

Travel the World without Leaving Your Kitchen

International Cooking Series

The Flavors of Mexico

Most of us can passionately describe a delicious recipe or meal that someone in our family has passed down for generations and the ensuing joy of sharing the dish around the table. Exploring, learning, and embracing cultural food traditions, both our own and others', can broaden our perspectives about history and cultures from around the world. Whether you experience these cultural differences in eating while traveling, while visiting a restaurant in your community, or by preparing them at home, it can help you celebrate the cultural diversity found in all our communities. So, let's travel the world without leaving your kitchen and experience the traditional flavors of Mexican cuisine.



History of Food

Long before the Spanish arrived in the land of Mexico, the Mayan and Aztec people had created a highly developed agricultural system. Besides the corn, beans, and chiles that form the basis of Mexican cuisine, there were orchards full of avocados, coconuts, papayas, pineapples, and pears. And fields full of early forms of tomatoes, sweet potatoes, squash, peanuts, vanilla, and cocoa. Once the Spanish arrived, they brought a new set of foods. To name a few, they included wheat, chickpeas, melons, onions, radishes, salad greens, grapes, and sugar cane. Rice, citrus fruits, and nuts were not far behind. The Spanish also expanded the variety of meat to eat, introducing beef, lamb, and chicken to the already thriving venison, turkey, and wild birds, along with a large variety of fish and shellfish from coastal waters. The spice traders of Europe brought cinnamon, black

pepper, cloves, thyme, marjoram, and bay leaves. Since the 16th century, other European influences, including the French, Austrians, and Italians, have left their mark on Mexican cooking. In 1821, Mexico gained independence from Spain, and by then, the native cuisine was heavily influenced by living under Spanish rule. When Texas declared its independence in 1831, Texans of Mexican descent introduced cheddar cheese, beef, wheat, and cumin into traditional Mexican. Wheat tortillas, nachos, chili con carne, burritos, and barbacoa gained notoriety as Mexican food and thus began the rise of Tex-Mex food, commonly found in the U.S.

Eating habits in Mexico usually include breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with lunch being the main meal in the late afternoon. Breakfast may be



as simple as fresh fruits or juices, or easy-to-make tacos. The luncheon meal may start with a soup or salad, then a main dish, and often a small dessert. There will always be tortillas, a variety of salsa, and maybe agua frescas (blended fruit and water) to quench your thirst. Dinner is typically a lighter meal in the evening between 7 to 9 p.m. The best way to experience authentic Mexican cooking and family-like hospitality is to visit the country.

While there may be a Mexican grocery in your community, many of the ingredients you need to experience the flavors of Mexico can be found in your local grocery store or may already be a staple in your pantry.

Tortillas

Let's start with the versatile tortilla. It can be filled, rolled, layered, or used as a bed for a wide variety of ingredients. Whether they are the traditional Indian corn tortillas or the soft flour tortillas developed after the Spanish brought wheat to Mexico, you can use this flat, round, unleavened bread to wrap up many popular Mexican foods. With a little imagination, you can use a variety of wholesome, high-fiber vegetables, and beans to make nutritious Mexican-style meals at home.

Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Make fajitas using thinly-sliced chicken or lean beef. Add thinly-sliced red, yellow, or green bell peppers and onion. Sauté in a small amount of chicken stock instead of oil and season with garlic, lime juice, and cumin. Place your fajitas on a warm flour tortilla, add salsa, and roll up to enclose the filling.
- Create a vegetable burrito in a flour tortilla. Sauté chopped onions, mushrooms, zucchini, bell peppers, tomatoes, ripe olives, jalapeño, and green chiles, and season with chili powder, oregano, and cumin. Cooked navy, kidney, or pinto beans can add extra fiber. Finish with Cotija cheese.
- Tostadas can be baked and topped with a cooked mixture of ground turkey, red kidney beans, tomatoes, onion, garlic, jalapeño peppers, chili powder, cumin, and oregano. Add shredded lettuce, chopped tomato, and low-fat sour cream or nonfat yogurt.
- Seafood makes a great filling or topping for tortillas. Try a soft crabmeat taco or an enchilada stuffed with shrimp.
- By using a combination of savory seasonings and the versatile tortilla, it's easy to enjoy an inexpensive, flavorful Mexican dinner without a lot of extra fat.



