

# Cook Tex-Mex



Recipes with love from  
**The Robot Book  
Club**

# **Cook Tex-Mex**

*Authentic Recipes and Bold Flavors from Texas and the Southwest*

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: Texas and the South West.

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

— Ted Benson

# Prologue

They call it Tex-Mex. A convenient label. Often, a cheap approximation. You've seen it, probably eaten it: the fluorescent cheese, the bland, the predictable. A culinary shorthand that, for too long, has obscured something far more profound.

But below the surface, beyond the neon signs and the endless combination plates, lies a different truth. A cuisine forged in the arid lands of the border, carried in the hands and hearts of families for generations. This is not restaurant food. This is *comida casera*.

For those who grew up a thousand miles from the Rio Grande, with only the ghost of an *abuela's* kitchen in their memory. For the ones who hear "tamales" and taste Christmas, but dread the *tamalada* itself. For the curious, the yearning, the inheritors of a vibrant culture now diluted by convenience and distance. This book is for you.

No exotic trips required. No impossible-to-find ingredients. Just solid, honest flavors, built on the bedrock of garlic, black pepper, and cumin—the true Texas Mexican trinity. These are the recipes that powered ranch hands, sustained growing families, and celebrated life's small victories. Dishes that speak the language of home, translated for your kitchen, your schedule, your grocery store aisle.

What you hold is more than a collection of instructions. It is a lifeline to a heritage, a culinary map back to the table where stories were shared, lessons learned, and bellies filled. It's about feeding your kids what your grandparents fed theirs. It's about reclaiming a taste, a memory, an identity. So, grab your *molcajete*—or a sturdy mortar and pestle—and let's get to work. The table is waiting.



# Mañanas en el Valle: The Southwestern Breakfast Rhythm

*Authentic morning rituals of the Mexican-American home, from quick weekday totopos to leisurely Saturday traditions.*

Morning in the borderlands doesn't wake up to a cloying syrup drizzle or some football-sized, foil-wrapped tourist abomination. It begins in the dark, driven by the hiss of cast iron and the deep, spiced perfume of simmering café de olla. These are the agrarian-rooted rhythms of the Tejano home, where breakfast has always been serious, sustaining business.

It is a daily, working-class alchemy. You taste it in the sharp, violent tang of salsa hitting hot oil for huevos rancheros, the sun-dried permanence of machacado, and the brilliant, thrifty resurrection of yesterday's tortillas into totopos con huevo. There is no pretense here. It is just the pure, unadulterated soul of the valley, plated up to get you through the day.





## Huevos Rancheros Norteños

There is a profound difference between the soggy, sour-cream-smothered huevos rancheros of a generic diner and the real thing. In the borderlands of South Texas and Nuevo León, this dish isn't just breakfast; it's a structural marvel. You don't need to hunt down obscure dried beef to make it work—a slice of thick deli ham stands in beautifully. The true magic lies entirely in the technique: blistering the tomatoes to black, then violently frying the blended salsa in hot oil until it deepens into a rich, smoky brick-red. It's the kind of grandmother trick that transforms a busy weeknight into something sacred.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 large</b>	Roma tomatoes	<b>4 small</b>	corn tortillas
<b>2 med</b>	serrano peppers <i>stems removed</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	refried pinto beans
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>cut into thick wedges</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	bacon grease
<b>2 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>4 med</b>	thick-cut deli ham
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>4 large</b>	eggs
<b>5 tbsp</b>	neutral oil <i>divided</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	water	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
		<b>1/2 med</b>	avocado <i>sliced</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Set the oven rack about 4 inches below the broiler element and preheat to high.**

## INSTRUCTIONS

### **1. Blister the vegetables under the broiler.**

Place the tomatoes, serrano peppers, onion wedges, and garlic on an unlined, rimmed baking sheet. Broil until blackened and blistered, 8 to 12 minutes, turning once. Pull the garlic early if it threatens to burn and turn bitter.

### **2. Pulse the charred vegetables into a rustic salsa.**

Transfer everything, including any released pan juices, to a blender. Add the cumin and a heavy pinch of salt. Pulse four or five times until combined but still chunky—do not purée it into a smooth liquid.

**1. Fry the salsa in hot oil to deepen the flavor.**

Heat 3 tablespoons of neutral oil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat until shimmering. Carefully pour in the salsa—it will sputter and hiss violently. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 5 to 7 minutes until it turns a deep brick-red, stirring in the water if it gets too thick, then reduce heat to keep warm.

**2. Warm the beans and sear the ham.**

Heat the refried beans with the bacon grease in a small pot. Meanwhile, in a large heavy skillet over medium heat, briefly sear the ham slices until lightly golden and the fat renders. Set the ham aside on a warm plate.

**3. Lightly fry the corn tortillas in the residual pork fat.**

Add the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil to the same skillet over medium-high heat. Fry the tortillas for 30 to 45 seconds per side until crisp on the edges but still pliable in the center, then drain on paper towels. Do not let them harden into shattering tostadas.

**4. Fry the eggs in the seasoned oil.**

Crack the eggs directly into that same skillet, frying them sunny-side-up or lightly over-easy so the runny yolk can eventually mingle with the salsa.

**5. Layer the Norteño stack and drown it in the hot ranchero sauce.**

Spread a warm layer of beans over each tortilla, top with a slice of seared ham, and carefully slide a fried egg over the top. Ladle the hot, fried salsa generously over the eggs so it pools on the plate, then finish with the queso fresco, cilantro, and avocado slices.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The salsa ranchera can be made entirely in advance.**

In fact, it gets better after a day in the fridge. Make a big batch on Sunday, and you're only ever ten minutes away from a real-deal Norteño breakfast on a busy Wednesday.



# Machacado con Huevo a la Mexicana

It started as fuel for highway workers in the 1920s Nuevo León desert and became the undisputed king of the borderland breakfast table. This is no delicate, fussy brunch; it is a profoundly savory, passed-down masterpiece relying on sun-dried, shredded beef. The magic is entirely in the rhythm: you must briefly fry the beef in hot lard to wake it up, then let the juices of fresh tomatoes gently rehydrate the meat before the eggs ever hit the pan. If you follow this simple cadence and resist the urge to add salt, your kitchen will smell exactly like a genuine Saturday morning in the valley.

## INGREDIENTS

**2 tbsp** pork lard

**3 oz** machaca  
*shredded*

**1/2 med** white onion  
*finely diced*

**2 med** serrano peppers  
*finely diced*

**1 large** roma tomato  
*cored and diced*

**8 large** eggs  
*lightly beaten*

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Melt the lard in a large skillet over medium heat.**

Cast iron is ideal here. Let the fat heat up until it is shimmering.

**2. Toast the dried beef in the hot fat for one to two minutes.**

Scatter the machaca into the skillet, stirring constantly. You want the meat to absorb the fat and release its deeply savory aroma, but be incredibly careful not to let it burn.

**3. Sauté the aromatics until the onions are soft and translucent.**

Toss in the diced white onion and serrano peppers. Cook for about two minutes, stirring frequently so they flavor the fat without scorching.

**4. Stir in the tomatoes and let their juices rehydrate the beef.**

This is the critical trick. The heat causes the tomatoes to break down and release their natural juices, creating a localized steam that gently softens the dried beef so it is tender to the bite. Let it bubble for one to two minutes.

