

Recipes, Customs and Cuisine of Oaxaca, Mexico August 2013

Cuisine of Oaxaca, Land of the Seven Moles

Oaxaca is famous for its delicious and complex *moles* (mo-lays). These intricate sauces, made by toasting and grinding spices, seeds and chiles, are truly the hallmark of the region. Local tribes were preparing moles and raising corn, tomatoes, squash, beans, turkeys, cacao and chiles long before Cortez ever set foot in the "New" World. *Mole* is drizzled over meats, enchiladas and much more.



The corn dough known as *masa* also plays a huge role in Oaxacan cooking. It is used for tamales and a wide variety of tortillas, from thick to thin, plain to stuffed. Popular cheeses include the fresh, crumbly *queso fresco*; aged, firm *queso añejo*; and a local string variety that's formed into a flattened ball. The herbs *hoja santa* (which has a distinctive, anise-like flavor) and *epazote* (pungent, almost medicinal) are common seasonings. (Glossary at <http://epi.us/18bnPIC>.)

The Spanish Conquistadores brought chickens, cattle, pigs (and thus the all-important lard), and spices such as *canela* (true cinnamon), cumin and cloves. Native cooking techniques such as steaming and dry roasting on clay griddles were joined by Spanish baking and frying. Learn more about Oaxacan cuisine at <http://epi.us/18bnXrx>.



Oaxaca is also the center of chocolate production in Mexico. The history of chocolate in Oaxaca goes back centuries. An Oaxacan hot (or cold) chocolate drink is different from what is served in the US. In Oaxaca, cacao beans are ground together with sugar and/or cinnamon, almonds and vanilla, then the paste is pressed into solid bars. Melting the bars in hot milk produces a beverage with a rich, complex taste. The traditional way of blending the milk and melted chocolate is with a *molinillo*. This wooden mixing tool has a long handle with a perforated bulb and loose rings at the bottom. You hold it between your palms, rub your hands together, and the tool spins, mixing and frothing the chocolate.



Source: www.vivaoaxacafolkart.com

Customs - Dining

- Do not begin eating until the host says, "*Buen provecho!*"
- Mexicans do not switch knives and forks. The knife remains in the right hand, and the fork remains in the left. When the meal is finished, the knife and fork are laid parallel to each other across the right side of the plate.
- When not holding utensils, your hands are expected to be visible above the table: this means you do not keep them in your lap; instead, rest your wrists on top of the table (never your elbows).
- Any salad will usually be served after the main course.
- The most honored position is at the head of the table, with the most important guest seated immediately to the right of the host (women to the right of the host, and men to the right of the hostess). If there is a hosting couple, one will be at each end of the table.

Customs - Festivals



A uniquely Oaxacan festival, and one of the most impressive vegetable festivals in the world, is Night of the Radishes (*Noche de Rábanos*), celebrated on December 23rd. Locals carve elaborate figures out of root vegetables as part of an annual competition in the *zócalo* (plaza) of Oaxaca City.

The radishes were originally brought over by the Spanish in the 16th century, but this festival is believed to have originated in 1897 when the then mayor of the city started the first exhibition of radish art.

The radishes are not the little red round ones so prevalent in the United States. They are thick, long and cylindrical, measuring up to 20 inches in length and weighing up to seven pounds each. They grow into contorted shapes with multiple appendages. This grotesque outcome proves inspirational to the carvers, who are often forced to react creatively to what they have at hand. This gives an improvisational feel to many of the works. "If the sculptures were music, they would be jazz."

Sources: StoveTeam staff and <http://bit.ly/18bp6iL>

Recipes

Mole Verde con Pollo (Green Mole with Chicken)

by Teresa Lourdes in Oaxaca, Mexico

Ingredients:

2 quarts water
2 pounds chicken
2 medium chayotes, cut in 4 pieces (a squash available in most supermarkets)
1 pound ejotes, (green beans) whole
2 large potatoes, cut in half or quartered
1 large white onion, cut in half
2 heads garlic
1 tablespoon cumin
1 tablespoon allspice
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1 bunch parsley
1 bunch cilantro
1 cup masa or flour
Salt (to taste)
Jalepeños (optional, 5 more or less)
Roasted pumpkin seeds for garnish (optional)



Directions:

Wash the chicken and cut it into pieces. Boil in 2 quarts of water for 30 – 40 minutes with half the onion, 1 head of garlic and salt. Add the cut vegetables and simmer with the meat for 10 minutes on high heat. Scoop out the meat and set aside.