Corn Tortillas

Yield: 12 5-inch tortillas
Prep time: 10 minutes
Cook time: 20 minutes

Nutritional analysis per tortilla: 52 calories;
10g carbohydrate; 1g protein

Ingredients

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups masa harina, Bob's Red Mill® or Masienda™.
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups of warm water

Instructions

1. Preheat a griddle to 350 degrees F, or use a heavy skillet over medium heat. When you start pressing the tortillas, your griddle should be hot.
2. In a large bowl, combine the masa harina and water. Mix well until the water is absorbed evenly and the dough forms a soft ball that does not stick to your hands. Form the dough into golf ball-size pieces. Work quickly so the dough will not dry out.
3. Using a tortilla press or a glass pie pan with a dough ball between two pieces of plastic film, press to form a 5-inch round tortilla.

4. Remove the tortilla carefully. If the edges crack, the dough is too dry. Add 1 teaspoon of water and knead the dough further. If the tortilla is difficult to remove from the press or between the plastic film, the dough is too wet. Add 1 tablespoon of masa harina and knead the dough further.
5. Place the tortillas on the griddle and cook for about 30 to 40 seconds. Once the edges begin to dry out, flip to the other side and cook about 40 to 45 seconds or until brown patches form. Flip again and cook for another 15 seconds, or until the tortilla begins to puff. Tap lightly with your fingertips to allow even puffing. Wrap with a napkin or clean towel and serve. The cook time will vary depending on how thick your tortilla is and the temperature of your griddle.

Note: Practice makes perfect. To reheat tortillas, reheat on a griddle or in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat for about 45 seconds on each side.

Adapted with permission from Mexico in My Kitchen, <https://www.mexicoinmykitchen.com/corn-tortillas-from-scratch/>, accessed June 2022.

Flour Tortillas

Yield: 10 10-inch tortillas

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 20 minutes

Nutritional analysis per tortilla: 147cal; 7g fat; 23g carbohydrate; 233mg sodium, 3g protein

Ingredients

- *2½ cups all-purpose flour, plus extra to form tortillas*
- *1 teaspoon salt*
- *½ teaspoon baking powder*
- *½ cup shortening*
- *1 cup of hot water*

Instructions

1. In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, and salt together. Using a pastry blender, blend the shortening into the dry ingredients, until it resembles coarse meal.
2. Slowly add the hot water a little at a time until the dough holds together. Do not add all the water at once.
3. On a lightly floured surface, knead the dough until smooth, about 2 to 3 minutes.
4. Divide the dough into 10 pieces. Roll each piece on a lightly floured surface with the palm of your hand to form a little disk, commonly known as testales. Cover with a damp towel and allow to rest for 30 to 45 minutes.
5. Preheat a griddle to 350 degrees F or use a heavy skillet over medium heat. When you start pressing or rolling the tortillas, your griddle should be hot.
6. Using a rolling pin and on a lightly floured surface, roll the dough balls, starting in the center and rolling until just before the edge, then press back toward the center and stop rolling just before the opposite edge. Do not use too much flour.
7. Turn the tortilla 45 degrees, or half a turn, and repeat the rolling motion. Flip the disk and keep repeating the same process until you have a 10-inch tortilla. Or you can use a tortilla press or a glass pie pan with the disk between two pieces of plastic film. If you are new to rolling tortillas, be patient, it takes a little practice.
8. On the hot griddle or heavy skillet over medium heat, carefully place the tortillas. In the first 20 to 30 seconds, the tortilla will form air bubbles and develop light brown spots on the grilling side of the tortilla. Flip the tortilla. In the next 20 seconds, more air bubbles will continue to form. Flip again. In the next 10 seconds, remove the tortilla and wrap with a kitchen towel. Only make as many tortillas as you can handle at one time.



Note: Practice makes perfect. To reheat the tortillas, reheat on a griddle or in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat for about 45 seconds on each side or until slightly dry.