**5. Lower the heat to medium-low and pour the beaten eggs over the mixture.**

Do not add any salt or pepper to the eggs; the cured beef provides all the seasoning this dish needs.

**6. Gently fold the eggs until they are cooked through but still slightly glossy.**

Let the eggs sit undisturbed for a few seconds until the edges set, then use a spatula to push them from the edges to the center. Remove the skillet from the heat immediately, as they will finish cooking in the hot pan. Serve immediately with warm flour tortillas and refried beans.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Substitute standard beef jerky if authentic machaca is unavailable.**

Buy a high-quality, unflavored, non-sweet beef jerky and pulse it in a food processor until it resembles coarse, stringy cotton.

- **Use bacon grease if you cannot source pork lard.**

Bacon grease is a phenomenal, culturally appropriate Tejano substitute that preserves the rustic soul of the dish. Avoid vegetable oils if possible.



## Totopos con Huevo

If you want to know what a Saturday morning on the border actually tastes like, forget the heavy, cheese-drenched plates slung at trendy Austin brunches. Real comida casera is born from beautiful, stark frugality. This is a masterclass in not wasting food. Stale corn tortillas, transformed in hot oil into golden, shattering totopos, then gently folded into soft, seasoned eggs spiked with fresh jalapeño and onion. The secret isn't a complex spice rub; it's taking three minutes to fry those day-old tortillas yourself. Do that, and you're eating the real thing.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>5 med</b>	stale corn tortillas <i>cut into bite-sized triangles or 1-inch strips</i>	<b>1 med</b>	Roma tomato <i>cored and diced</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>6 large</b>	eggs <i>beaten lightly in a bowl</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>2 med</b>	serrano chiles <i>seeded and minced</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	refried beans <i>warmed, for serving</i>
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	salsa <i>for serving</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Stale the tortillas overnight.**

Leave the corn tortillas out on the counter overnight or unwrapped in the fridge for a few days to dry out. They will absorb less oil and achieve a superior crunch when fried.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the oil in a large non-stick or cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering.**

Add the tortilla pieces in a single layer and fry, tossing occasionally, until they turn a deep golden brown and crisp up completely, about 3 to 4 minutes.

- 2. Reduce the heat to medium and push the crispy totopos to the edges of the pan.**

Add the diced onion and serrano chiles to the residual oil in the center. Sauté for about 2 minutes until the onions soften, then add the diced tomato and cook for 1 minute more just until it releases its juices.

- 3. Ensure the tortillas and vegetables are evenly distributed, season the beaten eggs with salt, and pour them into the pan.**

Resist the urge to aggressively stir. Let the eggs sit undisturbed for 15 to 30 seconds so the bottom begins to set.

**1. Gently fold the eggs over using a spatula, scraping the bottom of the pan.**

Continue to gently fold until the eggs are just cooked through but still soft and glistening, about 1 to 2 minutes. The goal is a delicate bind that keeps the totopos crunchy. Remove from the heat instantly to prevent overcooking, and serve immediately alongside warm refried beans.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

- **Never use bagged chips unless it's a true emergency.**

If you absolutely must, buy the thickest restaurant-style chips you can find. Thin ones will instantly disintegrate into a soggy, miserable mush when they hit the eggs. Skip the frying step and just warm them for thirty seconds before adding the eggs.

- **Do not add milk or cream to your eggs.**

Diluting the eggs ruins the texture. The moisture and richness come from the residual cooking oil and the soft-scramble technique itself.



## The "956" Breakfast Taco

Down in the Rio Grande Valley, where the Texas border hugs Mexico, the breakfast taco isn't some trendy brunch item; it's the daily rhythm of life. The "956" is a working-class masterpiece—a maximalist tower of creamy refried pintos, crispy potatoes, bacon, and cheesy eggs, all wrapped in a hot, homemade flour tortilla and draped with real-deal queso. There's no room here for Hollywood shortcuts or gummy, store-bought wrappers. This recipe gives you the passed-down secrets of the borderlands: hot-water dough for pillowy tortillas, and beans fried aggressively in chile-infused lard. It's the unvarnished, magnificent soul of Tejano cooking, streamlined for a Tuesday night.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 1/2 cup</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>6 large</b>	eggs
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Monterey Jack cheese <i>shredded</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	pork lard	<b>1 tbsp</b>	butter
<b>3/4 cup</b>	water <i>nearly boiling</i>	<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>finely minced</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	pork lard	<b>1 small</b>	serrano pepper <i>finely minced</i>
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>kept intact as one chunk</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	evaporated milk
<b>1 small</b>	dried chile de arbol	<b>1 tsp</b>	cornstarch
<b>2 cup</b>	cooked pinto beans <i>with 1/4 cup of their cooking liquid</i>	<b>6 oz</b>	white American cheese <i>freshly grated</i>
<b>8 oz</b>	thick-cut bacon <i>chopped</i>	<b>2 oz</b>	Monterey Jack cheese <i>freshly grated</i>
<b>1 large</b>	russet potato <i>peeled and diced into 1/2-inch cubes</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Substitute raw supermarket tortillas if you are short on time.**

Making scratch dough on a Tuesday night is daunting. The best alternative is buying unbaked, raw flour tortillas from the refrigerated section of the supermarket. Cooking them fresh takes 60 seconds and captures 90% of the authentic texture. Never use shelf-stable, gummy pre-cooked tortillas for this dish.

- **Adopt the weekend warrior strategy for the beans and queso.**

Authentic flavor takes time, but it doesn't have to happen all at once. Make the frioles refritos and the queso dip on a Sunday afternoon. They keep beautifully in airtight containers in the fridge for up to 5 days, leaving you with just the fillings to fry on a busy weeknight.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Mix the flour, salt, and lard into a coarse dough.**

In a large bowl, whisk the flour and salt. Using your fingers, rub the 1/3 cup of pork lard into the flour until the mixture resembles wet sand.

**2. Hydrate the dough with very hot water to pre-gelatinize the starches.**

This is the abuelita secret that guarantees a soft, pliable tortilla. Pour in the nearly boiling water gradually, mixing with a wooden spoon. Once cool enough to handle, knead on the counter for 5 minutes until smooth and elastic, then divide into golf-ball-sized pieces.

**3. Rest the dough, then roll and blister the tortillas on a hot comal.**

Cover the dough balls with a damp towel and let them rest for at least 20 minutes to relax the gluten network. Roll them out thin, then cook on a hot, dry cast-iron skillet for 30 seconds per side until they bubble and develop beautiful brown freckles. Keep them wrapped in a clean dish towel.

**4. Build a silky, scratch-made queso using evaporated milk and real cheese.**

Melt the butter in a small saucepan over medium heat, sautéing the minced onion and serrano until soft. Whisk the cornstarch into the evaporated milk, pour it into the pan, lower the heat to medium-low, and gradually whisk in the freshly grated American and Monterey Jack until you achieve a glossy, velvety emulsion. Keep warm on low.

**5. Infuse hot lard with onion and chile, then aggressively fry the pinto beans.**

In a heavy skillet, melt two tablespoons of lard over medium heat. Fry the intact chunk of onion and the chile de árbol until deeply fragrant, then discard them so they don't overpower the dish. Carefully pour in the beans and their liquid, let them violently bubble, and vigorously mash them with a potato masher into a rich, creamy paste.

