

Kentucky Hot Brown Benedict – Comfort du Jour

The most traditional food associated with the Kentucky Derby is a “hot brown sandwich,” classically prepared on toasted brioche, with roasted turkey, tomatoes, bacon and an elegant Mornay sauce. Like every recipe, there are thousands of versions out there. Mine is a little bit of a twist, in that I’ve transformed it into one of my favorite brunch options—a Benedict.

Straight up, I’ll admit this is kind of a fussy recipe, not for the faint of heart in the kitchen. But if you love the journey of delivering up a photo-worthy dish, I hope you’ll give it a try. My egg poaching skills aren’t top-notch, but I’m going to teach you in an easy way to “cheat” through it for an end result that’s every bit as pretty. And don’t let the “Mornay” scare you—honestly, it’s just a fancy way to say “cheese sauce,” and it’s very easy to make. It helps a lot to have your ingredients and tools in place, and read through the instructions before you begin. This recipe makes two single Benedict servings.

Ingredients – The Mornay

- 1 Tbsp. butter
- 1 Tbsp. flour
- ½ cup milk
- 2 oz. grated or shredded Gruyere (you could substitute Swiss)
- Kosher or sea salt to taste
- Freshly grated nutmeg (or about 1/8 tsp. ground nutmeg)

Ingredients – The Benedict

- 1 English muffin, fork split
- 2 slices bacon, cut in half
- 1 Roma tomato, cut crosswise into 6 slices (about 1/4” thick)
- 2 Tbsp. chopped sweet onion
- 2 oz. very thinly sliced deli turkey—about 1/3 cup packed, cut into shredded pieces
- 2 eggs
- Snipped fresh chives for garnish
- Mornay sauce (recipe above)

Tools

- Small saucepan
- Small whisk
- Microplane (optional, for grating nutmeg)
- Cheese grater (or use microplane)
- Skillet for cooking bacon
- Additional skillet (optional)
- Spatula or turner
- 2 custard cups (or small teacups) for separating eggs
- Small mesh strainer (optional)

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Tea kettle

Small (7") non-stick skillet with tight (preferably glass) lid

Additional small lid for keeping eggs warm

Instructions – The Mornay

In a small saucepan, heat 1 Tbsp. salted butter until melted and bubbly at edges. Add 1 Tbsp. flour and whisk to combine. Cook until mixture changes appearance and bubbles throughout. Add milk and whisk until fully blended. Keep over medium heat until bubbling and thickened. Grate fresh nutmeg into the sauce, then add grated gruyere cheese and a pinch of salt, whisking until smooth. Turn heat to warm setting while you prepare the other items.

Instructions – The Benedict

Cook the bacon strips to desired doneness and set aside on paper towels. Load your English muffin halves into the toaster so it's ready to go at plating time.

Heat a cast-iron pan over medium heat for about 5 minutes (use the bacon skillet, if you wish, but be sure to wipe it clean of grease first). Add about 1 Tbsp. olive oil and add onions, tossing to caramelize. Pile the onions into the middle of the skillet, and place the tomato slices around the outside. Cook the tomatoes until both sides show signs of caramelization (those gorgeous little charred spots is what you're going for here).

Move the tomatoes to a plate or cutting board to avoid burning them. Add the chopped turkey meat to the onions and toss to warm and caramelize the edges. Turn off the heat and set aside for plating.

If you already have a preferred way to cook poached eggs—well, you're my new hero! Although I completely love poached eggs on any restaurant brunch menu, making them at home wears my patience pretty thin. I'm going to teach you my "cheat" method of steam-poaching eggs, and it works great for me. Do what works for you.

First, turn on the heat under your tea kettle, or run some *very hot* tap water into a measuring cup with a pour spout. You're going to need hot water for this process.

Crack one egg into a custard cup. Place a small mesh strainer over a second cup and gently roll the egg into the strainer, allowing some of the egg white to drain through to the extra cup. An egg white actually has two distinct parts—the firm white, which is the pretty part, and the loose and runny white, which leaves unappealing shaggy edges on a poached or fried egg. We're getting rid of the runny white part so the egg steams more cleanly. If you don't have a mesh strainer, or if you're not a stickler for a pretty plate, you can skip this step. But this is a fancy-schmancy brunch dish we're making, so I'm doing it. Besides, I can burn more calories later if I have a sink *full* of dirty dishes.

Discard the runny white, then do the same with the second egg, keeping each egg in its own cup.

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Drop the English muffin to toast it. Whisk the Mornay. Breathe. (We're almost ready to eat)

Heat a small non-stick skillet over medium heat for about 1 minute. Carefully pour about 1/4 cup hot water directly into the empty skillet. It will sputter and perhaps even seem to boil, and this is good! Gently slip the first egg onto the boiling water and immediately cover with a tight fitting lid. Allow the egg to cook for about 1 minute, and watch for a light film to form over the yolk. With a rubber spatula or wide spoon, gently remove the egg to a plate lined with a paper towel. Cover with another lid to keep it warm while you prepare the second egg.

Plating

Place a small spoonful of the Mornay sauce in the center of each serving plate, to help keep the muffins from sliding around. Smear about 1 Tbsp. of sauce over each toasted muffin half, then top each with the turkey-onion mixture, the tomato slices, a generous drape of Mornay sauce and a poached egg. Sprinkle with snipped chives and top with the cooked bacon slices, placing them cross-wise for optimal image to impress your guest.

Enjoy!