

**Cook**

# Oaxacan

**in America**



Recipes with love from

**The Robot Book  
Club**

# **Cook Oaxacan in America**

*Authentic Home Cooking from Mexico's Culinary Heart*

The Robot Book Club

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# Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: Oaxacan Home Cooking.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

# Prologue

Oaxaca. The name itself conjures something primal. Earth and smoke, the whisper of nixtamalized corn. It's a place where history isn't just taught; it's eaten, one masa-pinched *memela* at a time, one sip of frothy chocolate. A cuisine sculpted by seventeen indigenous groups, their stories layered into every mole, every tortilla—a testament to resilience and flavor.

But for a generation navigating new landscapes, far from the ancient *comales* and sprawling markets, that truth can feel like a fading echo. This isn't a whitewashed fantasy or a tourist brochure. This is for the kitchens that smell of roasted chiles and simmering beans, the ones where the language of home still rings true.

This is about preserving the uncompromised soul of Oaxacan cooking. For those who yearn for the visceral taste of home, the memory of grandmother's practiced hands, even if 'home' is now an Ohio suburb and the 'kitchen' has a stainless-steel convection oven. We're not asking you to build a *brasero* in your backyard. We are, however, asking you to taste the distinction, to feel the heritage.

It's about the honest labor, the deliberate hands, the patience demanded by a true *mole negro*, or the sheer joy of a perfectly crisp *tlayuda*. It's understanding that the magic isn't just in the heirloom corn or the specific chile, but in the rhythm, the intention, the knowledge passed down.

Here, the sacred alchemy of corn, beans, and chiles isn't a distant concept; it's the quiet intimacy of morning *memelas*, the bustling energy of recreating street food cravings, the elaborate, deeply communal Sunday *comida* featuring complex moles. It's what sustains, what remembers, what connects across generations and continents.

These are the recipes for kitchens that hum with the quiet defiance of tradition. For cooks who refuse to let distance dilute the flavor, who understand that authenticity isn't a fixed address, but a living, breathing connection. Roll up your sleeves. The journey to keep home alive, vibrant and delicious, begins now.





# Mañanas en la Cocina: Breakfasts & Morning Rhythms

*The quiet intimacy of morning meals, featuring the sensory experience of toasted masa, frothy chocolate, and the comforting smells of home.*

Long before the sun demands your attention, the comal is already awake. There is a specific, unmistakable alchemy to a Oaxacan morning: the sharp, earthy scent of toasted masa hitting hot metal, the rich sputter of rendered asiento, the frantic wooden clatter of a molinillo coaxing foam from a clay pitcher. These are not the hurried, dashboard breakfasts of the modern commute. These are rituals of sustenance, muscle memories passed down to the hands now pressing dough on a quiet Sunday morning.

It is food meant to fortify. You pinch the edges of a memela to cradle the salsa. You fold a tetela around a dense core of black beans and melting quesillo. You drag tortillas through an unfussy, avocado-leaf-laced broth for a plate of enfrijoladas. It is simple, unpretentious work—the kind that quietly fills a kitchen with the ghosts of generations past, while feeding the kids waiting at the table right now.





# Memelas con Asiento y Quesillo

*meh-MEH-las con ah-SYEN-toe ee keh-SEE-yo*

If a standard tortilla is the flat plate of Mexico, the memela is its deeply savory, edible bowl. Thicker than a taco, with edges pinched by heat-calloused fingers, it's the morning rhythm of Oaxaca. The difference between the real thing and a generic corn cake comes down to two grandmotherly secrets: asiento—a roasted, unctuous pork paste—and the subtle, anise-like kiss of toasted avocado leaves in the beans. You don't have eight hours to render pork fat on a Tuesday before work. I get it. So we hack it, blitzing quality lard with crispy chicharrones. It's

a five-minute umami bomb that brings the griddles of the Valles Centrales straight to your kitchen, no apologies or compromises required.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 cup</b>	pork lard	<b>1 clove</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	crispy pork rinds	<b>1 tbsp</b>	lard
<b>1 pinch</b>	fine sea salt	<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt <i>to taste</i>
<b>15 oz</b>	canned black beans <i>undrained</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>2</b>	dried avocado leaves	<b>1 3/4 cup</b>	warm water
<b>2</b>	dried chiles de árbol <i>stems removed</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fine sea salt
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	Quesillo <i>pulled apart</i>
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	salsa

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the quick asiento.**

In a food processor, combine the pork rinds, half-cup of lard, and a pinch of fine sea salt. Pulse the mixture until it turns into a completely smooth, gritty paste. Set aside.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the aromatics.**

Heat a dry skillet or comal over medium. Toss in the avocado leaves and the chiles de árbol, toasting them for 60 to 90 seconds until they release a beautiful, earthy aroma. Flip them once and do not let them burn.

**1. Blend the bean puree.**

Transfer the toasted leaves and chiles to a blender. Dump in the entire can of black beans with their liquid, along with the chopped onion and garlic clove. Blend on high until the mixture is perfectly smooth.

**2. Refry the beans.**

Heat one tablespoon of lard in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Carefully pour in the bean puree—it will sputter. Lower the heat to medium and cook for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring frequently, until it reduces to a thick, spreadable paste. Salt to taste and keep it warm.

**3. Hydrate the masa.**

In a large bowl, whisk together the masa harina and a half-teaspoon of fine sea salt. Gradually pour in the warm water, mixing and kneading with your hands for 2 to 3 minutes until the dough feels like soft playdough. Cover the bowl with a damp towel so it doesn't dry out.

**4. Press the memelas.**

Pinch off a piece of masa and roll it into a ball slightly larger than a golf ball. Line a tortilla press with a split-open plastic zip-top bag and press the masa gently into a disc about 5 inches wide and 1/4-inch thick.

**5. Toast on the comal.**

Carefully peel away the plastic and lay the thick masa disc onto a hot, dry cast-iron skillet over medium heat. Let it cook for about 2 minutes until the bottom sets and releases easily, then flip it over.

**6. Pinch the borders.**

Once the memela is flipped and cooked through, immediately transfer it to a cutting board. While it is still steaming hot, quickly use your fingertips to pinch a raised lip around the entire edge.

### 1. **Assemble and serve.**

Return the pinched memela to the hot skillet. Immediately smear a half-teaspoon of your homemade asiento across the center, letting the pork fat melt into the hot corn. Spread a spoonful of the warm black bean paste over the fat, and top with a generous tuft of pulled Quesillo. Let it cook for one more minute until the bottom is crispy and the cheese begins to melt. Spoon over your favorite salsa and serve immediately.

### CHEF'S NOTES

- **The botanical secret.**

If you cannot find dried avocado leaves at your local Latin market, do not substitute with standard bay leaves. Add a tiny 1/4 teaspoon pinch of toasted, ground anise seed to the blender to mimic the licorice-like notes of the authentic leaf.

- **Liquid gold.**

The quick asiento hack yields more than you need for one morning. Store the extra in a mason jar in the fridge for up to a month. It is a secret weapon that instantly upgrades fried eggs, standard refried beans, or roasted vegetables.



# Tetelas Mixtecas Rellenas de Frijol y Quesillo

*teh-TEH-las meesh-TEH-cas reh-YEH-nas deh free-HOLE ee keh-SEE-yo*

If you want to know what the morning air smells like in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, you just need to toast an avocado leaf. Tetelas are gorgeous, geometric pockets of masa stuffed with rich black beans and melted string cheese, engineered centuries ago as field provisions that wouldn't leak or spoil. Forget the watered-down diaspora hacks that tell you to mash canned beans with vegetable oil. To recreate the exact, soul-warming taste of a Mexican grandmother's kitchen, you need the toasted, anise-like aroma of dried avocado leaves and the rich depth of real manteca. Respect the masa, don't overstuff them, and let the hot cast-iron do the work.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 tbsp</b>	manteca or pork lard	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/4 cup</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	premium masa harina
<b>1 large clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1 3/4 cup</b>	warm water
<b>3 med</b>	dried hojas de aguacate	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	cooked black beans <i>rinsed and drained if canned</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	quesillo or Oaxaca cheese <i>shredded</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	bean cooking liquid or chicken broth	<b>1/4 cup</b>	Mexican crema
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	salsa verde or roja

## PREPARATION

- **Toast the avocado leaves to awaken their essential oils.**

Place a dry skillet over medium heat and toast the hojas de aguacate for a few seconds on each side until highly fragrant. Be careful not to burn them, then crumble them into a blender.

- **Sauté the aromatics and puree the beans.**

Melt half the manteca in the same skillet, add the onion and garlic, and sauté until soft and translucent. Transfer to the blender with the crumbled leaves, black beans, a splash of cooking liquid, and a teaspoon of salt, then puree until smooth.

- **Fry the bean paste until thick and dry.**

Return the puree to the skillet with the remaining manteca and fry over medium-low heat, stirring constantly. The beans must reduce into a thick, creamy paste that spreads like peanut butter; if they are watery, the steam will rupture your masa on the griddle. Set aside to cool completely.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Hydrate the masa to the texture of soft clay.**

In a large bowl, mix the masa harina and salt, slowly pouring in the warm water while kneading with your hands. Test the hydration by rolling a golf-ball-sized piece and pressing your thumb into it; if the edges crack deeply, work in a tablespoon more water. Keep the bowl covered with a damp towel.

### 2. **Press the masa into sturdy tortillas.**

Place a one and a half ounce portion of dough between two sheets of heavy-duty plastic on a tortilla press. Press down firmly to create a circle about six inches across, slightly thicker than a standard taco tortilla.

### 3. **Add the filling without overstuffing.**

Remove the top layer of plastic. Spoon one and a half tablespoons of the cooled bean paste directly into the center of the masa and top with a small pinch of shredded cheese.

### 4. **Execute the triangular fold.**

Using the bottom plastic sheet to assist in lifting the delicate dough, fold the left third of the tortilla inward over the filling. Fold the right third inward to overlap it, and finally fold the bottom flap upward to close the parcel into a neat triangle. Gently pat the seams to seal.

### 5. **Dry-roast the tetelas on a hot comal.**

Heat a dry cast-iron skillet or comal over medium heat until hot but not smoking. Place the tetelas seam-side down first to lock the folds in place. Cook for two to three minutes per side until the masa turns opaque and develops beautiful charred spots.

### 6. **Serve like a local.**

Eat them piping hot as handheld pockets, or slit them down the middle and dress the interior with crema, salsa, and a flurry of crumbled queso fresco.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Embrace prep division for weeknight cooking.**

Make the authentic bean paste on a Sunday. Once the beans are waiting in your fridge, pressing and folding these tetelas fresh on a Tuesday morning takes barely twenty minutes.



# Enfrijoladas de la Abuela con Hoja de Aguacate

*en-free-ho-LAH-das*

In Oaxaca, a plate of enfrijoladas means you are home, and you are loved. While tourists chase complex, twenty-ingredient moles, this humble morning staple fuels the working day. It relies on a simple thermodynamic trick to elevate pantry staples: toasting the avocado leaf to wake up its intoxicating anise aroma, and searing the blended bean purée in hot fat until it transforms into a rich, velvety sauce. It is a frugal, deeply comforting dish, adapted here with canned beans for a busy Tuesday night without sacrificing an ounce of its ancestral soul.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>30 oz</b>	canned whole black beans <i>undrained</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	sea salt <i>to taste</i>
<b>1 med</b>	dried chile de árbol <i>stemmed and seeded</i>	<b>12 med</b>	corn tortillas <i>slightly dry or stale</i>
<b>2 med</b>	dried Mexican avocado leaves	<b>1/3 cup</b>	vegetable oil <i>for frying</i>
<b>1/2 small</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>
<b>2 med clove</b>	garlic <i>smashed</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Mexican crema
<b>1/2 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken broth	<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>sliced into ultra-thin half-moons</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil <i>divided</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>chopped</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Awaken the aromatics on a dry skillet.

Heat a dry, heavy skillet over medium heat. Toast the chile de árbol and avocado leaves, pressing down lightly with a spatula, until the chile puffs and the leaves release a distinct anise scent, about 15 to 30 seconds. Remove from the heat immediately so they do not burn.

### 2. Infuse the beans quickly.

In a medium saucepan, heat 1 tablespoon of oil over medium heat. Sauté the chopped onion and smashed garlic until translucent and browned at the edges. Pour in the undrained black beans, chicken broth, toasted chile, and avocado leaves. Bring to a gentle simmer, cover, and cook for 10 minutes to mimic an all-day simmer.

**1. Blend the sauce into a velvet purée.**

Remove the saucepan from the heat. Crucially, fish out the avocado leaves and discard them to avoid a gritty texture. Transfer the remaining bean mixture to a blender and process on high until completely smooth. The texture should resemble heavy cream; add a splash of warm water or broth if it is too thick.

**2. Sear the purée in hot fat.**

Wipe the saucepan clean or use a deep skillet. Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil over medium-high heat until nearly smoking. Carefully pour in the blended bean purée—stand back, as it will sputter aggressively. Reduce the heat to medium-low, season generously with sea salt, and let the sauce bubble and reduce for 10 minutes.

**3. Soft-fry the tortillas to create a structural barrier.**

In a separate skillet, heat 1/3 cup of oil over medium-high. Using metal tongs, slide a corn tortilla into the hot oil for just 5 to 10 seconds per side. It should blister slightly but remain soft and pliable, not crispy. Briefly drain on a paper towel-lined plate and repeat with the remaining tortillas.

**4. Bathe the tortillas and assemble the plate.**

Working quickly while everything is hot, submerge each fried tortilla entirely into the simmering bean sauce. Transfer to a serving plate, fold in half and then in half again to form a triangle. Overlap three folded tortillas per plate.

**5. Garnish heavily and serve immediately.**

Ladle an extra spoonful of the velvety bean sauce over the top. Drizzle aggressively with crema in a zigzag pattern, then shower the plate with crumbled queso fresco, thin white onion slices, and fresh parsley.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing the right avocado leaves.**

Ensure you are using dried Mexican avocado leaves (*Persea drymifolia*), found in most Latin markets. Common Hass avocado leaves lack the essential oils and can be toxic. If unavailable, substitute 1/8 teaspoon of toasted fennel seed to mimic the necessary anise flavor profile.

- **The importance of soft-frying the tortillas.**

Dipping a raw tortilla straight into wet bean purée results in a disintegrating mush. Passing the tortillas through hot oil creates a lipid barrier, ensuring they hold their structure while soaking up the sauce.



# El Chocolate de Agua y Pan Marquesote

*el cho-co-lah-teh deh ah-gwah ee pahn mar-keh-so-teh*

In Oaxaca, chocolate is a ritual, not a candy, and certainly not a vehicle for warm milk. The ancestral Mesoamerican method demands water to act as a magnifying glass for the roasted, acidic complexity of the cacao, brought to a foaming spirit with a wooden molinillo. To complete the morning rhythm, there is Pan Marquesote—a dry, fat-free sponge cake from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec made with rice flour, whose sole purpose in the universe is to be torn apart and dunked directly into that spiced, frothy liquid.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 cup</b>	filtered water	<b>1 cup</b>	granulated sugar
<b>150 g</b>	Oaxacan chocolate tablets <i>broken into large pieces</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	rice flour
<b>6 large</b>	eggs <i>separated into whites and yolks while cold</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	baking powder
		<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fresh lime juice

## PREPARATION

- **Bring the separated egg whites to room temperature.**

Cold eggs separate cleanly, but room-temperature whites whip into a much better, more stable foam.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and prepare the baking pan.**

Grease an 8x8-inch square pan and line the bottom with parchment paper to ensure the fragile sponge doesn't stick.

- 2. Sift the dry ingredients to guarantee an airy crumb.**

In a small bowl, whisk together the rice flour and baking powder.

- 3. Whip the egg whites and lime juice to stiff, glossy peaks.**

In a large, impeccably clean bowl, beat the whites and lime juice with an electric mixer on medium-high until frothy, then slowly shower in half the sugar; the lime juice acts as a stabilizer and cuts the heavy egg aroma.

- 4. Gently incorporate the egg yolks and remaining sugar.**

Lower the mixer speed and add the yolks one at a time, followed by the rest of the sugar, mixing just until the yellow is streaked through.

**1. Fold the dry ingredients into the aerated eggs by hand.**

Put the mixer away and use a rubber spatula to gently fold the sifted rice flour mixture into the eggs in three batches, using a sweeping under-and-over motion to avoid deflating the batter.

**2. Bake the Marquesote until deeply golden.**

Pour the batter gently into the prepared pan and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out completely clean.

**3. Cool the sponge gradually to prevent it from collapsing.**

Turn the oven off, crack the door slightly, and let the pan sit inside for 10 minutes before removing it to slice.

**4. Steep the chocolate in boiling water off the heat.**

While the cake cools, bring the filtered water to a rolling boil in a medium saucepan, remove from the heat, drop in the chocolate pieces, and let sit undisturbed for 5 minutes so the hot water does the melting.

**5. Vigorously aerate the chocolate to summon its spirit.**

Using a traditional wooden molinillo or a wire whisk, aggressively rub the handle back and forth between your palms to dissolve the chocolate and create a thick, dense layer of foam on top.

**6. Serve the foaming chocolate immediately with slices of the dry sponge.**

Ensure every mug gets a generous spoonful of the foam, ready to receive the torn pieces of Marquesote.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **Finding authentic Oaxacan chocolate is worth a trip to the local Latin market.**

Brands like Mayordomo, Guelaguetza, or Chocolate con Alas are widely available in the United States and contain the requisite rustic texture, sugar, and Ceylon cinnamon.

- **A weeknight substitution can replicate the chocolate's texture in a pinch.**

If authentic tablets are completely unavailable, substitute 150 grams of 75 percent dark chocolate, two tablespoons of finely ground almond flour, one Ceylon cinnamon stick, and two tablespoons of sugar.