**1. Fry the bacon and crisp the potatoes in the rendered fat.**

Crisp the chopped bacon in a large skillet, remove it to a paper towel, and leave about two tablespoons of fat in the pan. Toss in the diced potatoes, letting them fry undisturbed for a few minutes to develop a golden crust, then cook until tender inside and set aside with the bacon.

**2. Soft-scramble the eggs in the residual skillet fat, melting the cheese directly into the curds.**

Turn the heat to medium-low, pour in the well-beaten eggs, and gently push them across the pan with a spatula. Just before they set completely, fold in the shredded Monterey Jack until melted, then immediately pull them off the heat.

**3. Assemble the tacos while everything is piping hot.**

Lay down a warm flour tortilla, spread a generous smear of refried beans down the center, and layer on the crispy potatoes, cheesy eggs, and bacon. Finish with a cascade of the warm Tex-Mex queso, fold, and eat immediately.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **Fat is a primary flavoring agent, not just a cooking medium.**

First-generation cooks often try to make their parents' food 'healthier' with olive oil, but doing so strips the recipe of its soul. Rendered pork fat or bacon drippings give both the beans and the potatoes their profound, historical depth.

● **Buy deli-block cheese for the absolute best melt.**

While processed cheese loaf is common in modern Texas pantries, you get a much cleaner flavor by asking the deli counter for a block of White American cheese. It contains the exact sodium citrate needed for a perfect melt without the artificial aftertaste. Never use pre-shredded cheese.



# Molletes con Chorizo

*moh-YEH-tehs kohh choh-REE-soh*

Every problem in the borderlands can be solved over black coffee and a plate of molletes. Forget the delicate, vegetarian versions found further south; up north, a proper morning demands the smoky, aggressive punch of chorizo. The genius here lies in the architecture: hollowing out the bread to create a sturdy vessel, toasting a butter barrier to fend off the wet beans, and using the rendered pork fat to instantly resurrect a can of store-bought refrieds. It's a chaotic, beautiful, intensely satisfying mess that tastes exactly like a morning in the valley, entirely achievable on a Tuesday night.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>cored and finely diced</i>	<b>4 med</b>	bolillos or soft French sub rolls <i>halved lengthwise</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	salted butter <i>softened to room temperature</i>
<b>2 small</b>	jalapeño peppers <i>seeded and finely diced</i>	<b>10 oz</b>	Mexican chorizo <i>removed from casing</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>finely chopped</i>	<b>15 oz</b>	canned refried pinto beans
<b>1 med</b>	lime <i>juiced</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	Queso Chihuahua or Monterey Jack cheese <i>freshly shredded</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt		

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the tomatoes, onion, jalapeño, cilantro, lime juice, and salt in a bowl.**  
Do this first. Giving the pico de gallo a 15-minute head start allows the salt to draw out the tomato juices and mellows the harsh bite of the raw onion.
- 2. Crumble the chorizo into a dry skillet over medium-high heat and cook until deeply browned and crispy, about 6 to 8 minutes.**  
The sausage has plenty of its own fat, so you won't need oil. Once it's dark and crumbly, use a slotted spoon to transfer the meat to a paper towel, leaving the bright red rendered fat in the pan.
- 3. Reduce the heat to medium-low, drop the refried beans directly into the leftover chorizo fat, and stir constantly until hot and smooth.**  
This is the grandmother trick. The spiced pork fat aggressively wakes up the canned beans, making them taste like they simmered on a stove all day. Remove from the heat once spreadable.

- 1. Pluck out a little of the soft inner crumb from the bread halves to create a shallow boat, spread evenly with butter, and broil for 1 to 2 minutes until golden.**

This step is non-negotiable. Without this toasted lipid barrier, the moisture from the beans will seep into the bread and structurally ruin the entire dish.

- 2. Spread a generous layer of the warm, chorizo-infused beans into the hollow of each toasted bread half, followed by the crispy chorizo and a heavy handful of cheese.**

Make sure the cheese covers everything all the way to the crust to lock the underlying ingredients in place.

- 3. Return the assembled molletes to the broiler for 3 to 5 minutes until the cheese is bubbling and spotted with deep golden-brown blisters.**

Keep a close eye on them; the line between a perfectly blistered crust and a burnt breakfast is measured in seconds.

- 4. Transfer the hot molletes to plates and crown generously with the fresh pico de gallo.**

The cold, acidic crunch of the salsa violently cutting through the rich, molten cheese and spicy pork is the defining taste of a Southwestern morning. Serve immediately.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Finding the right bread.**

If you don't have a Mexican bakery nearby for authentic bolillos or teleras, soft French sub rolls or a wide, soft baguette cut into 5-inch segments are perfectly acceptable and culturally accurate substitutes.

- **A warning on chorizo.**

Ensure you are buying raw, crumbly Mexican chorizo from the refrigerated section, not the hard, cured Spanish chorizo meant for slicing.



# Huevos Divorciados

*WEH-vos dee-vor-see-AH-dos*

There is a moment in every Tejano household when the smell of charring tomatoes and hot corn tortillas signals that the weekend has truly begun. Huevos Divorciados is the ultimate breakfast diplomat, separating a smoky red salsa and a bright green one with a thick wall of refried pinto beans. The secret to its soul is the tatemado technique—blistering the vegetables on a hot, dry pan until they are black and ugly. For the working cook, doing this char work on a Sunday means this borderlands masterpiece is only ten minutes away on a Tuesday night.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>left whole</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped, stems included</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>cut into two chunks, plus 1 tbsp finely diced</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	bacon grease
<b>2 small</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	pinto beans <i>cooked or canned, slightly rinsed but retaining a little liquid</i>
<b>2 med</b>	Serrano peppers <i>stems removed</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	canola oil
<b>1 small</b>	dried arbol chile <i>stem removed</i>	<b>4 med</b>	white corn tortillas
<b>1 small</b>	dried arbol chile <i>stem removed</i>	<b>4 large</b>	eggs
<b>5 med</b>	tomatillos <i>husked and rinsed of sticky residue</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>
		<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt

## PREPARATION

- **Husk and rinse the tomatillos.**

Tomatillos are encased in a papery husk and coated in a sticky residue that must be washed away before they hit the hot pan.

- **Prep the aromatics.**

Quarter the onion, peel the garlic, and remove the stems from the fresh chiles to ensure they sit flat on the dry skillet.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Char the salsa roja vegetables.**

Place the Roma tomatoes, one chunk of white onion, one garlic clove, and one Serrano pepper in a dry cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Let them blister and blacken for 10 to 15 minutes.

- 2. Toast the dried chile.**

If using the dried arbol chile, press it to the hot pan for just 15 to 20 seconds per side until fragrant. Remove it immediately so it doesn't turn bitter.

**1. Blend the salsa roja.**

Transfer the charred red ingredients—blackened skins and all—along with the arbol chile to a blender. Add a generous pinch of salt and pulse until rustic and slightly chunky, then pour into a bowl.

**2. Char the salsa verde vegetables.**

In the same dry skillet, blister the tomatillos, the remaining onion chunk, a garlic clove, and a Serrano pepper until the tomatillos turn olive green and begin to burst.

