



## **Shrimp Cocktail (Coctel de Camarones) (Tested)**

**Serves 6 to 8**

**By Daniel Gritzer from Serious Eats**

Mexican shrimp cocktail, made from poached shrimp tossed in a flavorful sauce of ketchup, onion, cilantro, and citrus juice, is a wonderful cold summer dish. But it's often too sweet, thanks in large part to all that ketchup. This version strikes a slightly less saccharine note by replacing some of the ketchup with tomato puree, and it's spot-on perfect now.

### **Ingredients**

2 lb. shrimp, shelled and deveined (15-20 size large, or 21-25 size medium)  
2 tbsp. plus 1 tsp. kosher salt, divided, plus more to taste  
½ tsp. baking soda  
6 tbsp. fresh lime juice, from about 8 limes, divided  
1 cup diced white onion (about 1/2 large onion)  
¾ cup tomato puree  
½ cup ketchup  
3 tbsp. chopped cilantro leaves and tender stems  
2 tbsp. fresh orange juice  
1 jalapeño or serrano pepper, seeded, and finely diced  
Saltines, for serving  
Diced avocado, for garnish  
Mexican-style hot sauce, such as Tapatio, for serving

### **Directions**

In a large bowl, toss shrimp with 1 teaspoon kosher salt and the baking soda until evenly coated. Transfer to the refrigerator for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, stir together 4 tablespoons lime juice with onion, tomato puree, ketchup, cilantro, orange juice, and jalapeño.

In a medium pot, combine 2 quarts cold water with remaining 2 tablespoons lime juice

and 2 tablespoons salt. Add shrimp, set over medium-high heat, and cook, stirring occasionally, until temperature reaches 170°F on an instant-read thermometer and shrimp are just cooked through; adjust heat to make sure temperature does not go over 170°F.

Drain shrimp carefully, rinse under cold running water, then drain well. Cut shrimp into 1/2-inch pieces. Add shrimp to bowl with sauce and toss to combine. Top with avocado and serve immediately with saltines and hot sauce.

### **Tips and Instructions from the Serious Eats team**

Starting the shrimp in cold water and then heating it to no more than 170 degrees produces the plumpest, juiciest shrimp.

A quick dry brine of salt and baking soda makes the shrimp even plumper and more tender.

Recipe and photo credit with permission from Daniel Gritzer:

<http://www.seriousseats.com/recipes/2015/08/mexican-shrimp-cocktail-coctel-de-camarones-recipe.html>



### **Crispy Pork (Carnitas) (Tested)**

**Serves 8 to 10**

I have been making this carnitas recipe ever since the Bon Appetit Mexico issue came out in 2003! Adapted over the years, it is a family favorite whenever we crave Mexican food.

#### **Ingredients**

4 lb. boneless country-style pork ribs

1 large navel orange

6 large garlic cloves, peeled

2 tsp. fine sea salt

#### **Directions**

Cut the pork into 3 pieces each. Don't trim the fat, that's what will make the carnitas crisp and extra delicious!

Grab a deep 12-inch skillet and put the meat into the cold pan. Grate the zest of the orange right into the pan on top of the meat; this way none of the zest gets wasted, and the oils of the orange peel land on the meat as well. Cut the orange in half and squeeze both halves into the pan, then add the garlic cloves and salt. Mix with your hands to combine.

Cover the pan and bring to a simmer. At first the pork will steam and release a lot of juice, so there should be a fair amount of liquid in the pan to keep the meat from browning or burning. Check the meat after about half an hour and add water by the half-cup as necessary to keep the meat from sticking. Pay close attention and check under the lid every 20 minutes or so to evaluate.

Continue to cook the pork until it is very tender, about an hour and a half. Once the pork is tender, remove the lid from the pan and stir to break up the meat; it should readily fall apart. (If there is any liquid left in the pan, continue to simmer until the pan is dry and the pork is sizzling in its own fat.) Let the pork continue to cook for a bit longer to crisp, about 5 minutes.

You can easily make this one day ahead of time. When you want to serve the pork, break up the meat and place on a jelly roll pan. Slide into a hot oven, about 350 degrees, to heat and crisp. This will take about 15 to 20 minutes; you should hear the meat sizzling in the oven when ready.

Serve with tortillas and all the usual suspects.

Recipe adapted from Bon Appetit, May 2003 issue

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## **Tomatillo-Avocado Salsa (Tested)**

**Makes 2 cups**

I learned to make this salsa from my dear friend Javier, who hails from the State of Michoacán. The avocado is optional, but recommended if you want to use this salsa as a dip for tortilla chips. If you leave the avocado out, the salsa will be more vibrant and tart (the avocado mellows it), and it works well as a table salsa to be used over everything.