## Huevos al Comal sobre Hoja Santa

Grow up in an Ohio suburb with the smell of roasting chiles in the kitchen? This is the dish that takes you straight back to the old country. In rural Oaxaca, this is the ultimate everyday breakfast—zero fat, zero pretense, and on the table in under ten minutes. The secret lies entirely in the fresh hoja santa leaf. As it hits a blazing-hot cast-iron skillet, it acts as a steamer, a cooking vessel, and a potent seasoning all at once, infusing the egg with an intoxicating hit of anise and sassafras. Don't bother trying to fake it with fennel fronds; head to the local Latin market, track down the real leaves, and taste exactly what a true Oaxacan morning is supposed to be.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 large</b>	fresh hoja santa leaves <i>washed, patted completely dry, thick central stems shaved flat</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>2 large</b>	pasture-raised eggs	<b>4 small</b>	corn tortillas <i>warmed</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	coarse sea salt	<b>1 cup</b>	refried black beans <i>warmed</i>
		<b>4 tbsp</b>	roasted tomatillo salsa

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the leaves carefully.**

The thick, rubbery central stem of the hoja santa must be gently shaved down with a paring knife so the leaf lies flat and does not snap when folded over the egg.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat a heavy skillet until roaring hot.**

Place a large cast-iron skillet or carbon steel flat griddle over medium heat. If your pan tends to stick, wipe the surface with a microscopic sheen of neutral oil using a paper towel, but aim for a dry roast.

- 2. Construct the packet.**

Place a prepared leaf flat on the hot skillet, smooth side down, and immediately crack an egg directly onto its center, seasoning it generously with the coarse sea salt.

- 3. Fold the leaf to form an envelope.**

Working quickly, fold the four edges of the leaf inward over the egg white to trap it inside so it steams; if the leaf is too small, simply slap a second leaf upside-down over the top to seal it.

**1. Roast and flip the packet.**

Leave it completely alone for 2 to 3 minutes until the egg white sets and glues the leaf shut, then slide a wide spatula underneath and confidently flip the entire thing.

**2. Finish and serve immediately.**

Cook for another 1 to 2 minutes on the second side depending on your yolk preference, then transfer to a plate and serve alongside the warm refried beans, tomatillo salsa, and tortillas, eating the toasted leaf and egg together.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The indispensable leaf.**

There is no substitute for fresh hoja santa here. If you cannot find it at your local Latin grocer, simply toast the eggs on a dry skillet Oaxacan-style rather than trying to fake the flavor with other herbs.

● **The beans.**

For unquestionable authenticity, simmer your black beans with a dried Oaxacan avocado leaf before refrying. It bridges perfectly with the anise flavor of the eggs.



## Salsa de Huevo con Chile de Agua

If there is a dish that immediately yanks a child of the Oaxacan diaspora back to their mother's kitchen, it is this one. This isn't the heavy, cheese-smothered hangover cure of Hollywood's Mexico. It is an exercise in agrarian brilliance: farm eggs, deeply charred tomatoes, the undeniable punch of fresh epazote, and the sharp heat of regional chiles. The true chile de agua is hard to find north of the border, but substituting serranos and a grassy Anaheim pepper keeps the grandmother's secret intact. Keep the salsa thin, fry the eggs into a pale sponge, and let it all simmer together into something that tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	Roma tomatoes	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	water
<b>2 med</b>	Serrano peppers	<b>1 1/4 tsp</b>	Kosher salt <i>divided</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	Anaheim pepper	<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral vegetable oil or lard <i>divided</i>
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion	<b>6 large</b>	eggs
<b>2 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 large</b>	fresh epazote sprig

## PREPARATION

- **Set up your blending station before you begin.**

Have your blender, water, and salt ready near the stove. The charred vegetables will go straight from the hot pan into the pitcher.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Char the vegetables until deeply blackened and blistered.**

Heat a dry cast-iron skillet or comal over medium-high heat. Drop in the whole tomatoes, serrano peppers, Anaheim pepper, onion, and garlic. Remove the garlic and onion once they soften and brown. Let the tomatoes and chiles continue to roast until blistered and nearly bursting. Leave those charred skins on.

- 2. Blend the roasted vegetables into a coarse, watery broth.**

Transfer the charred vegetables to a blender. Add 1 cup of the water and 1 teaspoon of the salt. Pulse until broken down into a rustic, soupy salsa (a caldillo). It should not be a perfectly smooth puree. Add the remaining half cup of water if it seems too thick.

**1. Fry the beaten eggs into a flat, pale omelet.**

Beat the eggs in a bowl with the remaining 1/4 teaspoon of salt. Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil or lard in a wide skillet over medium-low heat. Pour in the eggs. Do not scramble them. Let the omelet set gently without browning the edges, flip to cook through, and chop it directly in the pan into large, bite-sized squares. Remove the egg to a plate.

**2. Fry the blended broth in the skillet.**

In the same skillet, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil over medium-high. Pour in the blended salsa—it should sizzle and spit beautifully. Drop in the fresh epazote sprig, lower the heat, and simmer for 3 to 4 minutes to let the herb perfume the sauce.

**3. Soak the egg squares in the simmering broth.**

Slide the reserved egg pieces back into the bubbling caldillo. Simmer gently for a final 2 minutes so the pale, spongy eggs absorb the spicy, herbaceous liquid without falling apart. Serve immediately with warm corn tortillas.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Replicating the Chile de Agua.**

Because authentic chile de agua is notoriously difficult to source in the States, blending the sharp heat of serranos with the fleshy, grassy depth of half an Anaheim pepper creates a surprisingly accurate flavor homage.

● **Do not substitute the epazote.**

If you cannot find fresh epazote at your local Latin market, use 1 teaspoon of dried. Cilantro has no place in this dish; the pungent, slightly medicinal bite of epazote is non-negotiable for authentic flavor.



## Empanadas de Chorizo y Quesillo al Comal

In Oaxaca, an empanada isn't an oven-baked pastry or a deep-fried pocket. It is a celebration of the comal, born in bustling morning markets where large, thin half-moons of corn masa are toasted on hot griddles. The secret to recreating that unmistakable aroma on a Midwestern weeknight is twofold: fortifying the dough with a spoonful of manteca, and letting the spiced red oils of the chorizo bleed into the masa from the inside out. It is a masterpiece of simplicity that demands no special equipment—just hot metal, good masa, and the patience to wait for the quesillo to stretch.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 lb</b>	authentic Mexican pork chorizo <i>casings removed</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	Queso Oaxaca <i>pulled apart by hand into fine strings</i>
<b>1/8 tsp</b>	ground clove	<b>2 cup</b>	Masa Harina
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	apple cider vinegar	<b>1 3/4 cup</b>	warm water
		<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1 tbsp</b>	pork lard

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the tortilla press liners.**

Cut the side seams off a heavy-duty zip-top freezer bag to create two sturdy plastic sheets for pressing the sticky masa.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Brown the chorizo until the fat renders and the meat crisps.**

Heat a skillet over medium heat. Mix the chorizo with the ground clove and apple cider vinegar to mimic the regional Oaxacan flavor profile, then cook for 6 to 8 minutes while breaking it apart. Remove the meat to a paper towel with a slotted spoon, leaving the rendered red fat in the pan.

- 2. Hydrate the masa harina with the warm water, salt, and lard.**

In a large bowl, mix the masa, salt, and lard, slowly kneading in the warm water until the dough feels like soft, pliable playdough. Divide the masa into four tangerine-sized spheres and cover them with a damp towel so they do not dry out.

- 3. Press the masa into large, thin circles.**

Preheat a heavy comal or wide cast-iron skillet over medium-low heat. Using your plastic-lined tortilla press, firmly flatten each masa ball into a 6-inch to 7-inch circle.

**1. Toast the raw tortilla on the hot comal.**

Peel the plastic away and gently lay the masa flat onto the dry, hot metal. Let it cook for roughly 60 seconds, just until the edges lift slightly and the dough easily releases from the pan.

**2. Add the cheese and chorizo, then fold the tortilla into a half-moon.**

Flip the tortilla, immediately cover one half with a generous handful of the stringed quesillo and a spoonful of the cooked chorizo, and fold the empty half over the top. Press the edges down gently with a spatula to seal.

**3. Cook until the cheese melts and the crust stains red.**

Move the folded empanada to a slightly cooler edge of the comal, cooking for 3 to 5 minutes per side until the quesillo turns to hot strings and the escaping chorizo oils toast the masa to a brilliant, crispy orange.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Use the right cheese and handle it correctly.**

Authentic Oaxacan empanadas require Quesillo, sold in most American Latin markets as Queso Oaxaca. Never grate it; it must be pulled apart by hand into fine strings to achieve its signature, elastic melt.



# Higadito Falso

*ee-gah-dee-toh fahl-soh*

In the Central Valleys of Oaxaca, this is the ultimate hangover cure and post-party restorative—a towering, spongy cake of eggs historically fortified with pork liver. But as the dish migrated, practical cooks swapped the metallic tang of offal for shredded chicken and rich bone broth, creating this "falso" version. It keeps the soul of the dish intact: an intoxicating, saffron-laced spice blend and a masterful technique of braising the eggs in the hot broth. It's a brilliant weeknight adaptation that smells exactly like a village fiesta and tastes like your abuela is standing right there in your kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 tbsp</b>	pork lard	<b>2 cup</b>	cooked chicken <i>shredded</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1/8 tsp</b>	ground cloves
<b>3 small clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>2 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1/8 tsp</b>	saffron threads <i>crushed</i>
<b>4 med</b>	tomatillos <i>husked, rinsed, and finely diced</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
<b>3 cup</b>	chicken bone broth	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>8 large</b>	eggs
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the lard in a wide Dutch oven over medium heat and cook the onion until translucent.**

Take your time here to let the onions sweeten for about four minutes before adding the garlic to cook for one minute more.

- 2. Fry the tomatoes, tomatillos, and spices into a thick paste.**

Add the tomatoes, tomatillos, cloves, cumin, saffron, oregano, and salt, cooking them down for a few minutes until they soften and release their juices into a rich, jammy base.

- 3. Pour in the bone broth and bring to a gentle simmer.**

Once simmering, stir in the shredded chicken and let it bathe for five minutes so the meat absorbs the deep, earthy flavors.

- 4. Vigorously beat the eggs with the chopped parsley and pour them slowly over the simmering broth.**

Stop right there and do not stir, or you will end up with cloudy, disappointing scrambled egg soup.

**1. Gently fold the cooking eggs to form a cohesive, spongy cake.**

Wait thirty seconds for the edges to set, then use a wooden spoon to push the cooked egg toward the center, allowing raw egg to flow into the hot broth at the edges. Repeat this gentle braising motion for about eight minutes until you have large, textured curds soaking up the liquid.

**2. Remove from the heat and let the pan rest for three minutes before serving.**

Ladle generous chunks of the egg cake and saffron-laced broth into wide bowls, serving piping hot alongside fresh corn tortillas and a fiery red salsa.



# Frijoles de la Olla con Huevos y Salsa Pasilla-Miltomate

*free-HOH-lehs deh lah OH-yah kohn WEH-vohs ee SAHL-sah pah-SEE-yah meel-toh-MAH-teh*

If you want to know what a real Oaxacan morning smells like, it is the earthy, medicinal steam of epazote rising from a pot of black beans, cutting through the intoxicating smoke of toasted chiles. In Oaxaca, this isn't a dainty breakfast; it is an almuerzo designed to fortify you for the day, relying on techniques an abuela would swear by: salting beans only when they are completely tender, and drowning fluffy scrambled eggs directly in the hot salsa so they swell like smoky, tart sponges. Finding authentic Sierra Mixe pasillas in an Ohio suburb is

nearly impossible, so we use a generational diaspora trick—blending standard, raisiny pasillas with dried morita to recreate that profound, ancestral woodsmoke.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	dried black beans <i>rinsed and picked over</i>	<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>3 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	water or low sodium chicken broth
<b>1 tbsp</b>	pork lard or olive oil	<b>8 large</b>	eggs
<b>1 large</b>	sprig fresh epazote	<b>1 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt and black pepper
<b>3 med</b>	dried standard pasilla chiles <i>wiped clean stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>8 med</b>	warm corn tortillas
<b>2 med</b>	dried morita chiles <i>wiped clean stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	miltomates or tomatillos <i>husked and rinsed</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro and white onion <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>2 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>unpeeled</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Pick over the dried black beans to remove any small stones or debris.**  
Rinse them thoroughly under cold water before cooking to ensure the broth is clean and earthy.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Cook the beans with a strict late-salting rule to guarantee perfectly tender skins.**

Add the beans, the half onion, three peeled garlic cloves, lard, and 6 cups of water to an electric pressure cooker and cook on high pressure for 35 minutes before allowing a natural release, or simmer in a heavy pot on the stove with 8 cups of water for about an hour and a half.

- 2. Simmer the tender beans with epazote and salt to build the rich savory broth.**

Once the beans are completely soft, drop in the fresh epazote and the 1 1/2 teaspoons of salt, simmering gently for 15 more minutes to allow the herb to release its medicinal, aromatic oils.

- 3. Toast the dried chiles on a hot dry skillet for exactly ten to fifteen seconds per side.**

Press the pasilla and morita chiles flat against a medium-hot comal or skillet just until they become fragrant and pliable; do not let them smoke heavily or burn, as a scorched chili will bitterly ruin the entire salsa.

- 4. Rehydrate the toasted chiles in boiling water for fifteen minutes until completely soft.**

Transfer the toasted chiles to a bowl, submerge them in hot water, and discard the bitter soaking liquid once they are fully rehydrated.

- 5. Roast the tomatillos onion and unpeeled garlic in the dry skillet until blistered and olive green.**

Let the tomatillos soften and develop charred spots alongside the aromatics for about ten to fifteen minutes, then remove them from the heat and peel the garlic.

- 6. Blend the softened chiles and roasted aromatics into a rustic slightly chunky salsa.**

Combine the chiles, tomatillos, garlic, onion, half teaspoon of salt, and a cup of water or chicken broth in a blender, pulsing until it comes together without turning into a watery purée.

**1. Scramble the eggs in hot fat until they form large fluffy golden curds.**

Beat the eggs vigorously with a pinch of salt and pepper, then pour them into a shimmering skillet of oil or lard over medium-high heat, letting them set for a moment before gently pushing them around.

**2. Drown the mostly set eggs directly in the blended salsa and let them simmer.**

Pour the salsa straight into the hot skillet so it sizzles and fries in the residual oil, then reduce the heat and let the eggs act as a sponge, absorbing the smoky tart liquid for three to five minutes.

**3. Serve the eggs and beans side by side in shallow bowls with warm corn tortillas.**

Ladle a generous portion of the frijoles with their dark broth next to the smoky huevos, garnishing with crumbled cheese, diced onion, and cilantro.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **The pasilla diaspora trick.**

True Oaxacan pasillas are a rare, heavily smoked chili from the Sierra Mixe region. Blending standard raisiny pasillas with smoky morita or chipotle chiles flawlessly mimics the authentic flavor profile for an American kitchen.

● **The science of late-salting beans.**

Never salt your beans at the beginning of the cook. Salt interferes with the breakdown of pectin in the cellular walls, guaranteeing tough skins. Always wait until they are fully soft.



# Molotes Oaxaqueños de Papa y Chorizo

*mo-LOH-tess wa-ha-KEH-nyos de PAH-pah ee cho-REE-so*

There is a distinct morning rhythm to the streets of Oaxaca, punctuated by the shatter and hiss of corn masa hitting hot oil. The molote is a torpedo of elemental perfection built on generations of instinct, yet perfectly adaptable to a weeknight kitchen in the American suburbs. By letting the starch of a yellow potato absorb the deeply spiced, rendered fat of uncased chorizo, and fortifying standard masa harina with a whisper of wheat flour, the diaspora cook can recreate this corner-stand magic without compromise. It is an honest, unembellished taste of home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	yellow potatoes <i>scrubbed</i>	<b>15 oz</b>	canned black beans <i>undrained</i>
<b>8 oz</b>	Mexican pork chorizo <i>casing removed</i>	<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1/2 small</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 small</b>	garlic
<b>1 small</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	fresh avocado leaf or epazote sprig
<b>2 cup</b>	masa harina	<b>1 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil
<b>2 tbsp</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1 cup</b>	guacamole
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	baking powder	<b>1/2 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fine sea salt	<b>1/2 cup</b>	iceberg lettuce <i>shredded</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil	<b>4 med</b>	radishes <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 3/4 cup</b>	warm water		
<b>2 cup</b>	neutral cooking oil		

## PREPARATION

- **Make the filling ahead of time.**

The potato and chorizo filling actually improves in flavor and texture if made a day or two in advance, as the starches fully absorb and lock in the spiced pork fat.

- **Freeze for a faster weeknight.**

Molotes can be shaped and frozen raw on a baking sheet, then transferred to a bag. They fry beautifully straight from frozen, just requiring an extra few minutes in the oil.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Boil the potatoes whole and unpeeled.**

Cover with heavily salted water and bring to a simmer for 30 to 40 minutes until a knife pierces them with zero resistance. Drain, cool slightly, peel, and roughly mash, leaving some texture intact.

### 2. **Render the chorizo and aromatics.**

In a large skillet over medium heat, cook the chorizo for 8 to 10 minutes until deeply browned. Do not drain the bright red fat; add the finely diced onion and minced garlic, sautéing until translucent.

### 3. **Combine the filling and let it cool completely.**

Fold the mashed potatoes directly into the chorizo skillet, ensuring they absorb all the spiced oil. Let this mixture cool entirely, as a hot filling will steam and tear the raw masa from the inside during shaping.