**3. Blend the salsa verde.**

Move the green ingredients to a clean blender with the cilantro and a pinch of salt. Pulse until combined but still textured, then set aside.

**4. Render the beans into a thick wall.**

Heat the bacon grease in a skillet over medium heat, frying the finely diced onion until translucent. Add the beans and mash them aggressively into the hot fat until they form a dense, cohesive paste that holds its shape.

**5. Seal the tortillas in hot oil.**

In a large skillet, heat the canola oil until shimmering. Fry each tortilla for about 20 seconds per side so it lightly seals against moisture but remains pliable, then drain on a paper towel.

**6. Fry the eggs to order.**

In the same skillet, crack the eggs and fry them sunny-side up. Cover the pan with a lid for 30 seconds to set the whites perfectly while keeping the yolks entirely liquid.

**7. Build the foundation.**

Overlap two fried tortillas slightly in the center of a warm plate. Spoon a thick, unbroken line of refried beans directly down the seam to build an impenetrable wall.

## 1. **Divorce the eggs.**

Slide one fried egg onto the left tortilla and the other onto the right. Bathe one egg generously in the salsa roja and the other in the salsa verde, letting the beans keep the peace. Garnish with crumbled queso fresco and cilantro.

### CHEF'S NOTES

- **The secret is the char.**

Do not rush the tatemado process. Blistering the vegetables in a dry pan until they are black and ugly is what gives the borderlands' salsas their complex, smoky soul.

- **Make it a weeknight staple.**

Prepare the salsas and the refried beans on Sunday so that assembly requires only frying the tortillas and eggs, transforming a weekend project into a ten-minute meal.

- **Save the bacon fat.**

Manteca (lard) is traditional, but saving Sunday morning's bacon grease for Wednesday's beans provides the exact authentic, savory depth required.



# Atole de Fresa & Café de Olla

*ah-TOH-leh deh FREH-sah & kah-FEH deh OH-yah*

This is the dual rhythm of a borderlands morning. For the adults, Café de Olla: a dark, molasses-heavy coffee born of the Mexican Revolution, steeped with sweet Ceylon cinnamon and never, ever boiled. For the kids—and the lingering weekend adults—Atole de Fresa, a sustaining, ancient lifeline thickened with toasted corn masa. The genius of this atole lies in a quiet, passed-down trick: a single pinch of baking soda added to the strawberry purée acts as a chemical buffer, preventing the acidic fruit from instantly curdling the hot milk. No Hollywood flourishes, no unnecessary embellishments. Just the authentic, comforting tastes of the homeland, engineered to work perfectly on a Tuesday morning in an American kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 cup</b>	filtered water <i>reserved for the coffee</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	fresh or frozen strawberries <i>hulled and halved</i>
<b>2 oz</b>	piloncillo <i>roughly chopped (or substitute 1/2 cup dark brown sugar mixed with 1 tsp molasses)</i>	<b>3/4 cup</b>	granulated sugar
<b>2 med</b>	Mexican canela <i>divided between the coffee and the atole</i>	<b>3 cup</b>	water <i>divided (1/2 cup for berries, 1 cup for masa, 1 1/2 cups for milk)</i>
<b>2 small</b>	whole cloves	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	baking soda
<b>1/2 cup</b>	coarsely ground dark roast coffee	<b>3 cup</b>	whole milk
		<b>12 oz</b>	evaporated milk
		<b>1/3 cup</b>	masa harina

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the masa slurry.**

In a small bowl, whisk the masa harina with 1 cup of cold water until it is completely smooth and lump-free. Never add dry masa straight to hot liquid, or it will instantly seize into impenetrable dumplings.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Simmer the coffee spices to extract their essential oils.**

In a medium saucepan, combine 4 cups filtered water, piloncillo, 1 cinnamon stick, and cloves. Simmer over medium heat for 5 to 10 minutes until the sugar dissolves and the water smells deeply of cinnamon.

- 2. Steep the coffee off the heat.**

Boiling coffee is a crime; it extracts bitter, astringent tannins. Turn the heat off completely, stir in the coarse grounds, cover the pot, and let it steep undisturbed for exactly 5 to 8 minutes before straining into mugs.

**1. Simmer the strawberries into a rough compote.**

In a separate pot, combine the strawberries, granulated sugar, and 1/2 cup of water. Cook over medium heat for 15 minutes until the fruit has entirely broken down and released its juices, then let cool slightly.

**2. Buffer the acid with the grandmother's trick.**

Transfer the strawberry compote to a blender and purée until smooth. Sprinkle the baking soda directly into the vortex and pulse once. It will foam slightly—this is the chemical buffer that will save your hot milk from separating into a curdled mess.

**3. Steam the milks with the remaining cinnamon.**

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot, combine the whole milk, evaporated milk, the remaining 1 1/2 cups of water, and the second cinnamon stick. Heat over medium-low until it is steaming but not boiling.

**4. Combine and thicken the atole.**

Slowly pour the prepared masa slurry through a fine-mesh strainer into the steaming milk, whisking constantly. Add the buffered strawberry purée and cook for 15 minutes, stirring continuously so the corn doesn't scorch the bottom, until it thickens into a glossy, drinkable pudding.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Maicena Shortcut.**

If you don't have masa harina, substitute 3 to 4 tablespoons of cornstarch (maicena) whisked into cold milk. It thickens faster and yields a slightly lighter, silkier drink, though it trades away that beautiful, ancestral roasted corn flavor.

● **The Right Cinnamon.**

Standard American grocery store cinnamon is Cassia—hard, woody, and intensely spicy. You need Ceylon cinnamon (canela), which is flaky, floral, and sweet. Look for it in cellophane bags in the Mexican spice aisle.





# Comida Casera on a Tuesday: Weeknight Suppers from the Homeland

*The beating heart of everyday Tejano domestic life, featuring comforting guisados, soups, and pan-fries ready in forty-five minutes.*

There is a distinct, quiet heroism in a Tuesday night dinner. It is the unforgiving middle of the workweek, when patience is thin, the boots are heavy, and the family still needs to eat. In the Tejano household, this is the golden hour of the guisado. It isn't about grand, weekend-long affairs or performing for guests. It is about the holy trinity of cumin, garlic, and black pepper hitting hot oil. It is survival, yes, but survival that actually gives a damn about how it tastes.

These are working-class miracles pulled together in under forty-five minutes. A bowl of fideo loco to cure a bad day; stacked enchiladas heavy with raw onion and sharp cheese; a quick pan-fry of milanesa that leaves the kitchen smelling like heaven. It is the beating heart of borderland domestic life, served in a humble bowl, demanding nothing but a warm flour tortilla to wipe the plate clean.





# Fideo Loco con Frijoles Pintos

To grow up in the South Texas borderlands is to know the smell of toasting fideo on a Tuesday night. This isn't the heavy, cheese-smothered Hollywood version of Tex-Mex; it is pure comida casera, a working-class supper born of necessity and elevated by grandmotherly instinct. By fortifying a humble, broth-soaked noodle with spiced beef, tender potatoes, and hearty pinto beans, a single pound of meat stretches to feed a family, delivering an unpretentious, deeply comforting bowl of home.

