

Bolivia, February 2017



Bolivian Peanut Soup (Sopa de Mani), Tested
Serves 8

Sopa de mani is a peanut soup that hails from Cochabamba, Bolivia. It is typically made with beef ribs or chicken, but it works well as a vegetarian soup, too. For this recipe, I took the liberty of substituting stewing beef chunks instead of using ribs.

One of the fun garnishes often included with this soup is fried matchstick potatoes or French fries. I leave up to you whether you are up to the task of frying potatoes. As you can see in the photo above, I made baked sweet potato fries instead of using regular potatoes.

Other traditional garnishes are fresh herbs, crusty bread and llajua, a traditional Bolivian salsa made with the locoto pepper. Just use your favorite hot sauce instead.

Ingredients

1½ lbs. beef stew meat, cut into bite-sized pieces
2 to 3 tsp. salt
8 cups of stock, or water
8 oz. skinless raw peanuts (about 1¾ cups), or use roasted if you cannot find raw peanuts
1 small onion, diced
2 small carrots, diced
½ large green bell pepper, diced
½ large red bell pepper, diced
½ cup white rice
½ cup green beans, diced
1 large clove garlic
½ tsp. ground cumin
¼ tsp. black pepper
½ cup frozen peas
Pinch of dried oregano

Garnishes

Handful fresh cilantro, sliced

Handful fresh parsley, sliced

French fried potatoes, or frozen French fries, baked

Crusty bread

Hot sauce

Directions

Grab a soup pot and add the stewing beef, salt and stock. Simmer for one hour until the meat is almost tender. Keep the pot covered to avoid too much evaporation. Feel free to skim off any foam that rises at the beginning of the simmering.

Place the peanuts in a blender jar, add one cup of water, and process until they are as finely ground as you can get them.

Once the soup has simmered for one hour, pour the peanut paste into the soup pot, along with the onion, carrots, and bell peppers.

Continue cooking for an hour. (Note: if you are using raw peanuts, it is recommended to cook them for at least an hour or risk possible indigestion.) Pay attention to keep the flame low, so that the peanut particles don't burn on the bottom of the pot and the pot does not boil over. Initially when I poured the peanut paste into the pot I walked away and noticed it just about to boil over.

At the two-hour mark, add the rice and the green beans.

Mash garlic, cumin, and black pepper together in a mortar and pestle or on a cutting board. Add to soup. You may need to add more water at this point as the rice will thicken the soup.

Simmer for another 10 minutes.

Add peas and sprinkle dried oregano over the top. Remove from heat. Don't be concerned if the rice isn't finished cooking yet, the residual heat will take care of that. Taste the soup and correct seasonings. Add additional water if the soup is too thick.

Serve the soup in shallow bowls, sprinkle fried potatoes in the center of each bowl and fresh herbs all over the top. Serve with chunks of baguette and the hot sauce on the side.

Recipe adapted from: The Bolivian Cookbook, by Rommy Holman

<https://boliviancookbook.wordpress.com/soups/sopa-de-mani/>

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Bolivian Turnovers (Salteñas), Tested

Yield: about 16

The beauty of this recipe is that it can be completely made ahead of time, frozen, and then baked on the day you need them. But do note: the filling *must* be made one day ahead of time to allow for the gelatin to set. You can also make the dough one day ahead of time, and then just assemble and bake the next day. Make sure to pull the dough out of the refrigerator ahead of time so that it can warm up before you roll it out.

The one wild card in this recipe is whether you are able to find aji amarillo pepper paste or powder. I found the powder at Whole Foods, and the paste at my local specialty shop. But if you can't locate any, just use a pinch of something else to add spice to the filling, such as cayenne or red chiles.

When dicing the potatoes and chicken, pay attention to keep your dice on the small side. The dough will be easier to roll and fill with smaller pieces in the filling. I've also included links to very short videos showing how to roll and fill the salteñas. A video is worth a thousand words!

Ingredients (filling)

- 4 tbsp. butter
- 1 cup yellow onion, chopped
- 2 green onions, chopped
- 2 tbsp. aji amarillo pepper paste, or 2 tsp. ground aji amarillo chile powder
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. ground cumin
- ½ tsp. oregano
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 2½ cups chicken stock, divided
- 1 large potato, diced small, about 2 cups
- 1 packet of gelatin
- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs, diced
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. teaspoon vinegar
- ½ cup peas
- 1 tbsp. chopped parsley

Additional ingredients (to be added during the assembly process)

- Sliced black or green olives
- Chopped hard boiled egg (about 2)
- Raisins

Directions

Melt the butter in a large pot, add the yellow onion, and sauté for a few minutes until softened. Add the green onion and sauté for one minute. Next add the pepper paste. Then add the salt, cumin, oregano, and pepper, cook for a few minutes. Add 2 cups of the chicken stock, bring to boil, add the potatoes and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes.

Pour the remaining ½ cup of chicken stock into a small bowl, sprinkle the gelatin packet over the stock and let it soften.

Add the chicken to the pot, and simmer until the chicken is done, about 5 more minutes. Add the sugar, vinegar, peas, and parsley. Taste and correct seasoning.

Stir in the softened gelatin and refrigerate overnight to set up.