### 4. **Hydrate and knead the masa.**

Whisk the masa harina, all-purpose flour, baking powder, and fine sea salt in a bowl. Add the tablespoon of oil and gradually pour in the warm water, kneading with your hands for 3 to 5 minutes until it resembles soft, pliable play-dough. Keep it covered with a damp towel.

### 5. **Shape the masa into sealed torpedoes.**

Roll golf-ball-sized portions of masa and press into 4-inch discs between two sheets of plastic. Spoon exactly one tablespoon of the cooled filling down the center, fold the edges over to overlap, and pinch the seams tightly while tapering the ends into a sealed cigar shape.

### 6. **Blend and simmer the black bean paste.**

Blend the undrained black beans, roughly chopped onion, and whole garlic clove until completely velvety. Heat a tablespoon of oil in a saucepan, fry the avocado leaf for fifteen seconds to release its oils, then carefully pour in the bean puree and simmer for 5 to 10 minutes until thickened.

**1. Fry the molotes to a deep golden brown.**

Heat the cooking oil in a deep skillet to 350°F. Working in small batches so the temperature doesn't drop, lower the molotes into the oil and fry for 2 to 3 minutes per side. Do not rush them over high heat, or the inner layer of dough will remain raw. Drain on paper towels.

**2. Assemble the Oaxacan garnish architecture.**

Smear a generous spoonful of the warm black bean paste on a plate and lay two hot molotes over the top. Garnish heavily with shredded lettuce, guacamole, crumbled queso fresco, and sliced radishes. Serve immediately.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Abuela Secret.**

Adding just two tablespoons of all-purpose flour to the masa provides a slight gluten network, offering enough elasticity to prevent the torpedoes from cracking during the fold.

● **Boil the potatoes in their skins.**

This technique prevents the potato flesh from absorbing excess water, which would render the filling soggy and jeopardize the structural integrity of the frying molote.





# Antojitos & The Masa Life: Street Food at Home

*Translating the vibrant, late-night street food of Oaxaca's markets into fun, interactive weeknight meals using accessible ingredients.*

There is a specific, urgent kind of hunger that only hits after the sun drops over Oaxaca, when the streetlamps hum and the air goes thick with the smell of toasted corn and rendering pork fat. It's a craving for the blistered edges of a tlayuda, the golden, oil-slicked crunch of a molote, the sharp, salty snap of

chapulines hitting a steaming cup of esquites. You don't need a rusted street cart or a plane ticket to chase that feeling down. You just need a decent neighborhood Latin market, a hot cast-iron pan, and the willingness to get your hands dusted in masa.

This is the late-night soul of Oaxacan food, stripped of the tourist polish and brought straight into the everyday American kitchen. It's about muscle memory, comfort, and the unapologetic joy of eating with your hands. From the heavy fold of a street-style tlayuda to empanadas leaking bright yellow mole and the anise-scent of hoja santa, these are the tactile, handheld truths of the diaspora. Roll up your sleeves and let the oil get hot.





# Tlayudas de la Calle

*tlah-YOO-dahs*

If you've ever walked the vibrant streets of Oaxaca City at night, you know the hypnotic smell of charcoal, toasted corn, and roasting pork fat. The tlayuda is the undisputed queen of Oaxacan street food. Far too often, American adaptations treat this dish like a generic pizza, swapping out the soul of the dish for flour tortillas and olive oil. Not here. We are doing this the way an abuela in the Central Valleys would teach it, but adapted for your Tuesday night. The secret to a real tlayuda lies in two things you can easily execute at home: a quick hack for the savory pork asiento, and utilizing dried avocado leaves to infuse the black beans with their signature earthy, anise-like aroma. Uncompromising flavor, with ingredients you can actually find.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 tbsp</b>	pork lard	<b>4 large</b>	imported tlayuda shells
<b>1/2 cup</b>	pork rinds <i>crushed</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	Queso Oaxaca <i>pulled into thin strings</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	pork lard	<b>2 cup</b>	white cabbage <i>very finely shredded</i>
<b>30 oz</b>	canned black beans <i>undrained</i>	<b>1 large</b>	Roma tomato <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>4 med</b>	dried Mexican avocado leaves	<b>1 med</b>	avocado <i>sliced</i>
<b>2 med</b>	dried chiles de árbol <i>stemmed</i>	<b>1/2 lb</b>	tasajo or flank steak <i>thinly sliced, salted, and quickly seared</i>
<b>2 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	salsa roja or verde
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>2 med</b>	limes <i>cut into wedges</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Create the quick asiento.

Pulse 3 tablespoons of the lard and the crushed pork rinds in a food processor or a heavy molcajete until they form a dark, gritty, savory paste.

### 2. Toast the aromatics.

Heat a large, dry cast-iron skillet over medium heat and toast the avocado leaves and chiles de árbol for 10 to 15 seconds per side until highly aromatic, being careful not to let them burn.

### 3. Purée the bean mixture.

Transfer the toasted leaves and chiles to a blender, adding the undrained black beans, garlic, and onion, then purée until completely smooth.

**1. Fry the beans into a paste.**

Heat the remaining tablespoon of lard in the skillet over medium-high heat, carefully pour in the bean purée, and cook while stirring constantly for 8 to 10 minutes until it reduces to a thick paste that holds its shape. Season generously with salt.

**2. Preheat your cooking surface.**

Preheat your oven to 425°F with a pizza stone or heavy baking sheets inside, or alternatively heat a large cast-iron griddle on your stovetop over medium heat.

**3. Assemble the tlayudas.**

Smear a teaspoon or two of the asiento across each tlayuda shell, followed by a hearty layer of the hot black bean paste, a handful of shredded cabbage, and a generous layer of the pulled Queso Oaxaca.

**4. Fire them up.**

Carefully transfer the assembled tlayudas to your preheated surface and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, until the cheese is completely melted and bubbly, and the bottom of the corn tortilla is browned and crispy.

**5. Garnish and serve immediately.**

Remove the tlayudas from the heat and top with the cooked tasajo, tomato slices, and avocado, serving open-faced with salsa and a squeeze of fresh lime juice.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not skip the avocado leaves.**

They are to Oaxacan cooking what basil is to Italian cooking. Ensure you buy the Mexican variety (*Persea americana* var. *drymifolia*), which can easily be found at local Latin markets or online, as other varieties lack the essential oils needed for this dish.

- **Consider the traditional fold.**

In some parts of Oaxaca, the tlayuda is folded in half like a giant quesadilla before being taken off the comal. If your tlayuda shell is fresh enough to fold without shattering, feel free to fold it over the meat and cheese during the last minute of cooking.



## Empanadas de Amarillo con Pollo y Hoja Santa

If you grew up in a Mexican household, the smell of toasted corn masa on a hot comal is the definitive smell of home. In Oaxaca, an empanada isn't a baked pastry pocket—it is a massive, hand-pressed tortilla, filled, folded, and cooked to a crisp right on the griddle. We rely on Mole Amarillo, a vibrant, broth-forward sauce thickened with a masa slurry so it gently oozes without turning the dough to mush. Paired with shredded chicken and the complex, anise-pepper bite of fresh hoja santa (or cilantro, in a pinch), this is a hyper-authentic masterpiece engineered to work flawlessly on a busy Wednesday night in Ohio.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>5 med</b>	dried Guajillo chiles <i>stems snapped off, seeds shaken out</i>	<b>3 med</b>	whole allspice berries
<b>1 med</b>	dried Ancho chile <i>stem and seeds removed</i>	<b>5 med</b>	black peppercorns
<b>3 med</b>	Roma tomatoes	<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
<b>3 med</b>	tomatillos <i>husked and rinsed</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>peeled and cut into thick wedges</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	warm chicken broth
<b>4 med</b>	cloves garlic <i>unpeeled</i>	<b>2 1/2 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>1 tbsp</b>	pork lard <i>or neutral oil</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	warm water <i>or warm chicken broth</i>
<b>3 cup</b>	chicken broth	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	cumin seeds	<b>2 cup</b>	cooked chicken breast <i>shredded</i>
<b>3 med</b>	whole cloves	<b>3 med</b>	fresh Hoja Santa leaves <i>torn into large pieces, or 1/2 cup fresh cilantro</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Make the mole up to three days in advance.**

Store the finished Mole Amarillo in an airtight container in the refrigerator; the flavors will deepen, and it transforms the empanadas into an incredibly fast weeknight dinner.

- **Shred the chicken.**

Use the meat from a store-bought rotisserie chicken to save time, or gently poach two chicken breasts in salted water with onion and garlic, saving the broth for your mole.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Roast the aromatics on a dry skillet.**

Heat a large cast-iron skillet or comal over medium-high heat and lay down the tomatoes, tomatillos, onion wedges, and unpeeled garlic cloves, letting them roast until soft and blistered in spots.

### 2. **Toast the chiles and whole spices.**

Remove the aromatics, then press the guajillo and ancho chiles flat in the skillet for 10 to 15 seconds per side until fragrant; soak them in hot water for 15 minutes, and quickly toast the cumin, cloves, allspice, and peppercorns in the dry skillet for 15 seconds.

### 3. **Blend the mole base until perfectly smooth.**

In a blender, combine the softened chiles, roasted vegetables (peel the garlic first), toasted spices, oregano, and 1 cup of the chicken broth, blending on high.

### 4. **Fry the chile puree to build depth.**

Heat the lard in a medium pot over medium heat, carefully pour in the blended puree to fry for 5 minutes, then stir in the remaining 2 cups of chicken broth and bring to a gentle simmer.

### 5. **Whisk in the masa slurry.**

In a small bowl, thoroughly whisk 1/4 cup of masa harina with 1/2 cup of warm broth until completely lump-free, then slowly pour it into the simmering mole.

### 6. **Simmer until the mole becomes a thick gravy.**

Lower the heat and simmer uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes; the masa will gelatinize and significantly thicken the sauce so it doesn't make your empanadas soggy.

### 7. **Mix and knead the masa dough.**

In a large bowl, combine 2 1/2 cups of masa harina and the salt, slowly stream in the 2 cups of warm water, and knead vigorously for 3 to 5 minutes until the dough feels like soft Play-Doh, then divide into 2-ounce, golf-ball-sized portions covered by a damp towel.

**1. Press and sear the tortilla.**

Preheat your cast-iron skillet over medium heat, use a plastic-lined tortilla press to flatten a masa ball into a 6-inch oval, and lay it on the dry skillet for exactly 30 seconds until the edges lift, then flip.

**2. Fill and seal the empanada on the hot comal.**

Immediately spread a spoonful of thick mole on one half of the tortilla, top with shredded chicken and a torn piece of hoja santa, then fold the empty half over and press the edges together to seal.

**3. Cook until deeply charred and crispy.**

Let the sealed empanada cook for 4 to 5 minutes per side until the masa is cooked entirely through; if a little bit of the yellow mole oozes out and caramelizes on the pan, count yourself lucky.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Masa Slurry.**

Do not skip thickening the mole with masa. It is the defining architectural secret of this dish that keeps the empanada dough from turning into mush.

● **Substituting Hoja Santa.**

If you cannot find fresh hoja santa, use a generous handful of fresh cilantro. Never use dried hoja santa; it loses all its volatile oils and tastes like dust.



# Molotes de Plátano Macho Rellenos de Frijol

*mo-loh-tes de plah-tah-no mah-cho re-yeh-nos de free-hol*

Down in the sweltering Isthmus of Tehuantepec, where matriarchs rule the markets, the mighty plantain takes the place of corn masa. These golden, crispy torpedoes are a direct, glorious descendant of Afro-Mexican street food, giving way to an earthy, savory center of black beans and melting cheese. For the first-generation kid cooking on a Tuesday night in Ohio, the secret is exactly what an Oaxacan grandmother would tell you: boil the plantains in their skins so they don't turn to mush, and let the mash cool completely before shaping. It's a masterclass in regional food science that tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 large</b>	ripe plantains <i>ends trimmed, halved crosswise</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 small</b>	garlic clove <i>minced</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	all-purpose flour or masa harina	<b>1 med</b>	dried avocado leaf <i>lightly toasted over a flame</i>
<b>2 cup</b>	vegetable oil	<b>3 oz</b>	Quesillo or string cheese <i>pulled into short strings</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	canned black beans <i>undrained</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	Mexican crema
<b>1 tbsp</b>	pork lard or neutral oil	<b>1/4 cup</b>	crumbled queso fresco
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	salsa roja

## PREPARATION

- **Make the dough and beans ahead.**

The plantains can be boiled, mashed, and stored in the fridge up to three days in advance, making weeknight assembly a fifteen-minute affair.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the plantains in their skins.**

Do not peel them. Drop the unpeeled plantain halves into a pot of boiling water and cook for 15 to 20 minutes, until the skins turn dark and split open. This is the non-negotiable secret to keeping the dough from becoming a waterlogged mess.

- 2. Mash and cool completely.**

Drain the plantains, peel them once they're cool enough to handle, and mash them in a bowl with the salt until smooth. Now walk away. Let the mash cool at room temperature for at least an hour so the starches firm up into a workable dough.

**1. Fry the black bean paste.**

Heat the lard in a skillet over medium heat, sauté the onion and garlic until fragrant, then dump in the beans and the toasted avocado leaf. Mash them aggressively while they simmer until the liquid evaporates and you're left with a thick, dry paste that pulls away from the pan. Let the beans cool completely.

**2. Shape the molotes.**

Oil your hands. Grab a golf-ball-sized portion of the cooled plantain dough, flatten it into a disc, and place a teaspoon of the cooled black bean paste and a string of cheese in the center. Fold the edges over to seal it completely, then gently roll it between your cupped palms to form an oblong, torpedo shape.

**3. Fry to a golden crisp.**

Heat three-quarters of an inch of oil in a heavy skillet to 350°F. Carefully shallow-fry the molotes in batches, turning gently, until they are a deep, rich golden brown on all sides—about four to five minutes total. Drain on paper towels and serve hot with crema, cheese, and salsa.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The ripeness rule.**

Buy plantains three to five days ahead. They must be yellow with black speckles—firm enough to hold shape, but sweet enough to mash. Green ones won't mash; entirely black ones will turn into soup.

● **Fixing sticky dough.**

If your plantains were a bit too ripe and the cooled mash feels impossibly sticky, vigorously stir in a tablespoon or two of masa harina or flour to bind the excess moisture.

● **The cream cheese exemption.**

While Quesillo is traditional, thousands of Mexican mothers use Philadelphia cream cheese for this on a busy Tuesday. Don't feel guilty making the swap.



# Garnachas Istmeñas con Carne de Res

*gar-NAH-chas ees-MAY-nyas*

In the sweltering night markets of Juchitán, the matriarchs of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec hand over something miraculous: a thick masa disk layered with pulverized beef and a smoky salsa flash-fried directly into the dough. It is a masterpiece of texture and acidity, crowned by the fermented funk of a pineapple-vinegar slaw. A home cook in the States might not have a barrel of pineapple vinegar on hand, but they can orchestrate this exact symphony on a Wednesday night using apple cider vinegar, strategic weekend prep, and a willingness to let hot oil and salsa do their loud, messy, and absolutely essential dance.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 large</b>	green cabbage <i>cored and very thinly sliced</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>very finely diced</i>
<b>2 large</b>	carrots <i>finely sliced or grated</i>	<b>4 large cloves</b>	garlic <i>smashed</i>
<b>2 med</b>	jalapeños <i>sliced into thin rounds</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>1 tbsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>4 med</b>	Roma tomatoes
<b>1/2 cup</b>	apple cider vinegar	<b>3 med</b>	dried morita chilies
<b>1/2 cup</b>	water	<b>2 large cloves</b>	garlic
<b>2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	sugar	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	beef flank steak <i>cut into large chunks</i>	<b>2 lb</b>	fresh corn masa
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>left whole</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	high-heat oil
		<b>1 cup</b>	Queso Cotija <i>finely grated</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Start the curtido at least twenty-four hours in advance.**

In a large jar, pack the cabbage, carrots, jalapeños, and sliced onion. Whisk the vinegar, water, oregano, two teaspoons of salt, and sugar, pour it over the vegetables, and massage gently before sealing and refrigerating.

- **Boil and pulverize the beef.**

Simmer the beef chunks, whole onion half, smashed garlic, and one teaspoon of salt in water until tender, about one and a half hours. Let cool, then pulse in a food processor until it resembles a coarse, fluffy crumble. Sauté the diced onion in a tablespoon of oil, stir in the ground beef for two minutes, and refrigerate.

- **Blend the smoky salsa.**

Boil the tomatoes and morita chilies for fifteen minutes until soft. Blend until smooth with the raw garlic, quarter onion, and a generous pinch of salt, then store in the fridge.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Shape and par-cook the masa.**

Roll the masa into one-ounce balls and press them to a quarter-inch thickness, pinching a slight rim around the edge. Toast on a dry skillet over medium heat for one to two minutes per side to set the structure.

- 2. Set up the frying station.**

Heat a quarter-inch of oil in a heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering, keeping the par-cooked masa, pulverized beef, and salsa right next to the stove.

- 3. Flash-fry the garnachas.**

Place a few masa disks into the hot oil, immediately spooning a tablespoon of beef onto the center of each, followed by a tablespoon of salsa poured directly over the meat.

- 4. Let the salsa and masa fuse.**

Stand back as the salsa sputters in the hot oil, allowing it to fry for one to two minutes so the reducing salsa soaks deep into the porous masa and pulverized beef.

- 5. Garnish and serve.**

Carefully transfer the hot garnachas to a platter, top generously with the pickled curtido and grated Cotija cheese, and serve immediately.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the food processor for the beef.**

Authentic garnachas rely on beef that is practically powdery, allowing it to absorb the flash-fried salsa and adhere to the masa in a way that regular shredded beef cannot.