## INGREDIENTS

**3 med** Roma tomatoes  
*quartered*

**1/2 med** white onion  
*roughly chopped*

<b>3 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>smashed</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	onion powder
<b>1 cup</b>	water	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	garlic powder
<b>1 lb</b>	lean ground beef	<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>7 oz</b>	fideo noodles <i>broken into 1-inch pieces</i>	<b>5 cup</b>	chicken broth
<b>2 med</b>	Yukon Gold potatoes <i>peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes</i>	<b>15 oz</b>	canned pinto beans <i>drained and rinsed</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>2 med</b>	limes <i>cut into wedges</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Blend the fresh tomato base.

In a blender, combine the Roma tomatoes, onion, garlic, and water, blending on high until completely smooth. Set this puree aside—it is the essential secret to an authentic broth.

### 2. Brown and spice the beef.

Heat a large, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven over medium-high heat and cook the ground beef until no pink remains, about 5 to 7 minutes. Drain excess fat, leaving about a tablespoon in the pot, then stir in the cumin, oregano, onion powder, garlic powder, salt, and pepper to toast the spices for a minute before transferring the meat to a bowl.

### 3. Toast the dry fideo in oil.

In the same pot over medium heat, add the vegetable oil and the dry broken noodles, stirring constantly for 2 to 4 minutes until they turn a deep, rich golden brown. Watch them like a hawk; they go from beautifully toasted to burnt in seconds. Skipping this step results in mushy pasta.

**1. Sizzle the tomato puree.**

The moment the fideo is golden, pour the blended tomato mixture directly into the pot over the hot noodles. Let it aggressively sizzle and fry for about 2 minutes to cook off the raw onion flavor and deepen the sauce.

**2. Simmer the soup.**

Pour in the broth, then return the spiced ground beef to the pot along with the diced potatoes. Bring to a rolling boil, then reduce the heat to a gentle low simmer, cover, and cook for 12 to 15 minutes until the potatoes are easily pierced with a fork.

**3. Fold in the pinto beans.**

Gently stir in the drained pinto beans and let the pot simmer uncovered for another 3 to 5 minutes just to warm them through. Do not overcook, or the beans will disintegrate into mush; ladle into wide bowls, finish with a squeeze of lime and a pinch of fresh cilantro, and serve immediately.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Toast your noodles.**

This is the cardinal rule of Mexican pasta dishes like *sopa seca*. Frying the dry fideo seals the starches and lends a nutty depth, keeping the thin noodles from turning into complete mush as they simmer.

● **Embrace the bouillon.**

While boxed chicken or beef broth works perfectly fine, dissolving 2 tablespoons of Knorr bouillon into 5 cups of hot water will yield the exact nostalgic flavor profile found in most Tejano home kitchens.



# Picadillo con Papas

*pee-kah-DEE-yoh kohn PAH-pahs*

If there is one dish that forms the absolute backbone of Tejano home cooking, it is this. You won't find it in fancy restaurants, and it isn't the complex, raisin-studded affair found in the Caribbean. This is pure, unadulterated *comida casera*—an honest, working-class meat and potato hash meant to stretch a dollar and feed a crowd. For a first-generation kid walking through the door after school, the smell of blooming cumin, searing beef, and bubbling tomatoes is a visceral time machine. The secret here isn't a complex technique; it's simply giving the ground beef the time it needs to aggressively brown, then letting the potatoes simmer directly in the vibrant tomato broth until they absorb all that history.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1/4 large</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>2 med cloves</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>
<b>1 med</b>	jalapeño or serrano pepper <i>stem removed, seeds left intact</i>	<b>2 med</b>	Russet potatoes <i>peeled and cut into 1/4-inch cubes</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	water or low-sodium beef broth	<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>1 tsp</b>	beef bouillon powder	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano <i>crushed between your fingers</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	80/20 ground beef	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper

## PREPARATION

- **Soak the potatoes.**

If you dice the potatoes ahead of time, keep them submerged in a bowl of cold water in the fridge. This prevents oxidation and removes excess surface starch that might otherwise make the dish gummy. Drain completely before adding to the skillet.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the salsa base.**

In a small saucepan, cover the Roma tomatoes, the quarter of an onion, and the jalapeño with water and bring to a boil. Simmer for about 10 minutes until the tomato skins burst and the pepper is soft.

- 2. Blend the broth.**

Transfer the boiled vegetables to a blender, add the half cup of water or broth, and the beef bouillon powder. Blend on high until completely smooth, then set aside.

**1. Sear the beef aggressively.**

Heat a large, heavy-bottomed skillet or cast iron pan over medium-high heat. Add the ground beef, breaking it apart with a wooden spoon. Step back and let it sit for a minute or two at a time without constantly stirring—you want a deep, dark brown crust to form. Season generously with black pepper and a pinch of kosher salt.

**2. Build the aromatics.**

Once the meat is fully browned and no pink remains, spoon out any excess fat so you are left with about two tablespoons in the pan. Reduce the heat to medium, add the finely diced half onion, and sauté for 3 minutes until translucent. Stir in the minced garlic, cumin, and crushed oregano, cooking for 60 seconds until the spices bloom.

**3. Simmer the potatoes.**

Pour the blended tomato salsa directly into the skillet with the beef. Scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan, then immediately fold in the diced potatoes. The liquid should come about halfway up the mixture; if it looks too dry, add a splash more water or broth.

**4. Steam to finish.**

Bring the skillet to a gentle boil, reduce the heat to low, and cover tightly with a lid. Simmer for 15 to 20 minutes until the potatoes are perfectly fork-tender but not turning to mush. Let it rest off the heat for 5 minutes to thicken before serving.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The pantry shortcut.**

If you simply do not have ten minutes to boil and blend fresh tomatoes, skip the blender entirely. Add a half cup of high-quality canned tomato sauce (like El Pato) and a half cup of beef broth to the browned meat along with the potatoes. It is an authentic weeknight cheat used by thousands of Mexican-American moms.

- **Adjusting the heat.**

If you are feeding toddlers or those sensitive to spice, leave the jalapeño out of the blender. Instead, fry a halved jalapeño in the pan with the beef just to extract its aromatic oils into the fat, then remove and discard it before serving.



# Enchiladas Norteñas Montadas

*en-chee-LAH-dahs nor-TEN-yahs mon-TAH-dahs*

Real enchiladas do not come out of a can, and they certainly do not have to be rolled. Born on the arid ranches of Chihuahua, the stacked montada is the ultimate, uncompromising weeknight hack. We bypass the flour-thickened gravies of modern Tex-Mex and return to the ancestral technique: a pure, velvety puree of toasted dried chiles, briefly seared in hot oil to wake up the flavor. Crowned with a sunny-side-up egg whose yolk bleeds down into the red sauce, this is a fast, soulful plate of food that smells and tastes exactly like a grandmother's kitchen in the borderlands.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>10</b>	dried Guajillo chiles <i>wiped clean, stemmed, and seeded</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	chicken broth
<b>2</b>	dried Ancho chiles <i>wiped clean, stemmed, and seeded</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	lard or neutral oil
<b>2 small clove</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>12</b>	white or yellow corn tortillas
<b>1 tsp</b>	Mexican oregano	<b>3 cup</b>	Queso Chihuahua or Monterey Jack cheese <i>shredded</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>4 large</b>	large eggs

## PREPARATION

- **Clean and seed the dried chiles.**

Tear off the stems, shake out the loose seeds, and pull out any prominent dried veins before toasting. A few stray seeds won't hurt, as the sauce will eventually be strained.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the chiles to wake them up.**

Heat a dry skillet over medium-high heat. Press the stemmed and seeded Guajillo and Ancho chiles flat against the hot metal with a spatula for 10 to 15 seconds per side until they become highly fragrant and slightly pliable. Do not let them burn, or the sauce will turn bitter.