### **Ingredients**

1 lb. tomatillos, about 5 large  
½ of a small white onion, about 4 oz.  
1 clove garlic, peeled  
1 jalapeno pepper, seeds removed for less heat  
¼ of a bunch of cilantro, including tender stems  
1 avocado  
Juice of 1 lime  
½ tsp. salt

### **Directions**

Begin by removing the papery husks of the tomatillos. Pro tip: *Make sure you remove the husks from all of them at once and then give them a rinse, as they will be sticky.* If you peel them one at a time and rinse individually your hands will be wet and the husks will stick to the tomatillos. Cut the tomatillos in half if they are large; no need to remove the core.

Put the tomatillos, onion, garlic, and jalapeno pepper in a small pan with 1 cup of water and bring to a boil. (I did not remove the seeds from my jalapeno and I didn't find that the salsa was too spicy, but know your audience.) Simmer 6 to 8 minutes, until everything is tender. Scoop the vegetables out of the liquid in the pan and place into a food processor or blender. Add the cilantro and ½ cup fresh water; puree until smooth. Leave in the container and let cool for a bit; you don't want to add the avocado to the steaming hot tomatillos.

When cool, add the flesh of the avocado, lime juice, and salt; process until smooth. Add additional salt to taste if necessary.

Recipe: Linda McElroy

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**Pico de Gallo (Tested)**  
**Makes about 3 cups**

No Mexican feast is ever complete without this salsa; you can never have too much. Use it as a condiment for meats, in tacos, as a dip for chips, you can even eat it like a salad mixed with shredded iceberg lettuce.

**Ingredients**

5 large plum tomatoes, diced (about 1 lb.)  
1 cup finely diced onion  
1 jalapeno pepper, minced (remove seeds for less heat)  
½ cup chopped cilantro, leaves and tender stems  
1 tsp. salt  
Juice of 1 lime

**Directions**

Combine the tomatoes, onion, jalapeno, and cilantro. Just before serving add salt and lime juice. If you add the salt too far ahead of time the tomatoes will release a lot of juice and your Pico de Gallo will be soupy – which is not necessarily a bad thing. I could eat this stuff by the bowlful.

Recipe and photo credit: Linda McElroy



**Mexican Rice (Tested)**  
**Serves 6**

I hope you never pick up a box of “Mexican” rice from the grocery store aisles ever again after trying this recipe. Take care to pay attention and you will be rewarded with the best rice you’ve ever tasted.

**Ingredients**

- 1 cup long-grain white rice
- 2 large plum tomatoes, about 8 oz., cut into chunks
- ½ of a small white onion, about 3 oz., cut into chunks
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 cups chicken stock, or 2 cups water mixed with 1 tbsp. chicken bullion
- Salt
- 2 to 3 tbsp. oil
- ½ cup frozen peas, still frozen

**Directions**

Rinse the rice in a strainer until the water runs clear; turn the rice out onto paper towels or a tea towel to drain and dry a bit. You will be sautéing the rice in oil and you don’t want the rice to be wet when it hits the pan.

You’ll need to get your blender out for this. Add to the blender jar the tomato, onion, garlic, and stock. Blend until fully pureed. Taste for salt; if you’ve used unsalted chicken stock you will need to add about 1 ½ tsp. salt. If you’ve used chicken bullion, taste and add more salt if necessary. The broth should taste salty, as the rice is bland and will absorb all this flavor.

In a 10-inch non-stick fry pan heat the oil. When it starts to shimmer add the rice. Turn the heat to low; stir and toss the rice to coat with the oil. Keep cooking and stirring the rice so that it doesn’t stick, about 5 minutes. The goal is to have the rice turn from chalky

white to translucent; keep the heat low so that the rice doesn't brown. When the rice is ready it should move freely in the pan when you toss or stir.

Once the rice has achieved this status, pour in the liquid. Bring the rice to a medium boil (or what I would call a hard simmer), and stir in the frozen peas. Do not stir anymore past this point as that will break up the grains of rice; continue to boil for 6 to 7 minutes. When the rice starts showing signs of thickening along the edges of the pan, and the broth has significantly diminished by about half, it's time to turn the pan off. Cover the pan with a lid if you have one or a large piece of foil tightly crimped around the edge of the pan. Let the rice sit on the hot burner, but with the heat off, for 15 more minutes to absorb the rest of the broth and continue steaming.

Fluff the rice and turn out into a serving bowl. Accept compliments.

**To make this dish one day ahead of time** don't add the peas, and simply let the rice sit for 10 minutes instead of 15 minutes to finish cooking. This will result in slightly al dente grains. Spread the rice out on a cookie sheet so it won't continue to cook, and refrigerate when cool.