- **Expect the hot oil to sputter violently.**

Pouring wet salsa into hot oil is the secret to this dish, but it causes a mess. Use a splatter screen if you have one, and do not lean directly over the pan.



# Piedrazos Oaxaqueños

*pee-eh-drah-sos wah-hah-ken-yos*

If you linger outside a primary school or an ice cream shop in Oaxaca City around three o'clock, you'll inevitably spot people clutching little plastic bags filled with a dark, brothy liquid, stabbing at the contents with wooden sticks. This is the *piedrazo*—literally, a 'blow from a stone'—born from a culture's stubborn refusal to waste a single crumb of day-old bread. Leftover rolls are baked until they reach the density of actual rocks, then drowned in a wildly complex, fermented pineapple vinegar loaded with pickled vegetables and string cheese. Since you probably don't have thirty days to wild-ferment fruit scraps on a weeknight, this recipe uses a rapid thermal infusion of apple cider

vinegar, piloncillo, and pineapple to cheat the deep, funky tang of the motherland in twenty minutes flat. It is aggressively acidic, deeply savory, and exactly what it tastes like in the plaza.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 cup</b>	crusty bread <i>cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried thyme
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	unfiltered apple cider vinegar	<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	water	<b>1 cup</b>	waxy potatoes <i>cut into 1/2-inch cubes</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	fresh pineapple <i>diced, including core and clean rinds</i>	<b>1 large</b>	carrot <i>peeled and sliced into thin coins</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	piloncillo or dark brown sugar <i>chopped</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	red onion <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>3 med clove</b>	garlic <i>smashed</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	Oaxacan queso or low- moisture mozzarella <i>pulled into strings</i>
<b>1 large</b>	dried chipotle or morita chili <i>stem removed and snipped in half</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sal de chile or chili powder
<b>2 med</b>	Mexican bay leaves	<b>1 tbsp</b>	vinegar-based Mexican hot sauce
<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano		

## PREPARATION

- **Preheat the oven to 200°F.**
- **Bake the bread cubes for two to three hours until completely dehydrated.**  
To make authentic piedrazos, your bread must be completely devoid of moisture, or it will turn to mush in the vinegar. Spread the bread cubes on a baking sheet and bake until they are rock-hard all the way through and sound like actual stones rattling against the pan. Let them cool completely and store in an airtight container.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the faux-fermented broth by bringing the vinegar, water, pineapple, and aromatics to a boil.**

In a medium saucepan or Dutch oven, combine the apple cider vinegar, water, pineapple chunks and rinds, piloncillo, garlic, dried chili, bay leaves, oregano, thyme, and salt. Bring the mixture to a rolling boil over medium-high heat.

- 2. Lower the heat to a gentle simmer and quick-pickle the potatoes.**

Once the broth is boiling, reduce the heat to a gentle simmer, toss in the cubed potatoes, and let them cook for about 8 minutes.

- 3. Add the sliced carrots and red onion to the simmering broth.**

Simmer for another 5 minutes, or until the potatoes are just tender when pierced with a fork. The high acidity of the vinegar strengthens the cell walls of the potatoes, ensuring they absorb flavor without turning to mush.

- 4. Remove the saucepan from the heat and strain out the spent aromatics.**

Using tongs, pluck out and discard the pineapple rinds, garlic cloves, bay leaves, and the dried chili.

- 5. Drown the fossilized bread in the hot vinegar broth.**

Place a handful of the rock-hard bread cubes into deep serving bowls or sturdy plastic baggies. Ladle the hot vinegar broth and pickled vegetables generously over the bread.

- 6. Wait a few minutes for the bread to soften, then garnish heavily and serve.**

Do not eat it immediately; wait 3 to 5 minutes so the exterior of the bread softens into a savory sponge while the center retains a tiny bit of crunchy resistance.

Shower the top with stringy quesillo, a heavy pinch of sal de chile, and several dashes of hot sauce before digging in with a spoon or a wooden stick.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Boiling the vinegar rapidly mimics natural fermentation.**

Simmering the apple cider vinegar with the fresh fruit and unrefined sugar rapidly replicates the esterification and flavor development that usually takes thirty days of natural wild yeast fermentation in Oaxaca.



# Esquites con Epazote y Chapulines

*es-KEE-tes con eh-pah-ZO-teh ee cha-poo-LEE-nes*

The internet will try to tell you Mexican street corn is a cold, sweet summer barbecue salad tossed on a plate. The internet is lying to you. Real esquites are a hot, deeply savory, brothy braise served in a cup on a street corner. In Oaxaca, we toast starchy white corn in fat, simmer it with pungent epazote, and crown the whole thing with chapulines— toasted grasshoppers that provide an unforgettable, earthy crunch. Don't flinch. This is the real deal, adapted for a Tuesday night without losing an ounce of its soul.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter	<b>2 cup</b>	water or low-sodium chicken broth
<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	high-quality mayonnaise
<b>2 small clove</b>	garlic <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Cotija cheese <i>crumbled</i>
<b>2 med</b>	serrano chiles <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	chapulines
<b>4 cup</b>	frozen white corn <i>thawed</i>	<b>2 large</b>	limes <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>3 large sprig</b>	fresh epazote	<b>1 tbsp</b>	chile piquín powder

## PREPARATION

- **Thaw the white corn.**

Take the frozen white corn out of the freezer well before cooking. Let it thaw and drain off any excess water so it fries properly in the fat rather than steaming.

- **Prep your aromatics in advance.**

Finely dice your onion, mince your garlic, and chop your chiles before you start cooking. The sofrito moves quickly, and you don't want to burn the butter while frantically chopping a serrano.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the sofrito base in hot fat.**

Place a heavy-bottomed pot or large, deep skillet over medium heat and add the butter and oil. Once the butter is melted and foaming, add the diced white onion, minced garlic, and serrano chiles, sautéing until translucent and fragrant. Don't let the garlic burn; you just want to release its soul into the fat.

**1. Toast the corn until lightly browned.**

Increase the heat to medium-high and add the thawed white corn kernels. Stir well to coat the corn in the aromatic butter. Let it cook for 5 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the kernels toast slightly and deepen in color. The Nahuatl word for this dish translates to 'toasted corn,' and this step locks in a rich, nutty depth you can't get by just boiling it.

**2. Braise the corn with epazote to create a starchy broth.**

Pour in the water or chicken broth so it just barely covers the corn. Submerge the fresh sprigs of epazote directly into the liquid and stir in the salt. Bring to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low, partially cover the pot, and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes.

**3. Remove the epazote and adjust the seasoning.**

Remove the pot from the heat. The starch from the white corn will have thickened the liquid slightly into a highly aromatic broth. Fish out the wilted epazote stems and discard them—their flavor is fully extracted. Taste the broth and adjust the salt if necessary.

**4. Serve in a cup with the cooking liquid.**

Do not drain the corn. Ladle the hot kernels along with a few spoonfuls of their hot, starchy broth into individual cups. Top each with a generous swipe of mayonnaise, a heavy sprinkle of crumbled Cotija cheese, a squeeze of fresh lime juice, and a dusting of chile powder. Finally, crown the dish with a handful of crunchy chapulines and serve immediately.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Sourcing the right corn is non-negotiable.**

Standard American yellow sweet corn will ruin this dish, making it watery and cloying. You need the starch of white corn. A bag of frozen white corn from the Latin market is cheap, accessible, and vastly superior to fresh yellow corn for this technique.

- **Embrace the chapulines.**

Grasshoppers might seem daunting, but they are a hallmark of Oaxacan gastronomy. They arrive from the market fully cooked, toasted with lime and salt, and provide an essential, earthy crunch that cuts right through the rich mayo and cheese. Don't skip them.



# La Comida de Domingo: The Weekly Family Gathering

*Hearty proteins, grilled meats, and vibrant sides recreating the magic of the traditional Sunday feast and the Pasillo de Humo.*

Sunday in Oaxaca isn't a day of rest. It's a loud, unapologetic collision of smoke, fat, and family. If you've ever walked the Pasillo de Humo—the legendary smoke hall of the Mercado 20 de Noviembre—you know the smell. It clings to your clothes and your memory: sizzling beef, rendering pork fat, and

blistering chilies. This chapter is about dragging that exact chaotic magic into a standard-issue American kitchen. No special equipment required. Just heat, good meat, and people worth cooking for.

The food here demands a crowd. It's the sprawling asado piled high with tasajo and crimson cecina, the sharp, bright slap of a proper chileajo, and chiles rellenos heavy with sweet-savory picadillo. Even the soup—a deeply green, epazote-heavy sopa de guías—commands attention. It isn't about perfect plating or polite conversation. It's about passing platters over a crowded table, talking over one another, and eating until there's nothing left.





# El Asado

*ah-SAH-doh deh res wah-hah-KEH-nyoh*

If you look for "Asado" in a generic Mexican cookbook, you'll find a Northern desert dish of pork and red chiles, but step into an Oaxacan home on a Sunday afternoon and the word means something entirely different. It means a rich, house-warming beef stew simmering in a thick, fire-roasted tomato sauce heavily perfumed with marjoram. This is pure abuela food—the kind of deep, unapologetic comfort that smells exactly like a hug from the homeland. We've adapted the traditional three-hour simmer for a modern Midwestern kitchen and a tight weeknight schedule, relying on cheap, collagen-rich chuck roast and ordinary supermarket herbs to deliver an uncompromisingly authentic bowl of Sunday magic.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	beef chuck roast <i>cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes</i>	<b>3 med</b>	bay leaves
<b>6 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>left whole</i>	<b>3 large</b>	Yukon Gold potatoes <i>peeled and cut into large chunks</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>quartered</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	apple cider vinegar
<b>3 small</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	lard
<b>1 tsp</b>	dried marjoram	<b>1 cup</b>	beef broth
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried thyme	<b>1 tsp</b>	salt
		<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Cut the potatoes large.**

Cutting the potatoes into large chunks is vital. If they are diced too small, they will turn into a gritty sludge during the braise and ruin the glossy texture of the tomato gravy.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the seasoned beef in a heavy pot or pressure cooker to build a deep, foundational crust.**

Heat the lard over medium-high heat until shimmering, generously season the beef cubes with salt and pepper, and brown them on all sides without crowding the pan. Do not rush this step; the deep brown crust is where the soul of the stew begins.

- 2. Dry-roast the tomatoes, onion, and garlic in a dry skillet until blackened and blistered.**

Place a cast-iron skillet over high heat and let the vegetables char, turning occasionally. The tomatoes should look bruised and blackened—this isn't a mistake, it's the rustic, smoky backbone of the caldillo.

**1. Blend the charred vegetables with a splash of broth into a coarse, unrefined puree.**

Toss the blistered tomatoes, onion, and garlic into a blender with the beef broth and pulse until smooth. Crucially, do not strain this mixture; the thick, rustic pulp is exactly what you want to texturize the stew.

**2. Combine the rustic puree, beef, herbs, and vinegar, then simmer gently to braise the meat.**

Pour the tomato puree directly over the seared beef, and add the marjoram, thyme, bay leaves, and apple cider vinegar. If cooking traditionally, cover and simmer on low for an hour and a half; if using a pressure cooker, seal and cook on high pressure for 35 minutes before performing a quick release.

**3. Add the large potato chunks at the end of the cooking process to prevent them from disintegrating into mush.**

Stir the potatoes into the stew, then continue to simmer on the stove for 25 minutes, or under pressure for an additional 5 minutes, until the meat melts and the gravy fiercely coats the back of a spoon. Serve immediately with hot corn tortillas.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Marjoram is non-negotiable.**

Do not skip the dried marjoram or try to substitute it entirely with standard oregano. It is the defining floral note that separates this authentic Oaxacan staple from a generic American pot roast.

- **Embrace the Instant Pot.**

Using a pressure cooker is widely accepted by modern Mexican home cooks. It breaks down the tough collagen in cheap chuck roast in a fraction of the time, making this deeply traditional Sunday meal a totally viable weeknight option.



## Chiles de Agua Rellenos de Picadillo

To understand Oaxaca is to understand its picadillo—a rich, sweet-and-savory collision of caramelized plantains, raisins, almonds, and warm spices folded into pork. Down there, abuelas stuff this masterpiece into slender, blistered chiles de agua and envelop them in a fluffy egg batter for the weekly Sunday gathering. Up here in the diaspora, we adapt without compromise, swapping in the widely available Anaheim pepper, which nails the shape and bright heat of the original. This is profound, ancestral cooking adapted for real life: make

the filling on a Wednesday, blister the peppers when you have a minute, and on Sunday, all you do is batter, fry, and feed the people you love.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>6 large</b>	Anaheim peppers	<b>1/4 cup</b>	raisins
<b>1/2 cup</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1/4 cup</b>	slivered almonds
<b>1 qt</b>	vegetable oil	<b>10 med</b>	green pimento-stuffed olives <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil	<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cinnamon
<b>2 small clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1/8 tsp</b>	ground cloves
<b>1/2 med</b>	ripe plantain <i>peeled and diced very small</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 lb</b>	ground pork	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper
<b>2 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>finely diced</i>	<b>4 large</b>	eggs <i>separated into whites and yolks</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Source the right plantain.**

Ensure your plantain is properly ripe before starting; the skin should be yellow and heavily mottled with black spots to provide the necessary sweetness.

- **Protect the egg whites.**

The egg whites will absolutely refuse to whip into stiff peaks if there is even a microscopic trace of grease or yolk in the mixing bowl.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Caramelize the plantains.**

Heat two tablespoons of oil in a large skillet over medium heat and fry the diced plantains until they are deeply golden to release their essential sugars.

### 2. **Build the savory base.**

Add the onion and garlic, sautéing until translucent, then drop in the ground pork, breaking it apart with a wooden spoon until browned and no longer pink.

### 3. **Simmer the picadillo.**

Stir in the tomatoes, raisins, almonds, olives, oregano, cinnamon, and cloves, and let the mixture cook down for 15 to 20 minutes until the juices evaporate into a thick, cohesive filling.

### 4. **Cool the filling.**

Set the picadillo aside to cool completely; stuffing hot filling into the peppers will make them soggy and prone to tearing.

### 5. **Blister the peppers.**

Char the Anaheims directly over a gas flame or under a broiler until the waxy skin is completely blackened, taking care not to overcook the flesh into mush.

### 6. **Sweat and peel.**

Transfer the blackened peppers to a sealed plastic bag for 10 minutes so the trapped steam lifts the skin, then gently scrape off the char with the dull side of a knife—never rinse them, or you'll wash that hard-earned smoke right down the drain.

### 7. **Deseed and stuff.**

Make a single lengthwise slit down the side of each pepper to carefully scoop out the seed cluster and veins, leaving the stem intact as a handle, then pack them plumply with the cooled picadillo.

**1. Dredge the peppers.**

Pat the stuffed peppers completely dry with a paper towel and gently roll them in the flour, shaking off the excess so there's only a fine, powdery coating to act as glue for the batter.

**2. Whip the capeado.**

In a pristine bowl, whip the egg whites and a pinch of salt to stiff peaks, then gently fold in the yolks one by one just until the batter is a uniform pale yellow.

**3. Fry to a golden finish.**

Heat an inch and a half of oil in a heavy skillet to 350°F, dunk each floured pepper by the stem into the fluffy egg batter to seal the slit, and fry for one to two minutes per side until deeply golden.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The weeknight reality check.**

If you don't have time to whip egg whites on a Tuesday, skip the batter entirely. Place the stuffed peppers in a baking dish, cover them with shredded Oaxaca cheese, and bake at 400°F for 15 minutes.

● **Respect your own time.**

The picadillo actually tastes better the next day as the complex spices and fruits meld. Make it up to three days in advance to break up the work.



# Sopa de Guías con Chochoyotes

*so-pah deh ghee-ahs cohn cho-cho-yo-tehs*

If you want to know what the earth smells like after the first summer rain in Oaxaca, you eat Sopa de Guías. It's a masterclass in making something out of nothing, utilizing every part of the squash plant from the twisting vines to the bright blossoms. For generations, Oaxacan grandmothers have built this restorative soup to celebrate the milpa. We're swapping hard-to-find herbs for baby spinach and regular zucchini, but the soul of the dish remains untouched. The real trick is entirely in the technique: blending a few ears of fresh corn straight into the broth for a velvety richness, and dropping in chochoyotes—savory,

lard-enriched masa dumplings with a signature thumbprint designed to catch the liquid. It's an ancient, deeply authentic bowl of comfort, translated seamlessly for a Tuesday night in America.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 tbsp</b>	pork lard <i>or neutral oil</i>	<b>1 bunch</b>	squash vines <i>peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces</i>
<b>1 med</b>	white onion <i>finely chopped</i>	<b>4 small</b>	zucchini <i>cut into 1/2-inch thick rounds</i>
<b>4 clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	fresh baby spinach <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>5 med</b>	fresh corn on the cob <i>husked, separated into rounds and loose kernels</i>	<b>15 med</b>	fresh squash blossoms <i>stems and inner pistils removed, roughly torn</i>
<b>10 cup</b>	water <i>or light vegetable broth</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	fresh masa fina
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 tbsp</b>	pork lard
		<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt

## PREPARATION

- **Peel the squash vines.**

Snap the thick end of a vine and pull downward to strip away the tough, fibrous outer skin and prickly hairs before chopping. Do not skip this step, or the soup will be woody and inedible.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Build the broth.**

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot, sauté the onion and garlic in two tablespoons of lard over medium heat until translucent, then pour in the water, add a generous pinch of salt and the thick corn rounds, and simmer for 15 minutes.

**1. Thicken the soup.**

Place your reserved loose corn kernels into a blender with a ladle of hot broth, blend on high until completely smooth, and pour this mixture through a fine-mesh strainer directly back into the soup pot.