- 2. Hydrate the toasted chiles.**

Transfer the chiles to a medium pot, cover them with water, and bring to a gentle boil. Remove the pot from the heat and let them steep for 15 minutes until fully softened.

**1. Blend and strain the sauce.**

Transfer the hydrated chiles to a blender along with the garlic, roughly chopped onion, oregano, cumin, salt, and chicken broth. Blend on high until completely smooth. Push the puree through a fine-mesh strainer into a bowl using the back of a spoon, discarding the tough, fibrous skins.

**2. Sear the chili puree.**

Heat one tablespoon of lard or oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat.

Carefully pour in the strained chili sauce—it will sputter aggressively. Simmering the sauce in hot oil cooks the raw chili flavor and deepens the color. Reduce heat to low and keep it warm.

**3. Fry the tortillas to build structure.**

In a skillet, heat the half cup of neutral oil over medium-high heat until shimmering. Using tongs, fry each corn tortilla for only 10 to 15 seconds per side. You want them pliable and slightly sealed against the sauce, not crispy like a tostada. Drain on a paper towel-lined plate.

**4. Dip and stack the enchiladas.**

Working one serving at a time, dip a fried tortilla completely into the warm red chile sauce. Lay it flat on a warm plate, sprinkle generously with cheese and a pinch of diced raw onions. Repeat to create a three-tortilla stack, finishing with a final heavy layer of cheese.

**5. Crown with a fried egg.**

In a clean skillet, quickly fry four eggs sunny-side up. Gently place one egg squarely on top of each enchilada stack so the liquid yolk can mix with the red sauce on the plate. Serve immediately.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Never skip the strainer.**

Pushing the blended sauce through a fine-mesh sieve is the grandmother's trick that separates a gritty, amateur puree from a velvety, professional-grade salsa colorada. Take the extra two minutes to do it.

- **The brief tortilla fry is non-negotiable.**

Dipping raw corn tortillas directly into hot enchilada sauce will result in a mushy, disintegrated mess. Frying them for a few seconds creates a vital lipid barrier that maintains the structure of the stack.



## Carne Guisada Rápida

If you grew up anywhere near the Texas-Mexico border, this is the ultimate taste of home—a profoundly comforting, cumin-scented stew of tender beef swimming in a rich brown gravy, meant to be swiped clean with a warm flour tortilla. But a working parent on a Tuesday doesn't have three hours to simmer traditional chuck roast. The grandmother's secret here is changing the meat, not the soul of the dish. Swapping tough cuts for top sirloin and relying on a quick pan-roux builds those deep, honest flavors in under forty-five minutes. It isn't a fake restaurant combo plate; it's the exact smell of an abuela's kitchen, brilliantly engineered for real life.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	Top Sirloin steak <i>trimmed and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	<b>3 large</b>	fresh garlic cloves <i>minced</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>3 tbsp</b>	all-purpose flour
<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>2 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil	<b>1 tsp</b>	chili powder
<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried oregano
<b>1 med</b>	jalapeño <i>finely diced with seeds and membranes removed</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	canned tomato sauce
		<b>2 1/2 cup</b>	beef broth
		<b>8 med</b>	flour tortillas <i>warmed</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toss the cubed sirloin thoroughly with the salt and freshly ground black pepper in a large bowl.**

Heat the vegetable oil in a large skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat until hot and shimmering.

- 2. Sear the beef in batches to develop a dark, crusty brown exterior.**

Do not crowd the pan, or the meat will steam instead of brown. Let the beef sit undisturbed for two to three minutes before flipping. This browned crust and the sticky fond left on the bottom of the pan are the entire secret to a rich, authentic gravy. Transfer the browned meat to a plate, leaving the fat in the pan.

- 3. Lower the heat to medium and sauté the diced onion and jalapeño in the residual beef fat.**

As the onions release their water, use a wooden spoon to aggressively scrape up all those beautiful brown bits from the bottom of the skillet. Cook for four to five minutes until the onions are soft and translucent, then add the minced garlic and cook for exactly one more minute.

1. **Return the beef and its accumulated juices to the skillet, then evenly sprinkle the flour over the top.**

Stir vigorously so the flour soaks up the fat and coats the meat, creating a pasty appearance. Cook this for one to two minutes, stirring constantly, to cook out the raw flour taste and toast it slightly—this is your thickening power.

2. **Pour in the beef broth and tomato sauce, then stir in the ground cumin, chili powder, and dried oregano.**

Stir well, scraping the bottom of the pan one last time to ensure no flour is stuck. Bring the liquid to a gentle boil, then immediately reduce the heat to medium-low.

3. **Simmer uncovered for twenty to twenty-five minutes until the sirloin is incredibly tender and the liquid transforms into a silken, glossy brown gravy.**

If the gravy thickens too quickly, splash in a little extra water; if it's too thin, let it bubble for a few more minutes. Taste and adjust the salt or pepper before serving generously alongside rice, beans, and piping hot flour tortillas.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not use pre-ground black pepper dust.**

The sharp, pungent bite of freshly cracked black peppercorns is a load-bearing pillar of the authentic Tejano flavor profile. Take the extra thirty seconds to grind it fresh.

- **Swap the jalapeño for a serrano chile if you prefer a sharper, more traditional heat.**

Conversely, removing the seeds and white membranes from a jalapeño provides the essential floral flavor of the green chile with almost zero heat, which is perfect if you're cooking for young kids.

- **A beef bouillon cube dissolved in water is a highly authentic shortcut if you don't have boxed broth.**

It is a staple technique in Mexican-American home kitchens and brings a distinct, nostalgic depth to the gravy.



## Guisado de Calabacita con Maíz y Queso Fresco

The smell of white onions and garlic sweating in a pan is the universal signal that it's time to eat. This restorative stew is the ultimate weeknight unsung hero, the absolute epitome of comida casera. It relies on the ancient, foundational marriage of squash and maize, updated for the modern American kitchen without losing an ounce of its soul. It doesn't try to be fancy. It's simply a bowl of warmth anchored by a deeply savory aromatic base and the milky finish of fresh cheese, tasting exactly like sitting at your grandmother's Formica table on a Tuesday evening.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	zucchini <i>cut into uniform 1/2-inch cubes</i>	<b>3 med</b>	roma tomatoes <i>diced</i>
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>finely chopped</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>3 large clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
<b>1 med</b>	jalapeno pepper <i>finely diced, seeds and ribs removed if desired</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>chopped</i>
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	sweet corn kernels <i>thawed if frozen, drained if canned</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Build the aromatic foundation without rushing.**

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat, add the onion, and let it cook slowly until deeply fragrant and translucent, about five to seven minutes. Don't rush this process, as sweating the onions builds the savory backbone of the entire dish before you stir in the minced garlic and chile to bloom for exactly one more minute.