Adapted with permission from Mexico in My Kitchen, <https://www.mexicoinmykitchen.com/flour-tortillas-de-harina/>, accessed June 2022.

Tacos

Tacos are an easy meal. Beef, pork, chicken, vegetables, and seafood make the quintessential Mexican dish. Typically, the pork roast is roasted on a spit with the marinade giving a unique savory and aromatic chile flavor. The slow cooking with the acidic marinade tenderizes the pork. Served with warm corn tortillas, tomatillos salsa, and lemon or lime wedges make for an interesting flavor combination. And even though Tacos al Pastor originated in Puebla, Mexico, the recipe was inspired in the early 1930s by Lebanese immigrants.

Tacos al Pastor

Yield: 10 servings

Prep time: 1 hour plus marinade time

Cook time: 30 minutes

Nutritional analysis per taco: 270cal, 11g fat, 65mg cholesterol, 290mg sodium, 25g carbohydrate, 21g protein

Ingredients

- *2½ pounds boneless pork shoulder, cut into ¼-inch slices*
- *3 dried, reconstituted guajillo chile peppers or 2 tablespoons guajillo chili powder*
- *2 dried, reconstituted seeded ancho chile peppers, 3 tablespoons achiote paste, or 1 teaspoon annatto powder*
- *2 crushed garlic cloves, or 2 teaspoons garlic powder*
- *1 tablespoon dried oregano*
- *1 tablespoon ground cumin*
- *1 teaspoon pepper*
- *¼ cup white vinegar*
- *½ to 1 cup pineapple juice*
- *½ skinned, sliced, pineapple, ¾-inch thick, or 16-ounce can of pineapple rings*

Reconstitution of Peppers

1. With gloved hands, carefully remove the seeds and chop the peppers. In a small saucepan, add the peppers and cover with water. Bring to a simmer and cook until just soft, about 15 minutes. Drain and cool the peppers. Place in a blender or food processor and blend until you have a smooth



sauce. Add a little pineapple juice if it is chunky and blend again.

Taco Ingredients

- *10 corn tortillas*
- *1 small chopped onion*
- *2 cups salsa*
- *1 bunch chopped fresh cilantro*
- *2 peeled and seeded avocados, chopped*
- *2 fresh limes, cut into 6 wedges each*

Instructions

1. In a large bowl, combine all spices and juice, stirring until smooth. Add the pork slices to the marinade and toss well, covering all the surface of the pork. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or up to 3 days.
2. When ready to cook the meat, drain the marinade and discard. Add the meat and the pineapple slices to a large frying pan, over medium-high heat. Cook until meat is cooked through, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes or until the pork registers 145 degrees F.
3. To assemble the tacos, place pork and pineapple mixture on the warm tortillas, followed by a spoonful each of onion, salsa, cilantro, and avocado. Or use your favorite condiments for the tacos. Serve with lime wedges to squeeze on the tacos.



Salsa

Salsa can be traced to the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas. To add more flavor to wild game and seafood, they combined tomatoes, chiles, and other spices. In 1591, a Spanish missionary gave the sauce its name. In 2013, salsa officially overtook ketchup as the most used American condiment. And while there are plenty of good, jarred salsas on the market, fresh salsa just can't be beat. If you have plenty of fresh tomatoes, green peppers, and onions from your garden, follow the recipes in the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension's Home Canning Salsa publication, accessed through <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/FCS3/FCS3581/FCS3581.pdf>. Salsas come in a variety of spice levels and textures.

Traditional Salsa

Yield: 2 cups

Prep time: 30 minutes

Nutritional Analysis for 2 tablespoons: 10 calories, 2g carbohydrate, 60mg sodium

Ingredients

- 2 cups tomatoes, peeled, cored, seeded, and diced
- ¼ cup onion, diced

- ¼ cup green pepper, diced
- 1 small jalapeño pepper, diced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 2 tablespoons cilantro, minced
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Instructions

1. To easily peel tomatoes, bring 1 quart of water to a boil in a medium saucepan over high heat. Cut a small X into the bottom of the tomato. Carefully add tomatoes to the boiling water until the X begins to separate from the tomatoes, about 30 to 60 seconds. Remove from the boiling water and dip immediately into cold water. The skins will slip off easily. Remove cores and seeds, and dice.
2. In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients, mixing well.