**2. Make the chochoyotes.**

In a mixing bowl, knead the masa, the remaining two tablespoons of lard, and a half teaspoon of salt until soft and pliable. Roll the dough into walnut-sized balls, pressing your thumb deeply into the center of each to create a small dimple designed to catch the broth.

**3. Cook the vegetables and dumplings.**

Add the chopped zucchini and peeled squash vines to the simmering broth, then carefully drop the chochoyotes into the pot one by one, simmering undisturbed for 8 to 10 minutes until they firm up and float slightly.

**4. Finish with greens and blossoms.**

In the final three minutes of cooking, gently fold in the baby spinach and the torn squash blossoms, cooking just until wilted to preserve their bright color.

**5. Serve immediately.**

Ladle the hot soup into wide bowls, ensuring everyone gets a piece of corn, plenty of vegetables, and a few chochoyotes, passing lime wedges and salsa at the table.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Masa Hack.**

The chochoyotes dough can be mixed, shaped, and kept in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 2 days before cooking. Drop them straight into the boiling soup from the fridge.

● **Blossom Storage.**

If you source fresh squash blossoms ahead of time, do not wash them until the exact moment of use. Store them wrapped in dry newspaper inside an airtight bag in your crisper drawer.

- **The Chepil Substitute.**

Traditional abuelas forage for local herbs like chepil, but baby spinach perfectly mimics its delicate, earthy flavor for an easy weeknight substitution.



# El Vibrante Chileajo de Vegetales

*chee-lay-AH-ho de ve-he-TAH-les*

In Oaxaca, chileajo is a masterclass in how to make simple vegetables taste extraordinary. Born of necessity in the hot Mixteca region long before refrigeration, this preserve relies on an unapologetic fistful of garlic, earthy dried chiles, and a sharp splash of vinegar. The magic here isn't a rare ingredient you can't find in Ohio, but the abuela's technique. Blanching the vegetables separately ensures they stay crisp and vibrant, while frying the chile purée immediately cooks out the raw bite of the garlic, developing a deep, roasted flavor. Put in the work

on a Sunday to serve this as a side, and by Tuesday night, those leftover, deeply marinated vegetables piled high on crispy tostadas become the greatest five-minute dinner you've ever had.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	waxy potatoes <i>peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried thyme
<b>3 large</b>	carrots <i>peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes</i>	<b>3 small</b>	whole allspice berries
<b>1/2 lb</b>	fresh green beans <i>ends trimmed and cut into 1/2-inch pieces</i>	<b>2 small</b>	whole cloves
<b>1 cup</b>	fresh or frozen green peas	<b>1 small</b>	Mexican cinnamon stick <i>broken into a 1-inch piece</i>
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>		<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	fine sea salt
<b>8 large</b>	dried Guajillo chiles <i>wiped clean, stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>2 large</b>	dried Ancho chiles <i>wiped clean, stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>12 med</b>	crisp corn tostadas
<b>8 large</b>	cloves garlic <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	refried black beans <i>warmed</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	apple cider vinegar	<b>1 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano <i>crumbled</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>very thinly sliced</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare an ice bath.**

Fill a large bowl with cold water and ice cubes, setting it near the stove so you can quickly halt the cooking process of the vegetables.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the chiles lightly in a dry skillet, then submerge them in boiling water to soften.**

Heat a dry skillet over medium heat and toast the Guajillo and Ancho chiles for 10 to 15 seconds per side until fragrant. Do not let them burn, or they will turn bitter. Transfer to a bowl, cover with boiling water, and soak for 20 to 30 minutes until plump.

- 2. Boil each vegetable individually in heavily salted water until just tender, then immediately shock in an ice bath.**

This is the secret to crisp, vibrant vegetables. Drop potatoes into boiling water for 8 to 10 minutes, scoop out, and plunge into ice water. Repeat with the carrots for 4 to 5 minutes, green beans for 3 to 4 minutes, and peas for 1 to 2 minutes. Drain thoroughly and combine in a large mixing bowl.

- 3. Grind the whole spices, then blend with the softened chiles, garlic, vinegar, herbs, and salt until completely smooth.**

Grind the allspice, cloves, and cinnamon stick into a powder using a mortar or spice grinder. Transfer to a blender with the soaked chiles, garlic, apple cider vinegar, oregano, thyme, salt, and about 3/4 cup of the chile soaking liquid. Blend on high until perfectly smooth, straining if your blender leaves tough skins behind.

- 4. Fry the blended chile purée in hot oil to mellow the raw garlic and deepen the flavor.**

Heat the neutral oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Carefully pour in the blended sauce, taking care as it will sputter violently. Simmer and stir constantly for 8 to 10 minutes until it thickens into a deep, dark brick red. Remove from heat and let cool slightly.

**1. Toss the blanched vegetables with the warm sauce until thoroughly coated.**

Fold the warm chileajo into the vegetables until every piece is covered. You can serve this immediately, but it is vastly better if covered and refrigerated for at least 4 hours, or ideally overnight, allowing the vinegar and garlic to fully penetrate the potatoes.

**2. Build the tostadas with a base of warm refried beans, a generous mound of the marinated vegetables, and traditional garnishes.**

Spread warmed black beans over each crisp tostada. Top with a heavy scoop of the cold chileajo, then finish with crumbled queso fresco and thin slices of raw white onion.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Replicating the elusive Chilcostle pepper.**

Authentic Mixtecan chileajo relies on the endemic Chilcostle chile, which is virtually impossible to find in an American suburb. A blend of primarily Guajillo with a little Ancho chile expertly mimics its earthy, mildly spicy, and complex profile.

- **Stick to waxy potatoes.**

You must use Yukon Gold or Red Bliss potatoes for this dish. Russets will absorb too much water and disintegrate into mush when boiled and tossed.



## Barbacoa de Pollo en Cazuela

Real barbacoa requires a massive hole in the earth, hot stones, and a whole animal—an undertaking not exactly suited for a Tuesday in Ohio. But Oaxacan grandmothers figured out a hack long ago: you can conjure that exact same earthy, smoked, pit-cooked magic indoors in a heavy Dutch oven. By trapping steam with charred banana leaves and utilizing the crucial licorice-anise hit of dried avocado leaves, this adobo-slathered chicken cooks beautifully in its own rendered fat and juices. Best of all, you can do the prep work on a Sunday and let the pot do all the heavy lifting on a busy weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>6 med</b>	dried Guajillo chiles <i>wiped clean, stemmed, seeded, and flattened</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried thyme
<b>2 med</b>	dried Ancho chiles <i>wiped clean, stemmed, seeded, and flattened</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>1 med</b>	dried Chipotle chile <i>wiped clean, stemmed, and seeded</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	apple cider vinegar
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>3/4 cup</b>	water
<b>4 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>3 small</b>	whole cloves	<b>3 lb</b>	bone-in skin-on chicken legs and thighs <i>patted dry</i>
<b>1 small</b>	Mexican cinnamon stick	<b>1 large</b>	package frozen banana leaves <i>thawed</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>5 med</b>	dried avocado leaves
		<b>3 med</b>	dried bay leaves

## PREPARATION

- **Make the adobo on Sunday.**

Blend and strain the chile paste over the weekend and let the chicken marinate in the fridge for up to two days, turning a multi-hour ancestral project into a totally passive weeknight dinner.

- **Thaw the banana leaves.**

Move the frozen package of banana leaves to the fridge the night before you plan to cook.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast and soften the dried chiles.**

Heat a dry skillet over medium heat and press the chiles flat against the pan for 15 seconds per side until fragrant, then submerge them in a bowl of boiling water for 20 minutes until completely soft.

**1. Blend and strain the adobo.**

Drain the chiles, discarding the soaking water, and blend them on high with the onion, garlic, spices, vinegar, salt, and fresh water for two minutes. Push the resulting paste through a fine-mesh strainer into a large bowl to guarantee a velvety, seed-free sauce.

**2. Marinate the chicken.**

Season the dried chicken pieces lightly with a pinch of extra salt, then aggressively massage the strained adobo into the meat before covering and refrigerating for at least four hours.

**3. Fire-roast the banana leaves.**

Pass wide sections of the thawed banana leaves directly over a medium gas flame or hot electric burner, keeping them moving until they instantly turn glossy, bright green, and pliable enough to fold without tearing.

**4. Assemble the cazuela.**

Line a heavy Dutch oven with the pliable banana leaves so the edges hang over the rim, nestle the marinated chicken inside with every drop of the adobo, and tuck the avocado and bay leaves between the pieces.

**5. Seal and steam.**

Fold the overhanging banana leaves tightly over the chicken to form a botanical package, cover the pot with a layer of aluminum foil, and press the lid down hard to trap all the interior steam.

**6. Braise low and slow.**

Place the pot on medium heat just until you hear the liquids begin to sizzle, then immediately drop the heat to the absolute lowest setting and walk away for an hour and a half.

**7. Serve immediately.**

Carefully peel back the foil and leaves to reveal impossibly tender chicken swimming in a rich, rendered adobo, served alongside hot white rice, warm tortillas, chopped onion, cilantro, and lime.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not substitute the leaves.**

The botanical, licorice-like aroma of dried avocado leaf is the undeniable soul of Oaxacan barbacoa. You can easily find them in the cellophane spice packets at any decent Latin market.

- **Keep the bones and skin.**

Do not use boneless, skinless chicken breasts for this. The skin's rendered fat is absolutely mandatory to emulsify the adobo into a glossy, clingy pan sauce instead of a watery stew.



# El Arte de los Moles: Demystifying the Sauces

*Breaking down the complex architecture of Oaxacan moles into ambitious weekend projects and unapologetic weeknight hacks.*

Mole isn't just a sauce; it's an architecture. For too long, it's been sold as some mystical, impenetrable alchemy requiring a dizzying roster of ingredients and three days of your life. And sure, a proper, midnight-dark Mole Negro demands respect and a free weekend. But the working matriarchs of Oaxaca are nothing if not practical, and cooking in the diaspora requires adaptation. This isn't about cutting corners or whitewashing the heat. It's about understanding the foundation well enough to make it work for you.

Here, the intimidation factor gets stripped away. We break down the heavy lifting of a weekend project, the bright hustle of a fresh mole verde, and the unapologetic, Tuesday-night brilliance of doctoring a good store-bought paste. The point isn't martyrdom at the stove. The point is keeping the deep, charred soul of Oaxaca alive on the plate, no matter the day of the week.





# Enmoladas de Pollo Oaxaqueñas

Real mole is a profound labor of love, a multi-day symphony of toasting and grinding reserved for massive weddings and local festivals. But what happens on a Tuesday in the diaspora when you're craving the deep, smoky resonance of Oaxaca? You don't fake it, and you certainly don't bake it in a glass casserole dish. You take a good jarred mole paste, treat it with the respect of an abuela by blooming it in hot oil and enriching it with broth and Mexican chocolate, and you build the dish à la minute. Flash-fry the tortillas so they don't

disintegrate into mush, drown them in the dark, simmering sauce, and eat immediately. This is the genuine, Tuesday-night-saving reality of Mexican home cooking.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>8 oz</b>	jarred Mole Negro or Mole Poblano paste	<b>1/3 cup</b>	vegetable oil
<b>1 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil	<b>3 cup</b>	cooked chicken <i>shredded and warmed</i>
<b>4 cup</b>	chicken broth <i>warmed</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>
<b>12 g</b>	Mexican chocolate <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>sliced into thin half-moons</i>
<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt <i>to taste</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	white sesame seeds <i>toasted</i>
<b>12 med</b>	thick corn tortillas	<b>1/4 cup</b>	Mexican crema
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Set up an assembly line before you begin cooking.**

Authentic enmoladas are built and eaten immediately. Have your warm shredded chicken, a paper-towel-lined plate, and serving plates ready to go before you fry a single tortilla.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Awaken the mole paste in hot oil.**

In a wide skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of oil over medium heat, add the stiff mole paste from the jar, and stir for one minute to bloom the dormant spices.

**1. Gradually whisk in the warm chicken broth.**

Pour the broth into the skillet one cup at a time, whisking constantly to smooth out any lumps until the paste is completely dissolved.

**2. Melt the chocolate into the sauce and simmer.**

Drop in the Mexican chocolate, lower the heat, and stir frequently until the sauce thickens to the consistency of melted ice cream, about 10 minutes.

**3. Flash-fry the tortillas to create a protective lipid barrier.**

Heat 1/3 cup of oil in a separate small skillet to 350°F and fry each corn tortilla for just 5 to 10 seconds per side so they become soft and pliable, not crispy.

**4. Submerge each fried tortilla directly into the simmering mole.**

Working quickly and using tongs, dunk the freshly fried tortilla directly into the simmering sauce, ensuring both sides are completely coated.

**5. Fill and roll the enmoladas directly on the serving plate.**

Transfer the sauce-bathed tortilla to a plate, place a generous spoonful of warm shredded chicken in the center, and fold it in half or roll it into a cylinder.

**6. Smother with additional sauce and garnish heavily.**

Ladle an extra spoonful of hot mole right over the top of the rolled tortillas, then immediately garnish with crumbled queso fresco, raw onion slices, a drizzle of crema, sesame seeds, and cilantro.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Never bake your enmoladas in a casserole dish.**

Baking turns corn tortillas into unrecognizable mush and ruins the silken texture of the sauce; assemble and eat them à la minute.

● **Do not skip the flash-fry.**

Submerging a raw, dry tortilla into hot mole is a rookie mistake that guarantees it will instantly disintegrate in the heavy sauce.



## Pollo en Mole Coloradito con Ayocotes

When you grow up with the smell of toasted chiles and simmering garlic lingering in the hallways of your childhood home, standard supermarket enchilada sauce just won't cut it. You want the real thing. Oaxacan Mole Coloradito is the approachable, weeknight-friendly cousin to the monumental Mole Negro—sweet, savory, and relying on a magical blend of ancho and guajillo chiles, sweet plantain, and warm spices. The grandma secret here isn't just the ingredients; it's the technique. You absolutely must fry the blended raw chile paste in

smoking hot pork lard to cook out the raw bite and marry the flavors together. Pour it over shredded chicken and massive, ancient ayocote beans, and you've captured the exact taste of home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 cup</b>	dried Ayocotes Morados or Negros <i>rinsed and picked over</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	stale bolillo roll <i>sliced</i>
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>peeled</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>2 small</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>4 small</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>
<b>1 small</b>	fresh epazote sprig	<b>2 large</b>	roma tomatoes <i>quartered</i>
<b>2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 med</b>	Mexican cinnamon stick <i>1-inch piece</i>
<b>5 med</b>	dried ancho chiles <i>wiped clean, stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>3 small</b>	whole cloves
<b>5 med</b>	dried guajillo chiles <i>wiped clean, stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>3 small</b>	whole allspice berries
<b>3 tbsp</b>	manteca de cerdo (pork lard)	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
<b>1/4 cup</b>	sesame seeds	<b>4 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken broth <i>warmed</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	raw almonds	<b>1 1/2 oz</b>	Mexican drinking chocolate <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	raisins	<b>1 med</b>	pre-cooked rotisserie chicken <i>meat shredded into large chunks</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	ripe black-skinned plantain <i>peeled and sliced</i>		

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Fast-track the ancient ayocote beans using an electric pressure cooker.**

Place the rinsed ayocotes, 1/4 onion, 2 garlic cloves, and epazote in the cooker, cover with 2 inches of water, and cook on high pressure for 35 to 40 minutes. Let the pressure release naturally for 15 minutes, then open the lid, add a heavy pinch of salt, and simmer on the sauté setting for 5 more minutes so the beans absorb the salt while keeping warm in their broth.

**2. Briefly toast the dried chiles on a hot, dry skillet.**

Working in batches over medium heat, press the flattened, seeded ancho and guajillo chiles against a dry cast iron skillet for 10 to 15 seconds per side until fragrant and slightly blistered. Do not let them burn or turn black, then transfer the toasted chiles to a bowl, cover with very hot water, and let them soak for 15 minutes until soft.

**3. Fry the aromatics and thickeners sequentially in manteca to build layers of flavor.**

In the same skillet over medium-low heat, toast the sesame seeds until golden and transfer to a blender. Add 1 tablespoon of manteca to the skillet to fry the almonds and raisins until puffed, followed by the plantain and bread slices until golden brown, transferring everything to the blender as it finishes. Finally, sauté the onion, garlic, tomatoes, cinnamon, cloves, allspice, and oregano until the tomatoes break down, then add to the blender.

**4. Blend the soaked chiles and fried ingredients into a thick, velvety paste.**

Drain the soaked chiles, discarding the bitter soaking water, and add them to the blender with all the fried ingredients and 1 cup of warm chicken broth. Blend on high until you have an incredibly smooth, thick paste, adding just enough extra broth to keep the blades moving if it struggles.

**1. Sazonar the mole by frying the raw paste in screaming hot manteca.**

Heat a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat with the remaining 2 tablespoons of manteca until it is shimmering and nearly smoking. Carefully pour the blended mole paste into the hot fat—standing back as it sputters—then lower the heat to medium and stir constantly for 10 to 12 minutes until the color deepens to a brick-red and the oils slightly separate at the edges.

**2. Simmer and finish the sauce with warm chicken broth and Mexican chocolate.**

Gradually whisk in 2 to 3 more cups of warm chicken broth until the mole reaches the consistency of heavy cream. Bring to a gentle simmer, stir in the chopped Mexican chocolate and kosher salt, and cook over low heat for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring frequently so the bottom doesn't scorch.

**3. Fold the chicken into the mole and serve generously over the broth-soaked beans.**

Toss your large chunks of cooked shredded chicken directly into the simmering mole sauce just long enough to heat them through. Spoon a generous portion of the creamy ayocotes into shallow bowls, top with the chicken and mole, garnish with toasted sesame seeds, and serve with hot corn tortillas.

## CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Blender Challenge**

Traditional mole is ground on a metate, which crushes spices into microscopic particles. Modern blenders can sometimes leave fragments of cinnamon or clove. If your blender isn't high-powered, you can use a spice grinder to turn your cloves, allspice, and cinnamon into a powder before adding them to the blender, ensuring a silky-smooth sauce.

● **Fixing a Bitter Mole**

If you accidentally burned a chile and your sauce tastes bitter, don't panic. You can balance it by adding an extra half-disc of Mexican chocolate, a pinch of brown sugar, or a little extra chicken broth to dilute the astringency.

- **Make Ahead Strategy**

Mole is famously better the next day. You can make the sauce entirely on a Sunday, keep it in the fridge, and simply heat it up and toss in a rotisserie chicken on a busy Wednesday night.



# Guías y Chochoyotes en Mole Verde

*gee-as ee cho-cho-yo-tes en mo-leh ver-deh*

In Oaxaca, mole isn't just a sauce; it's a living testament to the milpa. Forget the heavy, chocolate-laced versions you know. A true mole verde is a bright, herbaceous broth thickened strictly with corn masa, not nuts or seeds. Finding fresh squash vines on a Tuesday in the States is a fool's errand, so we adapt with robust leafy greens while preserving the uncompromising soul of the dish. The real magic lies in the chochoyotes—little masa dumplings with a functional thumbprint dimple that poach right in the vibrant, anise-scented stew. It's ancient, unapologetic comfort food, dialed in for your weeknight kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/4 cup</b>	masa harina	<b>3 small</b>	whole cloves
<b>1 3/4 cup</b>	warm water	<b>4 small</b>	black peppercorns
<b>2 tbsp</b>	rendered pork lard	<b>1 large</b>	chayote squash <i>peeled, cored, and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 med</b>	zucchini <i>cut into half-moons</i>
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	boneless skinless chicken thighs	<b>1 cup</b>	fresh green beans <i>ends trimmed and halved</i>
<b>6 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken broth	<b>1 large</b>	Swiss chard
<b>1 lb</b>	tomatillos <i>husked and rinsed</i>	<b>bunch</b>	<i>stems removed and roughly chopped</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 large</b>	fresh hoja santa leaf
<b>3 large</b>	garlic	<b>1 small</b>	fresh cilantro
<b>cloves</b>	<i>peeled</i>	<b>bunch</b>	
<b>2 med</b>	jalapeno chiles <i>stems removed</i>	<b>1 small</b>	fresh flat-leaf parsley
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>bunch</b>	
		<b>3 sprigs</b>	fresh epazote <i>leaves only</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Prep all vegetables and herbs before you start cooking.**

The mole moves quickly once the chicken begins simmering. Having the tomatillos husked, the chayote diced, and the raw herbs washed and ready will save you from scrambling.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Form the masa dumplings.**

In a bowl, mix 1 cup of the masa harina, the salt, and the lard, then gradually stream in 3/4 cup of the warm water until a soft, pliable dough forms. Roll into marble-sized balls and press a deep dimple into the center of each with your thumb—this engineered ombliguito ensures they cook through evenly. Cover with a damp towel and set aside.

### 2. **Build the broth and simmer the hearty vegetables.**

In a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven, bring the chicken broth to a gentle simmer. Add the chicken thighs, diced chayote, and green beans, and simmer for about 15 minutes until the chicken is mostly cooked through.

### 3. **Boil and blend the green base.**

While the chicken simmers, boil the tomatillos, jalapeños, onion, and garlic in a medium saucepan for 10 minutes until the tomatillos turn a muted olive green. Transfer the solids to a blender with a slotted spoon, add the cumin, cloves, and black peppercorns, and blend until completely smooth.

### 4. **Thicken the stew with a masa slurry.**

Whisk the remaining 1/4 cup masa harina with the remaining 1 cup warm water until entirely smooth. Pour the blended tomatillo base into your main pot, then pour the masa slurry through a fine-mesh strainer directly into the simmering broth, stirring continuously for five minutes until the liquid transforms into a rich, velvety stew.

### 5. **Poach the chochoyotes.**

Add the sliced zucchini to the stew, then carefully drop the formed dumplings into the pot one by one. Do not stir aggressively; let them simmer undisturbed for 10 to 12 minutes until they float to the surface and feel firm.

**1. Blend the raw herbal finish.**

Rinse the blender, then combine the fresh cilantro, parsley, epazote, and hoja santa leaf with a half-cup of water. Blend until the mixture is bright emerald green and completely liquefied.

**2. Wilt the greens and fold in the herbs off the heat.**

Fold the chopped Swiss chard into the gently boiling pot, letting it wilt for just two minutes. Turn off the heat entirely and gently stir in the raw herbal puree—boiling these delicate herbs will destroy their volatile oils and vibrant color. Serve immediately in wide, shallow bowls.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Seek out fresh hoja santa for the true Oaxacan experience.**

If you absolutely cannot find it at a local Latin market, an extra handful of cilantro and a tiny pinch of fennel frond will loosely mimic its aromatic footprint, though the authentic leaf is the true soul of the dish.



# Estofado de Manchamanteles con Cerdo

*es-toh-fah-doh de mahn-chah-mahn-teh-les kon ser-doh*

Manchamanteles translates to 'tablecloth stainer.' Once you see the violent, beautiful red of this sauce, you understand. This isn't the brooding, multi-day mole negro. It is a bright, unapologetic stew loaded with caramelized plantains and pineapple, born in colonial convents but surviving because it is pure comfort. We make this work for a Tuesday night without losing its soul by using quick-cooking pork loin and pan-frying the fruits separately so they keep their bite. The real secret? Frying the chili puree in hot pork fat. Do not fear the lard. It is the unbroken link to the kitchens of Oaxaca.

## INGREDIENTS

6	dried ancho chiles <i>stemmed, seeded, and wiped clean</i>	1/2 tsp	dried mexican oregano
2	dried guajillo chiles <i>stemmed, seeded, and wiped clean</i>	1 tbsp	apple cider vinegar
1/2 large	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	3 tbsp	pork lard <i>divided</i>
4 large	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	1 1/2 lb	boneless pork loin <i>cut into 1-inch cubes</i>
2 med	roma tomatoes <i>roasted or charred</i>	1 large	very ripe plantain <i>peeled and cut into thick coins</i>
1/4 cup	raw almonds	1 1/2 cup	fresh pineapple <i>cored and cut into chunks</i>
1 slice	day-old white bread <i>torn into pieces</i>	1 small	granny smith apple <i>peeled and diced</i>
1/2 tsp	ground mexican cinnamon	3 cup	low-sodium chicken broth <i>divided</i>
3	whole cloves	1 tbsp	kosher salt <i>to taste</i>
4	whole black peppercorns		

## PREPARATION

- **Char the Roma tomatoes in advance.**

Blister them in a dry skillet or under the broiler until blackened in spots so they are ready to drop directly into the blender.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Toast the dried chiles in a dry, heavy skillet over medium heat for fifteen seconds per side until fragrant.**

Press them flat with a spatula, but do not let them smoke or the sauce will turn bitter. Transfer to a bowl, cover with boiling water, and soak for fifteen minutes until soft.

- 1. Heat one tablespoon of the lard in a heavy pot over medium-high heat and sear the salted pork cubes until browned.**

You aren't cooking the pork through, just building a crust. Remove the meat to a plate and leave the rendered fat in the pot.

- 2. Toast the almonds, cloves, and peppercorns in the skillet until fragrant, then transfer to a blender.**

Add the onion and garlic to the skillet to char slightly, then add them to the blender with the tomatoes, torn bread, cinnamon, oregano, vinegar, drained chiles, and one cup of chicken broth. Blend on high until completely smooth.

- 3. Return the large pot with the pork fat to medium heat, adding another tablespoon of lard if dry, and pour in the chili puree.**

It will violently sputter and pop. Stir constantly for five to seven minutes until the sauce deepens to a dark brick red and the oil begins to separate. This is the non-negotiable step that cooks out the raw chili flavor and triggers the Maillard reaction.

- 4. Pour the remaining two cups of chicken broth into the fried paste, returning the pork and diced apple to the pot.**

Bring to a gentle simmer, cover partially, and let cook for fifteen to twenty minutes until the pork is tender.

- 5. In a separate non-stick skillet, heat the final tablespoon of lard over medium heat and fry the plantain coins until deeply golden.**

Cook about three minutes per side, then remove to a plate. Briefly sear the pineapple chunks in the same skillet to bring out their natural sugars.

- 6. Gently fold the caramelized plantains and pineapple into the simmering mole.**

Let it cook together for just three minutes so the fruit absorbs the sauce but retains its structural integrity. Serve immediately with warm corn tortillas to mop up the tablecloth-staining sauce.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not substitute the pork lard.**

Manteca provides the savory baseline that bridges the sweet fruit and earthy chiles. Vegetable oils introduce competing flavors and lack the essential mouthfeel.

- **Buy plantains with mostly black skin.**

Green or yellow plantains are too starchy and will taste like potatoes. The black skin guarantees the starches have converted to sugar, which is crucial for caramelizing before they hit the stew.



# Res en Mole Chichilo

## Adaptado

*res en mo-leh chee-chee-lo*

In Oaxaca, they call Mole Chichilo *el mole triste*—the sad mole—because it is the austere, deeply complex sauce traditionally served to comfort families in mourning. It forsakes the sugary sweetness of festive moles for a profound, smoky depth built on burnt corn tortillas, blackened chile seeds, and the intoxicating aroma of toasted avocado leaves. For the diaspora cook, tracking down the canonical chilhuacle negro pepper is nearly impossible, but the secret of an *abuela's* kitchen lies in technique, not just geography. By charring accessible dried chiles

and swapping tough, long-simmered beef for quick-searing ribeye, this adaptation summons the soulful, ancient flavor of the motherland on a random weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 large</b>	dried mulato chiles <i>stemmed and seeded, seeds reserved</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	lard or neutral cooking oil <i>reserved for the mole base</i>
<b>2 large</b>	dried pasilla chiles <i>stemmed and seeded, seeds reserved</i>	<b>3 med</b>	dried avocado leaves
<b>1 large</b>	dried ancho or guajillo chile <i>stemmed and seeded, seeds reserved</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 med</b>	corn tortilla	<b>3 tbsp</b>	masa harina <i>reserved for the thickening slurry</i>
<b>3 small</b>	tomatillos <i>husked and rinsed</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	warm water <i>reserved for the thickening slurry</i>
<b>1 med</b>	Roma tomato	<b>1 cup</b>	masa harina <i>reserved for the chochoyotes</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>cut into thick wedges</i>	<b>3/4 cup</b>	warm water <i>reserved for the chochoyotes</i>
<b>3 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>unpeeled</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	lard or neutral cooking oil <i>reserved for the chochoyotes</i>
<b>2 small</b>	whole cloves	<b>1 med</b>	chayote <i>peeled, cored, and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>
<b>3 small</b>	whole allspice berries	<b>1/2 lb</b>	fresh green beans <i>ends trimmed</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	cumin seeds	<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	ribeye or filet medallions <i>cut 1-inch thick</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil <i>reserved for searing the beef</i>
<b>4 cup</b>	low-sodium beef broth <i>warmed</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare all ingredients before beginning the tatemado (charring) process.**

Once the skillet is hot, the charring moves quickly. Having the chiles deseeded and the vegetables prepped ensures nothing burns improperly.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Roast the tomatillos, tomato, onion, and unpeeled garlic on a dry skillet over medium-high heat until softened and blistered with black spots.**

Turn the vegetables occasionally, which should take about 10 to 12 minutes.

Transfer them to a blender, peeling the garlic first. In the same pan, quickly toast the cloves, allspice, and cumin for about 15 seconds until fragrant, then add them to the blender.

- 2. Burn the corn tortilla entirely black on both sides in the dry skillet, then do the same for the reserved chile seeds.**

Do not panic about the smoke; this carbonization is the literal soul of the mole.

Break the burnt tortilla into the blender. Toast the seeds until completely black, about 3 to 5 minutes, then transfer them to a small bowl.

- 3. Soak the blackened seeds in hot water for 5 minutes, drain, and repeat this washing process two more times.**

This crucial step washes away the harsh, acrid tannins while preserving the deeply roasted, earthy flavor. Add the washed seeds to the blender.

- 4. Briefly press the flattened, deseeded chiles against the hot skillet just until they change color slightly and become fragrant.**

It should take no more than 15 seconds per side. Do not let the flesh burn, or the mole will turn acrid. Transfer them to a bowl, cover with hot water, and let soak for 15 minutes until pliable.

- 5. Drain the soaked chiles and blend them with the charred vegetables, spices, burnt tortilla, washed seeds, and one cup of warm beef broth.**

Blend on high for at least two full minutes until the mixture transforms into an incredibly smooth, dark paste.

- 6. Heat two tablespoons of lard or oil in a heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat until shimmering, then carefully pour in the blended mole paste.**

It will splatter aggressively. Stir constantly for about 5 to 7 minutes until the paste thickens and darkens. Slowly whisk in the remaining 3 cups of warm beef broth and bring to a gentle simmer.

- 1. Whisk three tablespoons of masa harina into a half cup of warm water to create a slurry, then slowly stir it into the simmering mole.**

Turn the heat to low and let it simmer for 15 minutes until the sauce coats the back of a spoon. Taste and adjust the salt generously.

- 2. Knead the remaining masa harina, warm water, lard, and salt into a soft dough, then roll into small balls with a deep dimple pressed into each center.**

Drop these dumplings directly into the simmering mole. They are ready when they float to the surface, about 7 to 10 minutes. While they cook, boil the cubed chayote and green beans in a separate pot of salted water until just tender.

- 3. Season the beef medallions heavily with coarse salt and black pepper, then sear them in a hot, oiled skillet until medium-rare.**

Cook for about 3 to 4 minutes per side, then remove to a cutting board to rest.

- 4. Briefly toast the dried avocado leaves over an open flame or in a hot skillet until highly fragrant, drop them into the simmering mole, and immediately turn off the heat.**

Never boil the leaves aggressively, or they will lose their delicate anise magic.

- 5. Ladle a generous pool of the dark mole into wide bowls, ensuring each gets a few dumplings, and top with the seared beef and boiled vegetables.**

Serve alongside warm corn tortillas and a glass of mezcal.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing avocado leaves.**

Only use culinary avocado leaves from the Mexican avocado tree, which are often found dried in well-stocked Latin markets. Common Hass avocado leaves from your backyard are flavorless and mildly toxic. If you absolutely cannot find them, substitute one bay leaf and a small pinch of anise seed.



## Cerdo y Vegetales en Mole Amarillo

If Mole Negro is the tuxedo, Mole Amarillo is the perfectly worn-in sweater. It's the everyday mole of Oaxaca, relying not on a laundry list of thirty ingredients or days of labor, but on the ancient magic of toasted chiles, rich pork broth, and masa de maíz. Finished with fresh cilantro and rustic, dimpled chochoyotes that act like tiny bowls to catch the sauce, this is how a real Oaxacan abuela feeds her family on a Tuesday night. It takes a little over an hour, but the smells of toasting cumin and simmering chiles will instantly transport your kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	pork shoulder <i>cut into 2-inch chunks</i>	<b>4 small</b>	allspice berries
<b>1 lb</b>	pork baby back ribs <i>cut into individual ribs</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	whole cumin seeds
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>kept intact</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
<b>3 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled and smashed</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>3/4 cup</b>	warm water
<b>8 cup</b>	water	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>6 med</b>	Guajillo chiles <i>wiped clean, stemmed, and seeded</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	pork lard or neutral oil
<b>2 med</b>	Ancho chiles <i>wiped clean, stemmed, and seeded</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>1 lb</b>	Roma tomatoes	<b>1 cup</b>	warm water
<b>1/2 lb</b>	tomatillos <i>husked and rinsed</i>	<b>1 large</b>	chayote squash <i>peeled, cored, and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>2 med</b>	yellow potatoes <i>peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>
<b>3 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>1/2 lb</b>	green beans <i>trimmed and cut in half</i>
<b>4 small</b>	whole cloves	<b>1 med</b>	Mexican zucchini <i>sliced into thick half-moons</i>
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the meat.**

Chop the pork shoulder into 2-inch chunks and separate the baby back ribs.

- **Prep the dried chiles.**

Wipe clean, stem, and seed all the dried Guajillo and Ancho chiles.

- **Prep the produce.**

Husk and rinse the tomatillos. Peel and cube the chayote and potatoes, trim the green beans, and slice the zucchini.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Simmer the pork to build the foundational broth.**

Combine the pork shoulder, ribs, the intact onion half, smashed garlic, and 1 tablespoon of salt in a large pot with 8 cups of water. Simmer for about an hour until fork-tender, then strain and reserve 5 to 6 cups of the broth along with 1 tablespoon of the rendered fat that floats to the top.

### 2. **Toast the dry spices and chiles on a comal.**

Heat a dry cast-iron skillet over medium heat and toast the cloves, allspice, and cumin for 30 to 45 seconds until fragrant, then transfer to a blender. In the same skillet, toast the Guajillo and Ancho chiles flat for 10 to 15 seconds per side without letting them blacken, then soak them in a bowl of hot water for 15 minutes.

### 3. **Roast the vegetables until deeply blistered.**

In the hot skillet, roast the whole tomatoes, tomatillos, chopped onion, and peeled garlic until soft and charred, about 10 minutes, pulling the garlic early if it threatens to burn, then add everything to the blender.

### 4. **Blend the mole paste into a silken puree.**

Drain the soaked chiles and blend them on high for a full two minutes with the roasted vegetables, toasted spices, oregano, and one cup of the reserved pork broth. Pass this entire mixture through a fine-mesh strainer to ensure a flawlessly velvety texture free of skins and seeds.