### 2. **Sauté the zucchini to build heat.**

Toss the cubed zucchini into the skillet, coating it thoroughly in the aromatic oil. Sauté uncovered for four to five minutes so the squash takes on heat and begins softening around the edges without turning to absolute mush.

### 3. **Introduce the corn and tomatoes.**

Stir in the sweet corn, diced Roma tomatoes, salt, pepper, and Mexican oregano. The tomatoes will immediately begin breaking down, yielding the thick, rich sauce that acts as your stewing broth.

**1. Cover and simmer the stew.**

Turn the heat down to medium-low, clamp a tight-fitting lid on the pan, and let the vegetables stew in their own natural juices for eight to ten minutes. If the pan threatens to scorch, splash in a little water or chicken broth; if it looks entirely too watery, leave the lid off for the final minutes of cooking.

**2. Garnish and serve immediately.**

Pierce a piece of squash to ensure it is perfectly tender but structurally intact, then pull the pan from the heat. Stir in the cilantro, adjust the salt to taste, and serve piping hot directly from the pan, showered generously with the crumbled queso fresco.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Mastering the texture of the zucchini is the true secret to this dish.**

American zucchini has a high water content and can easily turn to baby food. Cutting the squash into uniform pieces ensures it cooks evenly, while holding back the acidic tomatoes until after the zucchini has started to soften preserves its structure.

● **Seek out fresh epazote if you want the ultimate authentic flavor.**

If you have access to a Mexican market, grab a sprig of fresh epazote to lay over the stew as it simmers. It imparts a pungent, earthy profile that cilantro can't quite replicate, instantly transporting you to a rural Mexican kitchen.



# Chuletas de Puerco a la Mexicana

*choo-leh-tahs deh pwer-ko ah lah meh-hee-kah-nah*

If you grew up in a Mexican or Tejano household, "a la Mexicana" is a culinary love language. It means whatever is in the pan is being cooked with the holy trinity of Mexican produce: tomatoes, white onions, and green chiles. They represent the colors of the flag and the unmistakable smell of home. This isn't some complex, twenty-ingredient weekend project. It is a Tuesday night masterclass in building flavor in a single skillet. You sear the chops, deglaze the savory pork fat with the acidic tomatoes, and let it simmer. A modern weeknight shortcut—a splash of

El Pato sauce or a pinch of chicken bouillon—bridges the gap between the homeland and a tired weekday, delivering a deeply savory meal that tastes exactly like a grandmother's kitchen in under thirty minutes.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 med</b>	bone-in pork chops <i>patted dry</i>	<b>2 large</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>cloves</b>	
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>3 large</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>diced</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	garlic powder	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	Mexican oregano <i>lightly crushed</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>1/4 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken broth
<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>4 oz</b>	El Pato hot tomato sauce
<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>diced</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>chopped</i>
<b>2 med</b>	jalapeno peppers <i>finely diced, seeds removed for less heat</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Dry the pork chops.**

Use a paper towel to remove all surface moisture so the meat sears beautifully instead of steaming.

- **Season the meat.**

Sprinkle both sides of the pork chops evenly with the kosher salt, black pepper, garlic powder, and ground cumin.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Sear the pork chops in hot oil.**

Heat the neutral oil in a large, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat. Once shimmering, add the chops and sear for 3 to 4 minutes per side until a deeply golden brown crust forms, then remove them to a plate.

**2. Build the sofrito flavor base.**

Lower the heat to medium. Add the diced white onion and jalapenos to the residual pork fat in the pan, stirring for 3 minutes until the onions turn translucent, then add the minced garlic and cook for 1 minute more.

**3. Deglaze the pan with the Roma tomatoes.**

Add the diced tomatoes and Mexican oregano. As the tomatoes release their juices, use a wooden spoon to scrape up all the flavorful browned bits from the bottom of the pan, cooking for 5 minutes until the tomatoes break down and turn jammy.

**4. Add the liquids and return the pork to the pan.**

Pour in the chicken broth and El Pato sauce, stirring to combine into a rustic red sauce. Nestle the pork chops back into the skillet along with any juices from the resting plate, and spoon the sauce over the meat.

**5. Simmer until tender.**

Turn the heat down to medium-low, cover the skillet, and gently simmer for 10 to 12 minutes so the chops cook through and absorb the vibrant tomato and chile broth.

**6. Garnish and serve.**

Remove the skillet from the heat, sprinkle generously with chopped fresh cilantro, and serve immediately right out of the pan.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **White onions are non-negotiable.**

Do not substitute sweet or yellow onions; white onions provide the sharp, clean bite essential to the canonical 'a la Mexicana' flavor profile.

- **Embrace the weeknight shortcut.**

Using a half-can of El Pato sauce or a pinch of Knorr chicken bouillon isn't cheating. It is a genuine, passed-down pantry secret that instantly builds a rich sauce on a busy night.

- **Serve with warm tortillas.**

You absolutely need warm corn or flour tortillas to mop up the pan sauce, ideally paired with simple Mexican red rice and a scoop of refried beans.



# Sopa de Coditos con Picadillo

It is the smell of a Tuesday afternoon in a borderland kitchen—the earthy, toasted aroma of dry macaroni hitting hot oil. This isn't the heavy, cheese-drowned Tex-Mex of strip mall restaurants; it is *comida casera*, the thrifty, aromatic home cooking of the Mexican-American diaspora. The grandmother's secret here is unapologetic: you must toast the dry pasta so it holds its bite in the broth, bloom the cumin directly in the rendered beef fat, and rely on the savory punch of commercial bouillon. It is a bowl of deep comfort built for the reality of an American weeknight, tasting exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

**1 tbsp** neutral cooking oil

**1 cup** small elbow macaroni

<b>1 lb</b>	80/20 ground beef	<b>5 cup</b>	hot water
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	Knorr beef or chicken bouillon powder
<b>2 med clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	Russet potato <i>peeled and diced into 1/2-inch cubes</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	frozen mixed vegetables
<b>1 tsp</b>	Mexican oregano	<b>1 small</b>	zucchini <i>diced</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>8 oz</b>	canned tomato sauce	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Colby Jack or Monterey Jack cheese <i>shredded</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	tomato paste		

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Toast the macaroni in hot oil.

Heat the oil in a large heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the dry macaroni and stir constantly for 3 to 5 minutes until it blisters and turns a rich, nutty golden-brown. Watch it closely so it does not burn, then remove it with a slotted spoon and set aside, leaving the residual oil in the pot.

### 2. Brown the ground beef in the residual oil.

Add the beef to the pot, breaking it apart with a wooden spoon. Cook until fully browned and no pink remains, about 6 to 8 minutes. Drain all but about a tablespoon of the rendered fat.

### 3. Sauté the aromatics and bloom the spices.

Add the diced onion and minced garlic to the beef, cooking for 2 to 3 minutes until the onions soften. Sprinkle the cumin, Mexican oregano, and black pepper directly onto the meat, stirring for 30 seconds to wake up the essential oils in the spices.

**1. Add the tomato base and simmer the liquids.**

Stir in the tomato sauce and tomato paste, cooking for one minute to remove the tinny canned flavor. Pour in the hot water and bouillon powder, bringing the mixture to a gentle boil.