Put the masa or flour in a blender or food processor with 1 cup of water. Mix well. Add to the vegetables and boil for 10 minutes. Stir continuously to prevent the masa from sticking to the bottom or forming balls.

Put the leaves of the parsley and cilantro in a blender or food processor with the allspice, cumin, oregano and jalepeños (if using). Blend well with 1 cup water until smooth. Add the vegetables along with the liquid in which they cooked. Mix a little more, only to blend the mixture. Place the chicken on a serving platter, cover with mole sauce, and serve.

Chile Rellenos

Ingredients:

6 poblano chile peppers*, stems and seeds removed
3 egg whites, beaten until foamy
1 pinch salt
6 ounces semi-soft Mexican cheese such as Oaxaca**, cut in thick strips
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 (12 ounce) jar Tomatilla Verde Mexican Cooking Sauce (available in most supermarkets)
1/2 cup water

Directions:

Set oven rack about 6 inches from the heat source and preheat the oven's broiler to high. Place poblano chiles on baking sheet lined with foil. Broil each side of chiles until skin is blistered and slightly black, turning to char evenly, about 3 to 5 minutes on each side. Remove from heat and peel off skin that is easily removed, being careful not to split the flesh.

Stuff chiles with cheese strips. Mix the salt into the beaten egg whites. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Dip stuffed chiles in egg whites, coating thoroughly, and place them in a single layer in the hot oil. Cook until browned, making sure to turn each chile at least once during the cooking process. Place cooked chiles on plate lined with paper towels.

Wipe out skillet. Arrange the chiles in one layer in the skillet and gently pour in Tomatillo Verde cooking sauce and water. Bring to a quick boil over high heat and reduce heat to low. Simmer until heated through, 5 to 10 minutes. Serve with Mexican rice, refried beans, and warm tortillas.

Cook's Notes:

*Poblano chiles are notorious for sometimes being mild or sometimes having a little kick. Always remove all seeds to prevent any unexpected spiciness. You can grill the chiles over a grilling plate or outside grill instead of broiling them.

**You can also use panela, mozzarella, or even provolone cheese.

Recipe source: <http://bit.ly/18btz5e>



Oaxacan Mexican Tacos

Ingredients:

2 pounds top sirloin steak, cut into thin strips
Salt and pepper to taste
1/4 cup vegetable oil
18 (6-inch) corn tortillas
1 medium onion, diced
4 fresh jalapeño peppers, seeded and chopped
4 limes, cut into wedges
1 bunch fresh cilantro, chopped

Directions:

Heat a large skillet over medium high heat. Fry the steak strips, stirring constantly until browned on the outside and cooked through, but not too firm (about 5 minutes). Season with salt and pepper. Remove to a plate and keep warm.

Heat the oil in the skillet and quickly fry each tortilla on both sides until lightly browned and flexible. Set aside and keep warm.

Place the tortillas on a plate and top with the steak strips, onion, jalapeno and cilantro to taste. Squeeze lime juice over. Wrap and serve.



<http://mexicanfoodrecipe.blogspot.com/2012/10/recipe-oaxacan-mexican-tacos.html>

Vegetable Medley in Garlic Chile Sauce

Ingredients:

1 pound medium-small waxy potatoes such as Red Bliss, unpeeled
8 ounces young green beans
1 cup fresh shelled peas (optional)
2 medium carrots
1/2 small cauliflower
2 or 3 ounces guajillo* chiles (about 14-20 chiles)
1 ounce Amarillo* chiles (about 10 small chiles)
1-inch piece canela* (cinnamon)
10 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped
1 teaspoon dried thyme, crumbled
6 teaspoons cider vinegar
1 1/2 to 2 teaspoons salt, or to taste
8 ounces queso fresco*, crumbled, or 4 ounces queso añejo*, grated;
or substitute equal amounts of crumbled young or grated aged ricotta
1 medium onion, cut into paper-thin half-moons
1 1/2 teaspoons dried Mexican oregano*, crumbled