### 5. **Make the pot cry.**

Heat the lard or oil in a heavy pot until shimmering and lightly smoking, then pour the strained puree directly into the hot fat so it sizzles aggressively. Fry the sauce for 10 to 12 minutes, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until it darkens in color and the raw flavor of the garlic transforms into deep, savory magic.

**1. Thicken the mole with masa.**

Whisk the 1/3 cup of masa harina with 1 cup of warm water until perfectly smooth, then slowly whisk it into the mole along with 4 cups of the remaining pork broth. Let it gently simmer over low heat for 15 minutes until it becomes a beautiful, glossy gravy.

**2. Form the chochoyotes.**

Knead 1 cup of masa harina with 3/4 cup of warm water, 1/2 teaspoon of salt, and the reserved tablespoon of pork fat until it feels like soft clay. Roll off pieces into 1-inch balls and press your thumb deep into the center of each to create a dimple, or 'ombligo', that will catch the sauce.

**3. Marry the stew and vegetables.**

Add the potatoes and chayote to the simmering mole and cook for 10 minutes, then carefully drop in the chochoyotes without stirring aggressively. After 5 minutes, add the green beans, zucchini, and cooked pork, simmering just until the delicate vegetables are tender and the dumplings are firm.

**4. Garnish with cilantro and serve.**

Turn off the heat and stir in the chopped cilantro to perfectly cut the richness of the pork. Serve immediately in wide bowls, ensuring everyone gets a rainbow of vegetables, tender meat, and a generous ladle of golden sauce pooled inside their chochoyotes.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **On sourcing chiles.**

Authentic Oaxacan recipes often call for Chilhuacle Amarillo chiles, which are incredible but nearly impossible to find in standard US supermarkets. Local cooks substitute a mix of Guajillo and Ancho chiles when Chilhuacle is unavailable—it provides the exact red-gold color and fruity depth required.

- **On the magic of the dimple.**

The indentation in the chochoyotes isn't just for aesthetics. Masa is dense; the dimple allows the dumplings to cook quickly and evenly in the simmering broth while acting as a tiny bowl to hold the rich mole sauce.



# Pipián Verde Oaxaqueño con Pollo

*pee-pyahn vehr-deh wah-hah-keh-nyoh kohn poy-yoh*

The smell of toasted pumpkin seeds hitting a dry skillet means one thing: pipián is happening. While the famous mole negro can demand three days and thirty ingredients, pipián verde is its bright, herbaceous, weeknight-friendly cousin. It relies on the ancient Mesoamerican technique of using toasted pepitas to thicken the sauce, colored with vibrant tomatillos and the resinous, anise-like kick of hoja santa. This recipe streamlines the process for an American kitchen without cutting a single corner on flavor. The secret isn't magic, it's technique—

carefully toasting the seeds, extracting a quick homemade broth, and fiercely frying the blended puree in hot oil to unlock a velvety, canonical Mexican masterpiece.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	bone-in skinless chicken thighs	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black peppercorns
<b>3/4 med</b>	white onion <i>divided (1/2 left intact for broth, 1/4 roughly chopped for sauce)</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	cumin seeds
<b>4 small clove</b>	garlic <i>peeled and divided</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	fresh tomatillos <i>husks removed and rinsed</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt <i>plus extra to taste</i>	<b>2 med</b>	poblano peppers <i>stemmed and seeded</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	raw hulled pumpkin seeds	<b>1 med</b>	serrano pepper <i>stemmed</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	raw sesame seeds	<b>1 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>loosely packed</i>
<b>4</b>	whole cloves	<b>2 large</b>	fresh hoja santa leaves <i>or 2 sprigs fresh epazote</i>
		<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil <i>or high-quality lard</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Clean the tomatillos.**

Tomatillos come encased in a papery husk and are covered in a sticky residue that must be thoroughly rinsed away under warm water before cooking.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Poach the chicken to create a quick, rich broth.**

In a large heavy pot, combine the chicken thighs, the half onion, two cloves of garlic, one teaspoon of salt, and enough water to cover the chicken by an inch. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a gentle simmer and cook for 25 to 30 minutes until tender. Transfer the chicken to a plate to keep warm, and strain the broth into a bowl—you will need about three cups of this liquid gold for the sauce.

### 2. **Toast the seeds and spices in a dry pan.**

Heat a dry skillet over medium-low heat and add the pumpkin seeds, stirring constantly. After 3 to 5 minutes, they will begin to puff up and audibly pop; as soon as they smell nutty and turn lightly golden, immediately transfer them to a cool plate so they don't turn bitter. Toast the sesame seeds, cloves, peppercorns, and cumin in the same skillet for about one minute until fragrant, then add them to the plate.

### 3. **Sear the vegetables to soften their raw edge.**

In the same skillet, add a tiny splash of oil and raise the heat to medium. Add the tomatillos, poblano, serrano, the remaining quarter onion, and the final two cloves of garlic. Sear them, turning occasionally, until the tomatillos soften and turn from a bright, opaque green to a dull olive green.

### 4. **Blend the toasted seeds before adding the wet ingredients.**

Transfer the cooled seeds and spices to your blender and grind them into a fine powder first. Add the softened tomatillo mixture directly into the blender along with the fresh cilantro, hoja santa, and one cup of the warm reserved chicken broth. Blend on high until the mixture is vibrantly green and incredibly smooth, adding another splash of broth if the blades struggle.

**1. Fry the green puree in hot oil.**

Place your large pot back on the stove over medium-high heat and add two tablespoons of oil or lard. Once the fat is shimmering hot, pour the green puree directly into the pot—it will splatter aggressively. Stir constantly for 3 to 5 minutes as the sauce thickens and deepens in color, cooking out the raw flavors of the herbs and tomatillos.

**2. Simmer the sauce and warm the chicken.**

Stir in 1 to 1 1/2 cups of the remaining chicken broth until the pipián reaches the consistency of heavy cream. Reduce the heat to low, partially cover, and simmer for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally so the ground seeds don't scorch the bottom of the pot. Season aggressively with salt, add the warm chicken thighs back in to coat, and serve immediately.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Sourcing the herbs.**

Hoja santa gives Oaxacan pipián its signature anise and sarsaparilla aroma. If you cannot find it or epazote at your local Latin market, do not let that stop you. Add an extra half cup of cilantro and a handful of mild greens like spinach or radish leaves to maintain the bright emerald color.

● **Respect the splatter.**

Frying the blended puree is the single most critical step missed by modern adaptations. Dropping the sauce into hot oil stabilizes the emulsion and transforms the dish from a raw vegetable smoothie into a complex, velvety sauce.



# Tamales en Hoja de Plátano: The Ritual of Wrapping

*A guide to the communal, deeply rooted activity of Oaxacan tamale assembly using banana leaves.*

Making tamales is never a solitary pursuit. It is an orchestrated, multi-generational assembly line of beautiful, necessary chaos. In Oaxacan-American kitchens from Los Angeles to Chicago, the tamalada is a ritual of endurance. It's about the hypnotic rhythm of wiping down softened banana leaves, spreading the masa just right, and folding them into tight, sturdy packages that smell faintly of earth and green tea.

You don't do this alone. You gather the family, put on a pot of coffee, and get to work. The recipes that follow—from the dark, complex depths of tamales de mole negro to the simple comfort of beans and jalapeño—demand patience. But when that massive pot is finally cracked open, releasing a thick cloud of masa-scented fog into the room, you'll understand exactly why the work matters.





## Tamales de Mole Negro con Pollo Deshebrado

There is a pervasive lie that authentic Mexican cooking always demands grueling, multi-day labor. While a true mole negro from scratch takes a weekend to construct, modern Oaxacan grandmas know a brilliant, pragmatic secret: they buy exceptional artisanal mole paste from the market. For the first-generation cook missing the tastes of home, a jar of premium imported paste is the ticket to an uncompromisingly authentic weeknight tamal. Wrapped in pliant banana leaves and steamed horizontally, these are moister and

profoundly richer than the corn husk varieties of the north. The secret isn't suffering; it's proper masa hydration, respecting the imported ingredients, and the ritual of the fold.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	bone-in chicken thighs	<b>1 lb</b>	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed, wiped clean, and thick fibrous ribs removed</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>peeled</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>3 small clove</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 1/4 cup</b>	pork lard <i>softened to room temp</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	kosher salt <i>divided</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	baking powder
<b>16 oz</b>	Oaxacan mole negro paste	<b>6 cup</b>	water

## PREPARATION

- **Thaw the banana leaves.**

Leave the frozen banana leaves out at room temperature for a few hours before you plan to cook, or thaw them overnight in the refrigerator.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Poach the chicken to yield both tender meat and the fundamental broth.**

Simmer the chicken, onion, garlic, and one tablespoon of salt in six cups of water for about forty-five minutes. Once the chicken is fall-apart tender, remove and shred it, making sure to strain and save every drop of that warm broth for the masa and the mole.

**1. Awaken the artisanal mole paste.**

Heat a splash of oil in a skillet over medium heat, drop in the mole paste, and slowly stir in up to two cups of your warm chicken broth. Let it simmer until it dissolves from a dense paste into a glossy, velvety sauce that coats the back of a spoon.

**2. Condition the banana leaves over an open flame.**

Cut the cleaned leaves into roughly twelve-by-fourteen-inch rectangles and pass them swiftly over a medium-low gas burner, shiny side down. The heat instantly alters the cellular structure, turning them bright green and pliable; skip this step, and the brittle leaves will shatter when folded.

**3. Beat the masa until it passes the legendary flotation test.**

Whip the lard vigorously until it's light and creamy, then fold in the masa harina, baking powder, and the remaining tablespoon of salt. Slowly knead in three cups of the warm chicken broth until the dough reaches the consistency of thick buttercream; if a tiny ball of the masa floats in a glass of cold water, it's aerated perfectly.

**4. Embrace the ritual of the fold.**

Spread a quarter-cup of the wet masa onto the glossy side of a banana leaf, top it with a pinch of shredded chicken, and drizzle a generous spoonful of mole directly over the meat. Fold the top and bottom edges to overlap, then tuck the ends underneath to form a completely sealed, horizontal rectangular packet.

**5. Steam the tamales horizontally, using the penny trick as your auditory guide.**

Drop a clean coin into the water chamber of your steamer, line the rack with leaf scraps, and stack the tamales completely flat so the wet mole doesn't leak out the bottom. Cover tightly with a plastic bag and a lid, then steam for an hour and a half; if the penny stops rattling, your water has boiled away and you need to add more immediately.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing the right fat.**

If you cannot find high-quality rendered pork lard, do not settle for the highly hydrogenated flavorless stuff. A mixture of half vegetable shortening and half olive oil perfectly mimics the necessary fat content and texture for a weeknight adaptation.

- **Choosing your masa.**

Standard Maseca for tamales works fine, but seeking out an heirloom corn masa harina like Masienda will elevate this dish closer to the fresh masa quebrada used in Oaxaca.



# Tamales de Chepil con Salsa de Pasilla Mixe

Your abuela didn't have a stand mixer, but she had generations of muscle memory. The secret to a tamale that doesn't feel like a brick is air, beaten relentlessly into the lard until it looks like vanilla frosting. Don't stress if you can't find a flight to Oaxaca for fresh chepil—the frozen chipilín at your local Latin market is exactly what diaspora families use to keep this tradition alive on a Tuesday night. Bathed in the aggressive, bacon-like smokiness of pasilla mixe, this is the profound, uncompromised taste of the homeland.

## INGREDIENTS

**3 large** Roma tomatoes

<b>2 large</b>	garlic	<b>1 cup</b>	lard
<b>cloves</b>	<i>skin on</i>	<b>3 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion	<b>2 cup</b>	chicken bone broth
<b>3 med</b>	pasilla mixe chiles	<b>8 oz</b>	frozen chipilín
	<i>stemmed and seeded</i>		<i>thawed, drained well, and tough stems removed</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	banana leaves	<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt
	<i>thawed, wiped clean, and cut into 10-inch squares</i>		

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Char the tomatoes, garlic, and onion in a dry cast-iron skillet.**  
Heat the skillet over medium-high. Place the ingredients directly on the dry metal, turning occasionally until the tomatoes are deeply blackened and the garlic is soft. Peel the garlic once cool enough to handle.
- 2. Toast the chiles briefly to release their essential oils.**  
Wipe the skillet clean and press the chiles flat against the hot metal for 15 to 30 seconds per side. Do not let them burn, or they will turn bitter. Submerge in very hot water for 15 minutes to soften.
- 3. Blend the charred aromatics and softened chiles into a thick, velvety salsa.**  
Transfer the charred vegetables and rehydrated chiles to a blender with a splash of the chili-soaking liquid. Season aggressively with salt and blend until smooth. Set aside.
- 4. Toast the banana leaf squares over an open flame until pliable.**  
Pass each square slowly over a medium-low gas burner until the color shifts from dull to a vibrant, glossy green. If you have an electric stove, toast them briefly in a hot, dry skillet.
- 5. Vigorously beat the lard until pale and fluffy.**  
Use a stand mixer or relentless arm strength to whip the lard for 10 to 15 minutes. It must transform into a light, frosting-like consistency. Drop a tiny piece in cold water; if it floats, you have incorporated enough air.

**1. Gradually work the masa harina and chicken broth into the aerated lard.**

Knead the mixture until it resembles a deeply hydrated, thick buttercream, then season generously with salt. Gently fold in the drained chipilín leaves until evenly distributed.

**2. Assemble the tamales and steam until tender.**

Spoon about 1/3 cup of the masa into the center of each leaf. Fold the sides over and tuck the ends under to create a neat rectangular package. Arrange them upright in a steamer basket over boiling water. Steam for 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes. Let rest for 10 minutes before serving unwrapped and generously bathed in the salsa.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Sourcing Pasilla Mixe**

Pasilla mixe is a rare, smoke-dried chili from the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca. It is deeply smoky and intensely hot, fundamentally different from standard supermarket pasillas. If you cannot order them online, substitute one ancho chile and two morita chiles to approximate the flavor.



# Vegetarian Tamales de Frijol y Quesillo con Hoja de Aguacate

*tah-MAH-les de free-HOL ee keh-SEE-yo con OH-ha de ah-gwah-KAH-teh*

In the Central Valleys of Oaxaca, a tamal is not just food—it is a ritual that binds generations. For the diaspora, recreating the exact, intoxicating aroma of an abuela's kitchen seems impossible without her standing over your shoulder, but the secret to this specific tamal relies on two immutable laws: whipping the fat until it resembles clouds, and waking up the avocado leaves with fire. Trading traditional pork lard for vegetable shortening sacrifices zero flavor when you respect the technique, allowing the dense, anise-scented black bean paste and the

stringy pull of melted quesillo to shine. Make the bean paste on a Tuesday, and wrap the tamales on a Thursday for a weeknight triumph.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>5 large</b>	dried Mexican avocado leaves	<b>3 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>30 oz</b>	canned black beans <i>undrained</i>	<b>3 1/2 cup</b>	vegetable broth <i>warmed</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	baking powder
<b>3 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled and roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>3 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil	<b>1/2 lb</b>	Oaxaca cheese <i>pulled into thin strings</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	vegetable shortening <i>softened to room temp</i>	<b>1 large package</b>	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed, washed, and cut into 10-inch squares</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Toast the avocado leaves until fragrant.**

Heat a dry cast-iron skillet over medium heat and press the avocado leaves lightly against the metal for 10 to 15 seconds per side until they change color slightly and release a distinct, licorice-like aroma.

- **Puree the beans with the toasted leaves.**

In a blender, combine the undrained canned black beans and the toasted avocado leaves until completely smooth.

- **Fry the bean puree into a thick paste.**

Heat the vegetable oil in a heavy-bottomed skillet over medium heat, sauté the onion and garlic until golden, then pour in the bean mixture. Cook, stirring constantly, for about 15 minutes until it reduces to a dense paste that pulls cleanly away from the pan, then let cool completely.

- **Roast the banana leaves over an open flame.**

Pass each thawed and cleaned leaf square slowly over a medium-low stove burner until the heat breaks down the cellular structure, instantly turning the leaf a glossy, dark green and rendering it pliable.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Beat the shortening until pale and fluffy.**

In a large bowl, use an electric hand mixer to beat the vegetable shortening with the baking powder and kosher salt for 8 to 10 minutes until it doubles in volume and looks like clouds. Do not rush this step, as it is the absolute key to a light, spongy tamal.

- 2. Incorporate the masa harina and broth into the whipped fat.**

Gradually alternate adding the masa harina and the warm vegetable broth into the bowl, mixing continuously until the texture resembles a thick, spreadable buttercream frosting.

- 3. Spread the masa onto the prepared banana leaves and add the fillings.**

Lay a leaf shiny side up, spread a golf-ball-sized mound of masa into a thin 5-inch circle, and top the center with two tablespoons of the cooled black bean paste and a generous pinch of stringed Oaxaca cheese.

- 4. Fold the leaves to envelop the filling tightly.**

Fold the left side of the leaf over the center, then the right side to meet it, and finally fold the top and bottom flaps down to create a tight rectangular packet.

- 5. Steam the tamales for roughly an hour until the leaf peels away cleanly.**

Arrange the tamales in a steamer basket lined with leftover leaf scraps, ensuring they do not touch the water. Cover tightly and steam over medium heat for 60 to 75 minutes, then let them rest off the heat for 15 minutes to firm up before serving.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Split the work across multiple days.**

Making tamales in one evening is an exhausting endeavor. Prepare the dense bean paste and roast the banana leaves up to three days in advance, leaving only the masa mixing and assembly for the evening you plan to steam them.