Note: When cutting or seeding hot peppers, wear plastic or rubber gloves. If a hotter salsa is desired, modify the number of peppers in the recipe. Use your favorite peppers in this recipe, such as red, yellow, Anaheim, poblano, or hot banana peppers.



Guacamole

Avocados were important to the ancient indigenous Mesoamericans and can be traced back to the Aztec empire. The fruit provided a lot of nourishment in their diets. Avocados are a low-calorie, low-sodium, nutrient-dense food with nearly 20 vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients. More than 75% of the fat in avocados is unsaturated, the type of fat that does not raise LDL cholesterol levels. Like salsas, there are many variations of guacamole. Today, we typically see a combination of avocados, onions, tomatoes, and peppers.

Instructions

1. In a medium bowl, add the avocados and with a fork, mash until smooth but still chunky.
2. Season with salt and lemon or lime juice. Serve immediately with tortilla chips or fresh vegetables.

Note: For a more traditional version, add ½ cup of fresh salsa to the guacamole. Avocados contain an enzyme that oxidizes when exposed to air. Thus, guacamole does not store well.

Easy Guacamole

Yield: 8 servings

Prep time: 5 minutes

Nutritional analysis per 2 tablespoons serving size:
60 calories; 5g fat; 75mg sodium; 3g carbohydrate;
1g protein

Ingredients

- 2 large, ripe avocados, peeled, pitted, and diced
- The juice of 1 fresh lemon or lime
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Beans

Beans, such as pinto, navy, pink, and black beans, are nutrient-dense foods, found commonly in Mexican cuisine. Beans can be included as part of the MyPlate vegetable group (half-cup serving size, three times a week) or the protein group (quarter-cup serving size). Beans provide protein, fiber, folate, iron, potassium, and magnesium with little or no fat, sodium, and cholesterol. Beans also contain health-promoting nutrients, such as antioxidants, which reduce the risk of developing certain diseases, including heart disease, obesity, and many types of cancers. Beans can be added to main dishes, such as a black bean and spinach enchilada; as a side dish, such as charro beans; in a salad, such as a taco salad; in soup, such tortilla soup; and as an appetizer, such as refried bean dip. But what used to take hours of soaking and slow cooking can now be done in a pressure cooker.

Electric Pressure Cooker Black Beans

Yield: 6 cups

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 40 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving: 240 calories; 4.5g fat; 330mg sodium; 40g carbohydrate; 13g protein

Ingredients

- 1 pound black beans
- 7 cups of water or chicken broth
- 1 cup chopped carrots
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 1 medium red onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1½ teaspoons chili powder
- 1½ teaspoons cumin
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons olive oil



Note: If you have a Mexican grocery near you, use two epazote leaves in place of the chili powder and cumin.

Instructions

1. In a strainer, rinse the beans and remove any withered or broken pieces.
2. In an electric pressure cooker, add all the ingredients except the salt and oil. There is no need to presoak the beans. Adding the salt at the beginning causes the beans to stay hard. The oil at the end creates a broth with more body.
3. Following the manufacturer's instructions, put on the lid, and set the release valve to seal. Most cookers will have a bean setting, which cooks for about 30 minutes, but follow your cooker's instructions. You can always cook 5 more minutes if you want soft beans.
4. Carefully remove the lid and stir in the oil and salt. Cook 5 minutes on the manual setting. Serve.

Note: To use a pressure cooker on the stove, follow the manufacturer's instructions, but cooking time will likely increase to about 50 minutes. To cook on the stove, rinse the beans, presoak overnight, and discard the water. Then in a large pot, cover the beans with 2 quarts of water. Bring to a boil and reduce to a gentle simmer for 1 to 1½ hours. Add the oil and salt during the last 5 minutes of cooking. Pinto beans may be used in place of the black beans. You can serve as soup or drain the broth to add to burritos, tostados, or salads.