When you are ready to serve the rice, place it into an oven-proof serving dish, add the frozen peas on top, sprinkle with a few tablespoons of water, cover with foil, and warm in a 350 degree oven for 20 minutes. Now your rice should be perfectly cooked.

Recipe credit: Javier Arevalo

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



### **Rosé Sangria (Tested)**

**Serves 8**

Here is my template for “create your own sangria,” based on what you have on hand or what is available at the market. Aim for a combination of fruit that will give you a variety of different textures and tastes.

#### **Ingredients**

One bottle of your favorite rosé wine

¼ cup of liqueur, such as Cointreau, Grand Marnier, triple sec, or framboise

¼ cup honey

3 cups of assorted fruit, such as raspberries, strawberries, grapes, watermelon balls, oranges, lemons, peaches, plums, or cherries  
Sparkling water, Champagne, or prosecco  
Mint sprigs for garnish

### **Directions**

Pour the wine into a pitcher large enough to contain all the ingredients. Add the liqueur and honey; stir to dissolve.

Prepare whatever kind of fruit you are using: halve strawberries and grapes, scoop watermelon balls, slice oranges and lemons, pit and slice peaches and plums, pit cherries and tear in half. Add the fruit to the wine and chill for several hours.

Serve in your prettiest glasses, over ice, if you like. I prefer to put some ice into the pitcher just before serving. Ladle some of the fruit into your glass and you'll get some ice along with it. Top with your choice of bubbles. Garnish with mint.

### **Linda's notes**

My favorite combination is with framboise, halved strawberries, raspberries, and watermelon balls, topped with Champagne!

I've given you several options for the liqueur; hopefully you have one of those in your cabinet. But if not, and you don't want to buy an entire bottle of something, you should be able to find any of the liqueurs listed in two-ounce bottles at a liquor store.

Recipe credit: Linda McElroy

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## **Cajeta-Almond Tart with Mexican Chocolate Sauce (Tested)**

**Serves 6**

Don't be afraid of this recipe, even if you've never worked with puff pastry before. This is very easy to execute, especially if you use purchased cajeta or dulce de leche.

Cajeta is a rich Mexican caramel sauce made from goat's milk. You can find cajeta in some Latin markets, or you could use purchased dulce de leche, which is made with cow's milk. For those of you who might be inspired to make your own cajeta, I've included a recipe as well. Or you could use a previously posted recipe for [Dulce de Leche](#).

Mexican chocolate is sold in a hexagonal shaped yellow box, usually in the international aisle. If you don't wish to make a special purchase you could substitute regular semisweet chocolate for the Mexican chocolate and add 1 teaspoon of cinnamon and a few drops of almond extract.

### **Ingredients**

1 sheet frozen puff pastry (half of a 17.3 oz. package), thawed  
½ cup cajeta or dulce de leche  
1/3 cup chopped almonds, toasted  
1 egg white, beaten until foamy

Sauce:

½ cup whipping cream  
One 3.16 oz. disk Mexican chocolate, chopped  
4 oz. bittersweet (not unsweetened) or semisweet chocolate, chopped  
Ice cream for serving

### **Directions**

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Spray a heavy baking sheet with nonstick spray, or line with a sheet of parchment paper. I used the sheet of parchment paper that was rolled around the puff pastry.

Sprinkle just a bit of flour on your counter and lightly roll out the pastry sheet to a 12 by 12-inch square. Cut the sheet of pastry in half to form two 12 by 6-inch rectangles. Set aside one piece in the fridge to remain cold while you work on the other one. Transfer one piece of the pastry to the prepared baking sheet. Spread with the cajeta or dulce de leche. Make sure the cajeta is at room temperature so that you can spread it easily; if it's not at room temperature, warm it up slightly in the microwave. Sprinkle with the chopped almonds, leaving a 1-inch border along all the edges. Brush the edges of the pastry with some egg white.

Take the remaining piece of pastry out of the fridge and fold in half the long way. Make diagonal cuts along the fold, about 1 inch deep, every 2 inches. Unfold the pastry and lay it over the piece on the baking sheet, pressing edges together lightly to seal. Turn the

edges under, about ½ inch, and press the edges together with the tines of a fork. Brush the tart all over with the remaining egg white, sprinkle with sugar.

Bake until golden brown, about 20 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool completely on a rack.

While the tart is baking, bring the whipping cream to a boil in a medium saucepan and immediately remove from heat; add both chocolates. Let sit for one minute, then whisk until melted and smooth. The sauce can be made two days ahead of time; rewarm before using.

Slice (a serrated knife works well), and serve with ice cream and the chocolate sauce. Excellent choices of ice cream would be vanilla, cinnamon, or dulce de leche.