- **Do not fear a wet masa.**

Masa destined for banana leaves should be significantly wetter and more spreadable than masa for corn husks, as the moisture trapped in the thick leaf prevents the final tamal from becoming soggy.

- **Source true Mexican avocado leaves.**

Look for whole, unbroken, vibrantly olive-green dried leaves in the spice aisle of a Latin market. Guatemalan or Hass avocado leaves are not used for culinary purposes and will not deliver the required anise flavor.



# Tamales de Rajas con Queso y Epazote

*tah-MAH-less deh RAH-has kohn KEH-so ee eh-pah-SOH-teh*

When most Americans think of tamales, they picture dry northern-style corn husks, but step into a Oaxacan kitchen and the air hangs heavy with the tea-like smoke of toasting banana leaves. This recipe bypasses the generic strip of raw pepper and rubbery cheese found in lesser adaptations, demanding instead a robust tomato and epazote sofrito that bleeds brilliantly into the dough. By aggressively whipping warm broth into the masa, you mimic the famously silky texture of traditional stove-cooked dough without chaining yourself to the pot for an hour on a Tuesday night. It is an unapologetic, uncompromised taste of the homeland, built for a modern kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>1/2 lb</b>	Panela cheese <i>cut into 1/4-inch batons</i>
<b>1 large</b>	white onion <i>halved and thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	pork lard or vegetable shortening
<b>5 large</b>	jalapeño peppers <i>stemmed, seeded, and cut into thin strips</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	neutral oil
<b>3 large</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>finely chopped</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>2 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	baking powder
<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh epazote leaves <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>4 1/2 cup</b>	chicken or vegetable broth <i>warmed</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	Oaxaca cheese <i>pulled into strings</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the banana leaves by removing the rigid center stems and cutting into 10-inch squares.**

Rinse under warm water and wipe completely dry with a clean towel, swiping parallel to the veins so they don't tear.

- **Toast the leaves over an open flame to release their essential oils and render them pliable.**

Pass each square two inches over a medium-low gas flame or hot skillet for a few seconds until the dull green transforms into a glossy emerald.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the foundational rajas sofrito by sautéing the onions and jalapeños.**  
Heat two tablespoons of oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onions and peppers, cooking for five to seven minutes until softened and translucent.

**1. Simmer the tomatoes, garlic, and epazote into a thick, rustic stew.**

Stir in the minced garlic for thirty seconds, then add the chopped tomatoes, salt, and epazote. Lower the heat and simmer for ten minutes until the tomatoes break down entirely, then set aside to cool.

**2. Whip the lard and oil until wildly fluffy.**

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the lard and a quarter cup of oil on medium-high for about five minutes until it resembles white cake frosting.

**3. Hydrate the masa aggressively with warm broth.**

Whisk the masa harina, baking powder, and salt together, then slowly mix into the whipped fat on low speed. With the mixer running, pour in four cups of warm broth, beating for five minutes on medium until it feels like thick hummus. Add the remaining half cup if the dough feels stiff; it should taste highly seasoned and slightly too salty.

**4. Assemble the tamales on the toasted banana leaves.**

Lay a leaf square flat, glossy side up. Spread a third of a cup of masa into a five-inch square in the center. Spoon a generous tablespoon of the rajas stew down the middle, topping it with two strings of Oaxaca cheese and a baton of Panela.

**5. Fold the banana leaves into tight, enclosed rectangular parcels.**

Fold the left, then the right side of the leaf inward so the masa completely envelopes the filling. Fold the top flap down and the bottom flap up, tucking them under the parcel. Repeat until the masa is gone.

**6. Steam the tamales over simmering water for up to an hour and a half.**

Arrange the tamales horizontally in a prepared steamer pot, stacking them like staggered bricks. Cover with leftover leaves, seal tightly, and steam for seventy-five to ninety minutes.

**7. Rest the tamales off the heat so the starches can fully set.**

Turn off the heat, remove the lid, and let the pot sit for fifteen minutes. The tamales are nearly liquid at peak heat and require this resting time to achieve their signature silken texture.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Embrace the double-cheese approach.**

Oaxaca cheese provides the quintessential stringy melt, but pure Oaxaca will disappear into the hot dough during steaming. Using sturdy batons of Panela ensures the tamal retains its structural bite alongside the rich fat.



## Tamales de Amarillo con Hongos Silvestres

While mole negro hogs the spotlight on the Day of the Dead, amarillito is the true, beating heart of a Oaxacan home on a rainy Tuesday afternoon. Up in the mountainous Sierra de Juárez, indigenous cooks have long relied on foraged wild mushrooms to anchor this brilliant, masa-thickened yellow mole. You don't need a plane ticket or a grandmother's weekend-long tamalada to pull this off. By leaning on good masa harina, cultivated mushrooms, and a smart prep-ahead workflow, you can wrap a Tuesday night in toasted banana leaves and breathe in the exact, ancient aroma of the homeland.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 large</b>	package frozen banana leaves <i>thawed, cut into 10x12-inch rectangles, fibrous central ribs removed</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
<b>6 large</b>	dried guajillo chiles <i>wiped clean, stemmed, and seeded</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>1 med</b>	dried ancho chile <i>wiped clean, stemmed, and seeded</i>	<b>5 1/2 cup</b>	vegetable or chicken broth <i>warmed and divided</i>
<b>3 med</b>	Roma tomatoes	<b>3 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>4 med</b>	tomatillos <i>husked and rinsed</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	masa harina
<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	pork lard or vegetable oil <i>melted</i>
<b>3 small</b>	garlic cloves <i>unpeeled</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil <i>divided</i>
<b>1 small</b>	garlic clove <i>peeled and minced</i>	<b>1 large</b>	fresh Hoja Santa leaf <i>torn (or substitute 1 tsp dried Hoja Santa or a handful of fresh cilantro)</i>
<b>2 small</b>	whole cloves	<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	mixed mushrooms <i>cleaned and roughly torn into bite- sized pieces</i>
<b>3 small</b>	whole black peppercorns	<b>2 tsp</b>	Kosher salt <i>divided</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Toast the banana leaves to make them pliable.**

Turn a gas burner on medium heat or heat a dry skillet. Pass each 10x12-inch leaf rectangle quickly over the open flame. You will instantly see the leaf change from a dull, opaque green to a shiny, vibrant green as the heat releases the oils. It takes about 2 seconds per side. Save the scraps for lining the steamer.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Blister the aromatics on a hot, dry skillet.**

Heat an ungreased cast-iron skillet or comal over medium-high heat. Roast the tomatoes, tomatillos, onion, and the three unpeeled garlic cloves until they are soft and charred in spots, about 10 to 15 minutes. Once cool enough to handle, peel the garlic.

**2. Toast the chiles quickly without burning them.**

In the same dry skillet over medium-low heat, toast the guajillo and ancho chiles. Press them flat with a spatula for just 10 to 15 seconds per side until fragrant. Transfer to a bowl, cover with hot water, and hydrate for 15 minutes.

**3. Blend the mole base until perfectly smooth.**

In a blender, combine the roasted vegetables, peeled garlic, drained hydrated chiles, whole cloves, peppercorns, oregano, cumin, and 1 cup of broth. Blend on high until completely smooth. If you don't have a high-powered blender, press this mixture through a fine-mesh strainer to remove the tough chile skins.

**4. Thicken the mole with a masa slurry.**

Whisk the 2 tablespoons of masa harina with 1/2 cup of broth in a small bowl. In a medium pot, heat 1 tablespoon of oil over medium heat, carefully pour in the strained chile purée, and stir in the masa slurry along with another 1/2 cup of broth. Drop in the torn hoja santa leaf, simmering gently for 10 to 15 minutes until it thickens to the consistency of a creamy gravy.

**5. Dry-sauté the mushrooms to concentrate their flavor.**

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat and add the torn mushrooms without any oil. Let them cook for 3 to 4 minutes to release their natural moisture, then add 1 tablespoon of oil, the minced garlic clove, and a pinch of salt. Sauté for another 2 minutes until golden, then fold the cooked mushrooms into the finished mole amarillo.

**1. Whip the masa dough in a stand mixer.**

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the 3 cups of masa harina and 1 1/2 teaspoons of salt. Turn the mixer on low, slowly pour in the melted lard or oil, and gradually stream in 2 1/2 to 3 cups of warm broth. Increase the speed to medium-high and beat for 5 to 8 minutes until the masa is very soft, spreadable, and fluffy.

**2. Assemble the tamales using the traditional Oaxacan fold.**

Lay a toasted banana leaf rectangle smooth side up. Spread about 1/3 cup of masa in the center into a thin square, about 1/4 inch thick. Spoon 2 to 3 tablespoons of the mushroom mole into the center. Fold the left edge of the leaf over the center, fold the right side over to overlap, and then fold the top and bottom edges underneath to create a self-sealing rectangular packet.

**3. Steam the tamales over a bed of fragrant banana leaves.**

Add an inch of water to a steamer pot and line the basket with banana leaf scraps. Stack the folded tamales horizontally, staggered like bricks so the steam can circulate. Cover with more leaf scraps and a clean kitchen towel, secure the lid, and steam over medium heat for 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes. They are done when the leaf peels away cleanly without the masa sticking.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Work ahead to save time on a weeknight.**

Mole amarillito tastes even better the next day. Make the mole and mushroom filling on a Sunday, storing it in the fridge. On Tuesday night, simply whip the masa, fold the tamales, and steam.

● **Oversalt the masa slightly.**

Masa loses salt during the steaming process. Ensure the raw dough tastes slightly saltier than you think it should before you start wrapping, or the finished tamales will taste bland.

- **Freeze extras for instant weeknight meals.**

Tamales freeze beautifully. Once steamed and cooled, place them in a ziplock bag. You can microwave a frozen tamal, still wrapped in its leaf, for 3 minutes to restore it to its fresh-from-the-steamer glory.



# Tamales de Salsa Verde con Cerdo

*tah-MAH-les deh SAHL-sah VEHR-deh kohn SEHR-doh*

If there is one rule to take away from the kitchens of Oaxaca, it is this: the wrapper is an active ingredient, not just a vessel. We don't use corn husks here; we temper banana leaves over an open flame to release an earthy, slightly sweet aroma that is the absolute essence of Southern Mexico. The epazote in the salsa is the undeniable soul of the dish, but utilizing an electric pressure cooker is the weeknight salvation that brings this generational masterpiece to an American suburb on a Wednesday without losing an ounce of its integrity.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 package</b>	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed, cut into 10x10-inch squares, central vein removed</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	chicken broth
<b>2 lb</b>	boneless pork shoulder <i>cut into large chunks</i>	<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	tomatillos <i>husks removed and rinsed</i>
<b>3/4 med</b>	white onion <i>divided</i>	<b>3 med</b>	serrano peppers <i>stems removed</i>
<b>6 large clove</b>	garlic <i>peeled and divided</i>	<b>4 sprig</b>	fresh epazote
<b>2</b>	bay leaves	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	kosher salt <i>divided</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	rendered pork lard <i>softened to room temp</i>
		<b>4 cup</b>	masa harina
		<b>2 tsp</b>	baking powder

## PREPARATION

- **Cook the pork shoulder and reserve the broth.**

Place the pork, half a white onion, four cloves of garlic, the bay leaves, and a tablespoon of kosher salt into an electric pressure cooker. Cover with the chicken broth, seal, and cook on high pressure for 40 minutes, followed by a 15-minute natural release. Shred the meat with two forks and definitively save the cooking liquid—this strained broth is the liquid gold you will use to hydrate your masa.

- **Condition the banana leaves over an open flame.**

Wipe the leaf squares with a damp cloth to remove any agricultural dust. Turn a stove burner to medium-low and slowly pass each square directly over the flame; within seconds, the heat will relax the rigid cellulose, transforming the dull leaf into a glossy, flexible, dark green wrapper.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Build the authentic salsa verde.**

Boil the tomatillos and serrano peppers until they shift from bright green to an olive-yellow hue, being careful not to let them burst. Blend them completely smooth with the remaining quarter onion, two cloves of garlic, and the epazote sprigs.

### 2. **Fry the salsa to concentrate the flavor.**

Heat a tablespoon of neutral oil in a skillet over medium heat and pour in the blended salsa so that it sizzles upon impact. Simmer it for 10 minutes to reduce its water content, then fold in the shredded pork and set aside.

### 3. **Whip the lard to aerate the masa.**

In a large bowl, use a hand mixer to aggressively beat the pork lard for about five minutes until it turns stark white and fluffy, resembling buttercream frosting.

### 4. **Hydrate the masa and perform the float test.**

Beat the baking powder, remaining half tablespoon of salt, and masa harina into the whipped lard, then gradually pour in three and a half to four cups of the warm, reserved pork broth until the batter resembles a thick, spreadable hummus. Drop a marble-sized pinch of the masa into a glass of warm water; if it sinks, keep whipping, but if it bobs to the surface, it is perfectly aerated.

### 5. **Assemble and fold the tamales.**

Lay a conditioned banana leaf flat, glossy side up, and spread about three tablespoons of masa in the center to form a thin rectangle. Spoon two tablespoons of the salsa-soaked pork into the center, bring the left and right sides of the leaf together to entirely encase the meat, and fold the top and bottom edges down to create a tight, flat rectangular packet.

**1. Steam the tamales under pressure.**

Pour one and a half cups of water into your pressure cooker, insert a steamer trivet lined with leftover leaf scraps, and stack the tamales horizontally in a crisscross pattern to allow the steam to circulate. Cook on high pressure for 40 minutes, let the pressure release naturally for 15 minutes, and allow them to rest briefly before unwrapping.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Epazote is the soul of Oaxacan salsa verde.**

Do not substitute cilantro. If you cannot find fresh or dried epazote at your local Latin market, omit it entirely, but understand you are missing the profound, herbaceous hallmark of the homeland.

● **Do not skip the float test.**

A heavy, dense tamal is the mark of a rushed cook. Keep beating that lard until the masa is buoyant enough to float in water; this physical aeration is what dictates a tender, spongy crumb.



# Tamales Dulces de Piña, Pasas y Nuez

*tah-MAH-les DOOL-ses de PEE-nyah, PAH-sas ee NWEZ*

There is a distinct, intoxicating magic to unwrapping a tamal from a banana leaf—the steam carries the earthy scent of the Oaxacan jungle right into the kitchen. Traditionally, achieving that impossibly fluffy, sweet masa required hours of grueling hand-beating, but the modern cook can lean on the stand mixer to secure that ancestral texture on a Tuesday night. Spiked with the bright tang of pineapple, studded with plump raisins and earthy pecans, this is the canonical sweet tamal of the southern markets, translated flawlessly for a first-generation home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 large package</b>	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 cup</b>	unsalted butter <i>softened at room temperature</i>	<b>20 oz</b>	canned diced pineapple in syrup <i>drained well, syrup heavily reserved</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	vegetable shortening	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	reserved pineapple syrup
<b>3/4 cup</b>	granulated white sugar	<b>1 tsp</b>	vanilla extract
<b>3 cup</b>	masa harina	<b>1/2 cup</b>	dark raisins
<b>2 tsp</b>	baking powder	<b>1/2 cup</b>	pecans <i>chopped</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Clean and roast the banana leaves.**

Cut the thawed banana leaves into 10-inch squares and wipe both sides with a damp paper towel. Using tongs, slowly pass each leaf directly over an open gas flame or a hot, dry skillet until the dull, opaque green transforms into a glossy, pliable dark green.

- **Plump the raisins.**

Place the raisins in a small bowl, cover with hot water, and let steep for 10 minutes before draining completely so they don't draw moisture out of the masa during steaming.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Cream the fats and sugar until profoundly light and airy.**

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the softened butter, vegetable shortening, and sugar on medium-high speed for 8 to 10 minutes until the dense paste transforms into a pale, cloud-like frosting.

**1. Hydrate the masa with the reserved pineapple syrup.**

Whisk the masa harina, baking powder, and salt together in a separate bowl. Turn the mixer to its lowest speed and gradually alternate adding the dry masa mixture and the reserved pineapple syrup to the whipped fat, finishing with the vanilla extract.

**2. Beat the dough until it resembles thick buttercream.**

Increase the mixer speed to medium and beat for another 5 minutes until the dough is wet and sticky, significantly wetter than standard tortilla dough.

**3. Perform the traditional float test.**

Drop a tiny pinch of the masa into a glass of cold water. If it bobs to the top and floats, the texture is perfect; if it sinks, beat the dough for 3 more minutes and try again.

**4. Fold in the bright, textural jewels.**

Remove the bowl from the mixer and use a silicone spatula to gently fold in the drained pineapple chunks, plumped raisins, and chopped pecans until evenly distributed throughout the masa.

**5. Wrap the tamales in the prepared banana leaves.**

Lay a leaf square flat on the counter, glossy side up, dollop about 1/3 cup of the masa directly in the center, and fold the left and right edges over to create a long tube. Fold the top and bottom ends underneath to securely seal the package.

**6. Steam the tamales over simmering water.**

Arrange the tamales horizontally in a crisscross pattern inside a steamer pot lined with leftover banana leaves. Cover them with more leaves and a clean kitchen towel to trap the steam, then simmer gently for 1 hour to 1 hour and 15 minutes.

**7. Rest the tamales before unwrapping.**

This step is absolutely non-negotiable. Remove the pot from the heat, take off the lid, and let the tamales rest for 15 to 20 minutes so the masa can firm up; eating them straight from the steam will result in a mushy texture.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Utilize an electric pressure cooker for a hands-off weeknight option.**

Add 1 1/2 cups of water to the bottom of the pot, insert the steamer trivet, stack the tamales, and cook on High Pressure for 35 minutes with a 15-minute natural release.

- **Ensure you are using genuine masa harina.**

Look for a nixtamalized corn flour like Maseca in the baking or international aisle. Never substitute standard cornmeal; it will not bind into a proper dough.