Rice

Rice is not native to Mexico, but was brought over by the Spaniards, who after visiting Asia, introduced rice and wheat. In Mexico, the type of rice served depends on the region. Red rice or arroz rojo is cooked in northern Mexico with chicken broth and tomato flavors. In southern Mexico, plain white rice is more common. In U.S. restaurants, Mexican rice, refried beans, or a corn salad, are commonly served with the main dish. Rice is also found stuffed in burritos or layered in a taco casserole.

Arroz Rojo or Red Rice

Yield: 5 servings

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 20 minutes

Nutritional analysis for 1/2-cup serving: 150 calories; 2.5g fat; 65mg sodium; 28g carbohydrate; 3g protein

Ingredients

- 1 cup uncooked white rice
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1/4 cup chopped serrano pepper, jalapeño pepper, or green pepper
- 1/4 cup canned diced tomatoes
- 1/4 cup canned tomato sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon onion powder

Instructions

1. To prevent rice from sticking together, rinse the rice in a colander until the water runs clear. For fluffier rice, place drained rice into a small bowl and cover with water, allowing it to set for 15 minutes. Drain the excess water.



2. In a medium saucepan, over medium high heat, heat oil until shimmering. Add the rice and sauté, stirring occasionally to prevent scorching, for about 5 minutes or until a light golden color.
3. Carefully, add the remaining ingredients to the rice and combine well. Bring the broth to a boil. Reduce heat to low.
4. Add a lid to the saucepan and cook for about 15 minutes. Do not lift the cover while the rice is cooking.
5. Remove from heat and allow to stand about 10 minutes. Fluff with a fork before serving.

Note: If you have a successful way to cook rice, simply add all ingredients together and follow your recipe instructions.



Corn

In Mexico, corn is not just a commodity, but a part of their national heritage. Ears of corn and cornstalks were commonly found in ancient Mexican art, leading archeologists to estimate that corn was discovered more than 7,000 years ago. Today, two-thirds of Mexico's cornfields are planted in native maize varieties, or Indian corn. Differences in corn varieties are a big part of regional dishes, from tortillas to tamales to pozole. Every community has a tortilleria, or tortilla bakery, keeping the traditions alive.

Elote or Mexican Corn on the Cob

Yield: 4 servings

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes

Nutritional analysis for 1 corn on the cob:
160 calories; 7g fat; 20mg cholesterol;
370mg sodium; 20g carbohydrate; 7g protein

Ingredients

- 2 quarts water
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 4 ears sweet corn, complete with husk
- ¼ cup low-fat Mexican crema or sour cream
- ¼ cup low-fat mayonnaise

- 1 lime, cut in half
- ½ cup Cotija or powdered parmesan cheese
- 1 teaspoon ground piquin pepper, chili powder, or ground cayenne pepper

Instructions

1. Using a large chef's knife, cut off the tassel ends of the corn. Remove several layers of the outer husk, leaving the rest for flavor.
2. In a large pot over medium-high heat, add water and salt. Bring to a boil.
3. Add the corn. Lower the heat to medium and cover the pot with the lid. After 5 minutes, check the corn for doneness. If the corn is tender, carefully remove from the pot.
4. Carefully remove the husks. Spread the corn on the cob with cream, and then the mayo.
5. Roll in cheese. Sprinkle with chili powder, and salt, if desired. Add a few drops of lime juice, and serve hot.

Note: You can grill the corn on the cob by peeling the first layer of the husk off. Add the corn to a preheated grill. Cook for 5 mins on each side until the corn has a nice char on it. Then, follow the rest of the steps in the instructions.

Adapted with permission from Mexico in My Kitchen, <https://www.mexicoinmykitchen.com/mexican-corn-on-cob>, accessed June 2022.



Jicama

Jicama is native to Mexico. The root or tuber of the jicama plant is what is edible. Traditionally, it is eaten raw, after peeling and slicing it into strips accompanied with lime juice and chili powder. It is crisp and juicy, so street vendors in Mexico sell it in bags because it is particularly nice to munch on a hot day. It is especially delicious with grilled fish and roasted pork or added thinly sliced to sandwiches to add crunch.