Ingredients (dough)

4 cups flour
2 tbsp. sugar
½ tsp. salt
1 stick (1/2 cup) melted butter
2 eggs, divided
about 1 cup of warm water

Directions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees, line a cookie sheet with parchment paper or foil, and grease with non-stick spray.

In a food processor, mix together the flour, sugar and salt. Pour in the melted butter, one of the eggs, and about ¾ cup warm water. Process until the dough forms a ball, and if you need to add extra water, add just a little bit at a time. The dough should be slightly firm, not sticky. This can also be done in a mixer or by hand.

Let the dough rest on the counter (covered with a towel so it does not dry out) for about 10 minutes. After it rests, divide the dough into 2-ounce portions, or about 16 balls. Roll out each ball to about the size and thickness of a 5- to 6-inch corn tortilla.

At this point, you are ready to assemble the salteñas, adding the additional filling ingredients to each in the assembly process. Don't skip this step, as these ingredients really add interest to the filling.

To see short videos on how to fill and form salteñas click on these links:

Method 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-HByGUgySE>

Method 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDR_Lm7MmXE

You're back! Now I have some tips for you. I showed you two methods. The first method formed and filled the salteñas flat on the counter, without lifting them up. They were also baked flat. The second method formed and filled the salteñas in hand. They were baked sitting upright, with the braid facing up.

I tried both methods and found that I used a hybrid. What worked for me was putting the filling in the dough circle while still on the countertop, but then instead of folding the dough while flat, I pulled the edges of the dough up (so that it was sitting upright like a little packet), and pressed the edges together that way. Then I laid the packet flat to crimp the edges together. I also found that I needed to slightly moisten the edges to crimp, as there was still a bit of flour that prevented the edges from sealing well. As I went along, my technique got better and better. You will just have to experiment and see what works best for you.

Once you have finished making all the packets and placed them on your prepared baking sheet (braided end up),

crack the remaining egg into a small bowl and beat well with a fork. Using a pastry brush, generously coat each salteña with the egg wash. This will help give them a golden shine.

Now, turn the oven down to 375 degrees and bake until the salteñas are browned, about 25 minutes. Watch for excessive browning. If the tops get too dark, lay a piece of foil over them to prevent burning.

You can also store the assembled salteñas in the freezer until you are ready to bake them. Place the frozen salteñas on a parchment-lined baking sheet (don't forget to brush with egg wash) and bake an extra five minutes.

Recipe adapted from: <https://dulceandsalado.com/2013/01/03/saltenas/>

Photo credit: Linda McElroy

Culture

Bolivia is the fifth largest country in South America. It was named after Simon Bolívar, the 19th century leader of the wars waged against the Spanish conquerors. Bolivia achieved independence in 1825. Bolivia has a rugged geography that encompasses the high cold plateaus of the Andes Mountains, numerous valleys and vast lowland tropical rain forests. About 50 percent of Bolivia is forest. Most Bolivians live in the highlands. The country is land locked in central west area of South America and borders Peru, Chile, Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil.

The population is approximately 11 million. About 30 percent of Bolivians are of mixed European and indigenous heritage and many consider themselves direct descendants of the Incas. Spanish is the national language, but many Bolivians speak native languages including Quechua, the ancient language of the Incas, Aymara, and Guarani. Most Bolivians are Catholic. Other Christian faiths make up less than 10 percent of the population. The culture is influenced by the historical Spanish presence blended with native identity.

Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in South America and has high levels of poverty, limited education, high rates of malnutrition, high mortality and poor life expectancy. Fertility rates are high due to lack of family planning resources. This leads to high infant and maternal death rates. A lack of access to clean water sources creates a high risk of waterborne and infectious diseases.

A lack of industrialized development and misuse of land resources has led to a rate of food production that does not keep pace with the population growth.

Bolivians celebrate many religious holidays with festivals that blend Christianity and ancient religious customs. These festivals are an important part of life and the festival parades feature dancers in traditional, elaborate and very colorful costumes and masks.

Cuisine

Potatoes in many different varieties are the staple food in the highlands. Quinoa is also a staple and is a chief crop. Other grains and vegetables include barley, rice, maize, legumes, soybeans, sugar corn, beans and many fresh vegetables. Brazil nuts, coconuts and coffee are also grown. Pre-Columbian crops are peanuts, white potatoes and squash. Meats include pork, fish, poultry and, to a lesser amount, beef and lamb. Staples include freeze-dried potatoes called “chuno” and air-dried jerky called “ch’ark.”

Bolivia is famous for queso do Paria. This soft, un-ripened sheep milk cheese was introduced to the indigenous natives by the Spanish conquistadores.

Meals are family-centered with the lunch as the main meal of the day. Dishes include humitas, which are corn-filled pies, meat-filled turnovers called “saliensa,” and boiled potatoes with hard boiled eggs called “almuerzo.” Popular dishes are spicy thick stews and roasted pig for special occasions. Most meals are served with hot pepper sauce.

Bolivians enjoy chicka, a beer made from maize, coffee and yerba mate.

Sources

everyculture.com

Bolivia.com

CIA World Fact Book

World Book Encyclopedia

Cambridge World History of Food

Photo credit: Linda McElroy