookie, add ½ cup Rice Krispies and reduce the flour by ¼ cup, just like my Nonna used to do.

CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

— MAKES 1½ DOZEN COOKIES —

I have a strong aversion to the idea of putting classic baked goods on our menu. I don't want to compete with your memories or your grandma; I want to bake things that she'd never think of but might love. But that's the professional me. When I'm at home, staying over at a friend's, or on vacation, I fully believe in straight-up celebrating the classics.

And when you're talking classics, nothing is better than a chocolate chip cookie fresh out of the oven. This is my go-to recipe. It's nothing fancy, just a stand-up cookie, crispy on the outside, fudgy in the center, with just the right amount of chew (brought to you by the addition of nonfat milk powder and the use of melted butter). And this cookie is great because you can make it by hand in one bowl, with a wooden spoon, just like the old gals used to do.

½ pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, melted and still warm (not hot) to the touch
¾ cup packed light brown sugar
½ cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1¾ cups all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons nonfat milk powder
1¼ teaspoons kosher salt
½ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon baking soda
1 (12-ounce) bag semisweet chocolate chips

Don't skip this!

Make sure you buy a 12-ounce bag—some are only 9 or 10 ounces.

1. Heat the oven to 375°F.
2. With a wooden spoon or sturdy spatula, mix together the butter and both sugars in a large bowl, flexing your biceps, until homogenous, about 1 minute. Add the egg and vanilla and stir until combined, about 1 minute.
3. Mix in the flour, milk powder, salt, baking powder, and baking soda until just combined, about 30 seconds. Add the chocolate chips and mix until evenly distributed, about 30 seconds. (If your dough is exceptionally wet, it's a factor of too-hot melted butter. Throw it in the fridge for a few minutes to firm up before baking.)
4. Portion 2¾-ounce scoops of dough 2 to 3 inches apart onto a greased or lined baking sheet. Bake the cookies for 10 to 12 minutes, until golden brown. Cool completely on the pan. For storage instructions, see page 47.

Or a minute and a half.

Make sure the egg is fully incorporated.

Sprinkle with sea salt if you like that salty-sweet experience.

FRUITY-PEBBLE MERINGUES WITH PASSION FRUIT CURD

— MAKES ABOUT 2 DOZEN MERINGUES —

These sweet little things are a cheery, crisp yet somewhat chewy, rainbow-striped, bite-sized American take on Australian/New Zealand pavlova. They're also flourless!

- 4 large egg whites (cold and fresh)
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1½ cups confectioners' sugar
- 2 cups Fruity Pebbles

Passion Fruit Curd

1. Heat the oven to 200°F.
2. Whip the egg whites in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment on high until fluffy, about 2 minutes. Sprinkle in the salt and whisk for about 1 minute, until the salt disappears and the whites stiffen slightly. Add the confectioners' sugar and beat until glossy, stiff peaks form, about 3 minutes. Whisk in the cereal until just combined, about 30 seconds. *or less*
3. Pipe 1½-inch rounds using a pastry bag fitted with a plain round tip or drop tablespoons of the mixture 2 inches apart onto greased or lined baking sheets.
4. Bake for 3 hours, until the meringues are completely dry. They should feel hollow and be slightly cracked. Let cool completely on the pans.
5. With a small spoon or the tip of a knife, hollow out the bottom of each meringue and pipe or spoon in passion fruit curd until it begins to creep out of the bottom. Serve, or store right side up in an airtight container in the fridge for up to a week.

This is much easier.

These are delicate so be careful.

PASSION FRUIT CURD

MAKES ABOUT ¾ CUP

Passion fruit curd is by far my favorite thing to eat with a spoon. Or layer into a cake, scoop into a pie shell, or stuff into meringues. Making a small batch of this liquid gold in the microwave is a cinch. If you are without microwave, poor you, cook the mixture in a small heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium-low heat, gently bringing it to a boil.

- 1 large egg
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt

- ¼ cup passion fruit puree (found online and in Latin supermarkets)
- 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, melted

1. Whisk together the egg, sugar, and salt in a microwave-safe bowl. Add the passion fruit puree and butter and whisk until completely smooth.
2. Microwave on high for 30-second intervals, stirring after each one, for 3 to 4 minutes until the mixture is thick and custard-like. Refrigerate for 1 hour, or until set, or transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate for up to 1 week.

This takes 3 to 4 minutes.

This will likely be frozen.