Jicama Salad

Yield: 9 servings

Prep time: 30 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving: 80 calories; 1g fat; 75mg sodium; 6g carbohydrate

Ingredients

- ½ cup julienned red bell pepper
- ½ cup julienned green bell pepper
- ½ cup julienned yellow bell pepper
- ½ cup julienned carrots

- ½ cup peeled, seeded, julienned cucumbers
- 2 cups peeled, julienned jicama
- 1 tablespoon fresh, minced cilantro
- 1 teaspoon fresh, minced parsley
- 1 teaspoon fresh, minced chives
- ¼ cup minced shallots or mild onion
- 1 minced garlic clove
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper

Instructions

1. In a medium-size bowl, combine ingredients and stir. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Note: Jicama absorbs other flavors well. Instead of oil and vinegar dressing, use your favorite vinaigrette or salad dressings. Store in the refrigerator up to 3 days.



Fish

Communities along the sea enjoy a variety of seafood dishes. Fish, such as grouper, red snapper, mojarra, and snook, along with lobster, crab, and oysters are abundant. For a Mexican twist on your healthy fish dish for the week, try arroz a la tumbada, skate machaca, caldo michi, or abalone chorizo.

Pescado a la Veracruzana or Fish Veracruz Style

Yield: 4 servings

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 25 minutes

Nutritional analysis per fish fillet: 250 calories; 7g fat; 60mg cholesterol; 200mg sodium; 13g carbohydrate; 36g protein

Ingredients

- 4 6-ounce snapper fillets, or a firm-fleshed fish
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 cup thinly sliced onions
- 2 minced garlic cloves
- 2 tablespoons minced parsley

- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 2 whole cloves
- 3 cups skinned, chopped tomatoes, or 18-ounces canned diced tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon rinsed and drained capers
- 2 seeded and thinly sliced jalapeños
- ¼ cup thinly sliced, pitted green olives
- 1 cup water or fish stock

Instructions

1. In a large pan, over medium heat, heat oil until it shimmers. Add onion and cook until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and sauté 1 more minute.
2. Add remaining ingredients, including fillets and bring to a simmer. Cook until thickened or to a sauce consistency, and until the fillets are flaky, about 15 minutes. Remove bay leaf, cinnamon stick, and cloves. Serve immediately.

Note: The fillets can be grilled for 2 minutes on each side and added to the sauce the last 2 minutes of cooking.

Not All Chiles Are Hot!

Chiles are a great way to season foods without using fat. There are dozens of varieties, both mild and hot, that can be used to add flavor to any appetizer, entree, snack, or vegetable dish. Here's a grocery guide to some of the most popular chiles.

- Poblanos are mild peppers with an earthy flavor. They are big enough to stuff. A dried poblano is known as ancho, which is perfect for mole and barbecue sauces.
- Cascabel have an earthy nuttiness that make them perfect for marinades and sauces. These chiles are a popular ornamental pepper that when dried look like a miniature apple and the seeds rattle when shaken.
- Guajillo peppers are popular in mole sauces. They have a sweet fruit flavor, typically used as flakes or powders and reconstituted in stews.
- Jalapeños are the most popular chile in the world. They have quite the bite, perfect for fresh salsas. Because they have thick walls, they are perfect for stuffing. Dried and smoked jalapeños become the chipotle pepper. Chipotles have a deep smoky flavor, perfect for marinades and barbecue rubs. Dried red jalapeños are known as moritas, which become chili powder or paste.
- Serrano chiles take the heat factor up to another level.
- Chile de árbol are typically dried for cooking in flake and powder form. They are very spicy. Their long skinny shape make it perfect for decorative uses.
- Habaneros are one of the hottest peppers in the world. They are used in hot sauces.

The Seven Moles of Oaxaca Sauces

The word mole literally means sauce. Most moles follow a basic recipe but change an ingredient or two depending on the complexity of the characteristic mole. Most are complicated to make and include roasted dried chiles, roasted vegetables,



nuts, seeds, dried fruit, bread, or mesa, with a few adding chocolate. The state of Oaxaca claims there are seven moles, including rojo, verde, negro, amarillo, coloradito, chichilo, and manchamanteles. The website Savory Spice Shop (<https://www.savoryspiceshop.com/blogs/news/making-the-7-moles-of-oaxaca-in-7-days-a-survivor-s-guide>) has a good blog dedicated to helping you have success with these sometimes complicated recipes. But the rich flavor is worth the efforts! Each mole has specific dishes that bring out the delicious flavors.