Directions:

First prepare the vegetables: Have ready a large bowl of ice water, with more ice in reserve. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the potatoes and cook until barely tender, about 15 minutes (depending on their size). Lift out, drain, peel, and cut into 1/2-inch dice. Remove the strings from the green beans if necessary. Cut into short pieces (about 1/4 inch) and cook with the peas until barely tender, about 5 to 7 minutes. Scoop out the beans and peas with a strainer or slotted spoon and at once plunge them into the ice water to stop the cooking. Scoop out and drain. Peel the carrots, cut into 1/4-inch dice, and cook until barely tender, about 3 to 5 minutes, chilling and draining in the same way. Separate the cauliflower into small florets; cook until barely tender, about 4 to 6 minutes, chilling and draining in the same way. Set the vegetables aside.

Remove and discard the tops and seeds from the guajillo chiles. Rinse the guajillos under cold running water and shake off excess moisture, but do not dry them. Heat a griddle or cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat until a drop of water sizzles on contact. Place a few guajillos on the griddle and heat, turning occasionally with tongs, just until any clinging moisture is evaporated and the aroma is released, about 25 seconds. (The chiles should just become dry, hot, and fragrant; do not allow them to start really roasting or they will have a terrible scorched flavor.) Remove from the griddle as they are done, and repeat with the remaining guajillos.

Place the guajillo and amarillo chiles in a deep bowl, cover generously with boiling water, and let soak for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, grind the canela in an electric coffee or spice grinder.



Drain the chiles and place in a blender with the ground canela, garlic, thyme, vinegar and enough water to facilitate blending (about 1 cup). Process on high for about 3 minutes, until you have a smooth purée. With a wooden spoon or pusher, force the purée through a medium-mesh sieve into a bowl.

In a large non-reactive bowl (glass, stainless steel or plastic), toss the cooked vegetables with the puréed chile mixture and salt. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, preferably longer. It will be better if left overnight — or even better after two days.

When ready to serve, combine the cheese, sliced onion, and oregano in a small bowl and toss to distribute evenly. Heap the marinated vegetables on a serving platter, topping with the cheese-onion mixture. Serve with fresh corn tortillas or fried tortilla chips.

Recipe Source - <http://epi.us/18bv1EK>

***Tips:**

Guajillos are large, dark-red, dried chiles with a nutty flavor and not too much heat.

Amarillos are a small, hot, yellow-red variety with a citrusy flavor.

Canela, also called True, Mexican, Ceylon, or Sri Lanka cinnamon, is a less pungent variety than the cassia cinnamon commonly used in the U.S.

Queso Fresco is a young, crumbly, mild cow's milk cheese.

Queso Añejo is the Mexican name for any aged cheese, the most common of which is *cotija*, a hard, salty variety. Both are available by mail order from the Specialty Cheese Company at www.specialcheese.com

Mexican oregano has a more assertive flavor than the Mediterranean oregano common in the U.S. Mexican oregano is sold in Latin American groceries and in many supermarkets under the McCormick brand.

In Mexico, chiles are traditionally dry-roasted on clay implements called *comals*, which impart the perfect seared flavor. A large, heavy griddle or skillet, ideally cast iron, makes a good substitute. Avoid nonstick skillets as the coatings may peel over high heat.

Sopapilla (Crispy Mexican flatbread dessert)

Ingredients:

4 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
4 tablespoons shortening
1 ½ cups warm water
½ cup of sugar
2 quarts oil for frying

Directions:

In a large bowl, stir together flour, baking powder, salt and shortening. Stir in water; mix until dough is smooth. Cover and let stand for 20 minutes.

Roll out on floured board until 1/8 to 1/4 inch thick. Cut into 3 inch squares. Heat oil in deep-fryer to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C). Fry until golden brown on both sides. Drain on paper towels. Roll in sugar and serve hot.



Recipe source: <http://bit.ly/18bvBSM>