Recipe adapted from: Bon Appetit, May 2003 issue

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



### **Homemade Cajeta (Tested)**

**Makes about 1 ½ cups**

**By Pati Jinich**

Pati Jinich is the author of a blog by the same name, and also the hostess of Pati's Mexican Table, a national public TV series going on its fifth season -and very recently nominated for two James Beard Awards. She is a foremost expert on the cuisine of Mexico and joyfully shares her knowledge with her readers and TV audience. She has graciously agreed to share her recipe for Homemade Cajeta with us. Make sure you click on the link at the bottom to see her photos of how to make cajeta, and check out the rest of her awesome site for more delicious recipes at <http://patijinich.com>.

### **Ingredients**

8 cups goat's milk, you can substitute or combine with cow's milk  
2 ½ cups dark brown sugar or shredded piloncillo  
1 tbsp. vanilla extract  
½ tsp. baking soda

### **Directions**

Place a large pot over medium heat. Pour in milk, sugar, vanilla, and baking soda; give it a good stir and let it come to a simmer. Keep it at a steady medium simmer for about one and one-half hours, stirring occasionally, every 15 to 20 minutes or so, with a wooden spoon. The mix will gradually thicken and darken.

After about an hour and a half the liquid will have thickened and reduced, and the simmer will become stronger. Reduce the heat to low to keep the milk at that constant medium simmer. You want active bubbling, but not over the top angry bubbles. Stir a bit more frequently, as you don't want the bottom to develop a thicker layer.

You will know the cajeta is ready when: It achieves a caramel brown color; it is thick as liquid caramel or syrup, much like a chocolate syrup consistency; it envelops the back of the spoon; when you gently stir across the pot with your wooden spoon, a slightly delayed trail behind the spoon appears, revealing the bottom of the pot if only for a few seconds; as you slowly lift up the wooden spoon the cajeta takes its time to drop, and lastly, the sides of the pot show how the cajeta has cooked down, and if you run your spoon across that side, you get a fudgy and delicious residue.

Turn off the heat and let cool slightly, pour into a heat proof glass jar (it will thicken considerably as it cools).

This will keep in refrigerator for up to 6 months.

Linda's note: My timing was less; in about 1 hour my cajeta was finished. I think it depends on how low your simmer burner can go. Mine doesn't go that low so pay attention and stir often; it may be done sooner than you think.

Recipe and photo credit with permission: by Pati Jinich  
<http://patijinich.com/recipe/homemade-cajeta-or-dulce-de-leche/>



## Mexican Customs and Cuisine

Mexican food is a blend of indigenous (Indian) and Spanish influences. At the heart of the cuisine of this beautiful country are three very important crops: corn, beans, and chilies. These native foods are cheap and widely available. Corn has been a part of the Mexican diet forever, and it is consumed in all possible forms: as a cooked or roasted corncob (elote), as cooked grain or porridge (atole), as wrapped and steamed dough with filling (tamal), in hearty corn stew (pozole), but most importantly as a tortilla, a thin, round "pancake." Corn is eaten daily, and often at every meal.

There are many of types of chilies. The most common ones that we find in our American markets are the jalapeño, poblano, serrano, chipotle, and habaero. Herbs like cilantro and thyme are widely used, along with spices like cumin and cinnamon. Fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, tomatillos, prickly pear cactus (nopales), avocado, mango, papaya are all widely available and used in all manner of salsas and sauces.

The humble pinto bean finds its way into most meals, usually in the form of a soupy-textured refried bean served with tortillas. Chicken (pollo asado) and pork (carnitas) are the favorite meats, but beef (carne) is also eaten. Seafood is more bountiful in coastal cities.

Breakfast (desayuno) is typically a light meal of coffee, fruit and a sweet roll, but for a heartier meal huevos rancheros would be served. The most important meal of the day is lunch (comida) and normally served between 1 and 3 p.m. Supper (cena) is served late, usually after 8 p.m. and is a light snack, although in urban areas supper can be an elaborate affair eaten at restaurants.

Soft drinks such as Coca-Cola are hugely popular, along with other fruit juice based drinks. Of course beer (cerveza) and Sangria (an import from Spain) are popular beverages, but tequila might well be the national beverage. Tequila is produced from the blue agave plant that is grown mainly in the state of Jalisco, as well as a few other areas. The only country that produces tequila is Mexico, and it has achieved a "protected designation of origin" status (PDO). In other words, to receive the PDO status, the entire product must be traditionally and entirely manufactured (prepared, processed *and* produced) within the specific region and thus acquire unique

properties. It is typically served as a “shot” with salt and lime, or as a margarita.

Source materials: [www.everyculture.com](http://www.everyculture.com) and [www.foodbycountry.com](http://www.foodbycountry.com)

### **Dining Etiquette:**

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.

General Etiquette Source: [www.etiquettescholar.com](http://www.etiquettescholar.com)