Pastel Tres Leches or Three Milk Cake

Tres Leches Cake is a celebration cake, served at birthdays, graduations, and weddings. An authentic recipe is a light sponge cake soaked in three milks: evaporated, condensed, and heavy cream or whole milk. The result is a rich, moist cake, with a unique flavor. It's also easy to make but high in fat and sugar. A small piece will wow your taste buds.

Pastel Tres Leches

Yield: 15 servings

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 25 minutes

Nutritional analysis per slice: 360 calories; 17g fat; 95mg cholesterol; 270mg sodium; 46g carbohydrate; 8g protein

Ingredients Cake

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 5 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- ½ cup whole milk

Tres leches

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream or 1 can (7.6 ounce) Media Crema Nestle
- 1 can (12 ounce) evaporated milk
- 1 can (14 ounce) sweetened condensed milk
- ½ teaspoon almond extract
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Frosting

- 1¼ cups heavy whipping cream
- 4 tablespoons of sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Using cooking spray, spray a 9-inch-by-13-inch rectangular cake pan.
2. In a medium-size bowl, blend together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Set aside.
3. In a large mixing bowl, add the eggs, sugar, and vanilla. Using an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat on medium-high speed, about 10 minutes or until the egg mixture is light yellow and fluffy.
4. Reduce the speed to low and slowly add half the flour mixture, then the milk, and finally the remaining flour mixture. Mix until well combined but do not overmix.
5. Pour the batter into a prepared pan and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until light golden or a wooden toothpick comes out clean when inserted in the cake.
6. Cool the cake for 30 minutes. Then use the thick end of a skewer to make holes all over the cake.
7. In a medium bowl, mix the heavy cream, evaporated milk, sweetened condensed milk, almond extract, and vanilla. Pour the milk mixture over the cake.
8. Cover and refrigerate until cold, about 3 hours or overnight. Place the mixing bowl and wire whip attachment in the freezer to whip the frosting before service.
9. When ready to make the frosting, take the mixing bowl and wire whip attachment out of the freezer and attach to the electric mixer. Add the whipping cream, sugar, and vanilla into the bowl. Mix on medium speed until soft peaks form, about 2 minutes.
10. Spread the cake with the whipped cream. Refrigerate until ready to serve, decorate with fresh berries or sprinkle with cinnamon.

Note: This is best eaten within a day!

Food and Health

Today, there are more than 49,000 Mexican restaurants in the United States, making it one of the most accessible and popular international cuisines in our communities. While it's safe to say true Mexican cooking bears little resemblance to the foods found in many Mexican restaurants, here are some tips for choosing or cooking more wholesome Mexican foods.

- Substitute plain cooked beans for refried beans. If you buy commercial refried beans, look for those that use oil instead of lard. At home, use olive oil to sauté onion and garlic to add to mashed Pinto beans, tomato paste, chili powder, and ground cumin.
- Ask for plain tortillas to dip in salsa instead of deep-fried tortilla chips. At home, slice tortillas into eight slices and spray them with cooking spray before baking at 350 degrees F for 7 minutes on one side, flipping, and baking for an additional 8 minutes or until golden brown on the other side.
- Use salsa as a topping. Guacamole and sour cream should be used sparingly. At home, try low-fat sour cream, plain yogurt, or low-fat cheeses.
- Look for baked and grilled entrees instead of fried items. Grilled chicken as fajitas are a good choice and snapper is often grilled with garlic, cilantro, and fresh lemon.

Other traditional Mexican foods to explore include chili rellenos, enchilada suizas, tamales, and pozole. There are many Mexican and Tex-Mex recipes available at your local library or from websites and food blogs. Not all will be authentic or traditional. But exploring the culture and foods of modern-day Mexico will be an adventure in culinary flavors!

Resources

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Written by Sandra Bastin, Extension Food and Nutrition specialist, and
Maxx Alviar, Anderson County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agent
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