**2. Return the pasta to the pot and simmer with the hearty vegetables.**

Add the toasted macaroni, diced potato, and frozen vegetables. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover, and let simmer for 12 to 15 minutes.

**3. Stir in the zucchini and finish the soup.**

In the last 5 minutes of simmering, add the diced zucchini and half of the cilantro so they retain their texture. Serve hot in deep bowls, garnished with the remaining cilantro and a generous handful of shredded cheese to melt into the broth.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not fear the bouillon.**

Commercial bouillon powder is the true, unapologetic backbone of mid-century Mexican-American home cooking. It provides a distinct savory baseline that liquid boxed broths simply cannot replicate.

● **Manage the consistency.**

This is a *sopa aguada*, meaning a wet soup. The macaroni will continue to soak up broth as it sits; add a splash of water or extra broth when reheating leftovers to restore the original texture.



# Arroz con Pollo Casero

*ah-rohs kon poh-yo kah-seh-ro*

The smell of toasting rice and blooming cumin means one thing to a kid from the borderlands: you are home. This is the deeply savory, fiercely guarded reality of arroz rojo, stripped of commercial restaurant cheese and scaled for a Tuesday night. The secret your grandmother knew is that the dry rice must be fried in hot oil until golden before a single drop of liquid touches the pan. This locks the starch, keeping the grains separate and fluffy, turning a humble pot of chicken and pantry staples into an unforgettable act of love.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	boneless skinless chicken thighs	<b>1/2 med</b>	green bell pepper <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>3 small clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil	<b>1 cup</b>	tomato sauce
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	long-grain white rice	<b>2 1/2 cup</b>	chicken broth
<b>1/2 large</b>	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	frozen peas and carrots blend

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Sear the chicken to build the flavor base.

Season the chicken thighs evenly with the salt and pepper. Heat the oil in a wide, heavy-bottomed skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat, browning the chicken deeply on both sides for about four minutes per side, then remove the chicken and leave the rendered fat in the pan.

### 2. Toast the rice in the residual fat until golden brown.

Pour the dry rice directly into the hot fat left in the skillet. Stir continuously for three to five minutes until the grains smell deeply nutty and turn an opaque, toasted golden color, which seals the starch and prevents a mushy end product.

### 3. Bloom the aromatics and spices.

Add the chopped onion and bell pepper to the toasted rice, cooking until softened. Stir in the minced garlic and ground cumin, letting them bloom in the hot oil for thirty seconds to release their volatile oils without burning.

### 4. Deglaze the pan and initiate the simmer.

Pour in the tomato sauce and chicken broth, scraping the bottom of the pan to lift up all the browned chicken bits. Nestle the seared chicken thighs back into the rice, add the frozen peas and carrots, and bring the liquid to a simmer.

**1. Cover the skillet and let the rice steam undisturbed.**

Immediately drop the heat to the lowest possible setting, cover the pan tightly, and walk away for exactly twenty minutes without lifting the lid.

**2. Rest the rice off the heat before serving.**

Turn off the heat entirely and leave the covered pan on the stove for an additional ten minutes to let the starch set and moisture distribute evenly, then fluff the rice gently with a fork.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Never wash or soak the rice.**

The raw rice must hit the hot oil completely dry to fry properly and develop the protective crust that keeps the grains distinctly separate.

● **Use a proper lid.**

The steaming process relies entirely on trapping moisture. If your lid is loose, cover the skillet with a sheet of aluminum foil before pressing the lid down.



# El Lonche: The Working Lunch and Midday Sustenance

*Translating leftover comida casera into portable, enviable midday meals for the office or school.*

There is a distinct, quiet dignity to the working lunch. It is not the sad, plastic-wrapped sandwich of the tragic office drone, but a triumphant repurposing of last night's comida casera. To peer into the lonchera of a Tejano worker is to witness a masterclass in culinary resourcefulness. Here, yesterday's slow-

simmered guisado finds a glorious second life inside a tightly swaddled flour tortilla, and a simple, yielding bolillo roll becomes the canvas for a perfectly fried milanesa.

This is sustenance built for the job site, the breakroom, and the schoolyard—meals designed to travel well and taste devastatingly good whether hot from the microwave or eaten at ambient temperature. It is food that commands immediate, undivided envy from the uninitiated. From the humble, brilliant alchemy of refried beans and melted cheese on a mollete to sweet, handheld empanadas de camote, these are the lunches that make the back half of the day worth working for.



lemons  
@cesar\_jonathan



# Lonches de Bistec Estilo Nuevo Progreso

*lon-ches deh bees-teck es-tee-loh nweh-voh proh-greh-soh*

Walk across the border into Nuevo Progreso, and the scent of sizzling beef and hot, crispy bread hits before the customs agents even check your passport. These are not the massive, heavy tortas of the interior; they are small, utilitarian sandwiches served on a platter like a round of tacos, meant to be devoured hot and fast on the street. The absolute masterstroke here is the bread. It is not merely toasted. It is flash-fried in screaming hot oil for a matter of seconds, blistering into a shattering crust while keeping the interior pillowy and completely free of grease.

Stuffed with aggressively seasoned chopped steak, creamy avocado, and shredded cabbage—never lettuce—this is the ultimate borderland secret effortlessly adapted for a Midwestern Tuesday night.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	beef chuck steak <i>very finely chopped</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	mayonnaise
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 tbsp</b>	yellow mustard
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>2 cup</b>	green cabbage <i>very finely shredded</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	garlic powder	<b>2 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	onion powder	<b>1 large</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>chopped</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil	<b>2 large</b>	Hass avocados <i>sliced</i>
<b>8 med</b>	small bolillos or crusty slider buns	<b>1/2 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	neutral cooking oil	<b>1/4 cup</b>	spicy salsa

## PREPARATION

- **Set up the garnish station.**

The bread must be eaten the exact minute it comes out of the oil. Have your cabbage, tomato, onion, cilantro, avocado, and cheese entirely prepped and waiting in bowls before the meat even hits the pan.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Render and crisp the chopped steak.**

Place a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat and add the finely chopped beef directly to the dry pan. Let the meat cook in its own juices until the water evaporates and it begins to fry in its own rendered fat, then stir in the salt, pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, and cumin, cooking until the edges are crispy and deeply browned.

### 2. **Flash-fry the bread in hot oil.**

This is the crucial technique that defines a true lonche. Pour the neutral oil into a skillet to a depth of a quarter-inch and heat until shimmering. Working one or two at a time, fry the small bolillos for just 10 to 15 seconds per side until the outside is golden and blistered, then immediately transfer to paper towels to drain.

### 3. **Assemble the sandwiches like a taco.**

While the bread is still hot, slice each roll open lengthwise, leaving one edge attached so it opens like a book. Smear a thin layer of mayonnaise and a dab of mustard inside, fill generously with the hot steak, and layer with the shredded cabbage, tomato, onion, and cilantro.

### 4. **Garnish and serve immediately.**

Tuck in the avocado slices, sprinkle heavily with the crumbled queso fresco, finish with a drizzle of spicy salsa, and pass them out to be eaten while the bread is still shattering and warm.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the cabbage rule.**

In Mexican street food, structural integrity is everything. Cabbage withstands the intense heat of the fried bread and the sizzling beef, maintaining a fresh crunch where lettuce would immediately wilt into a sad, soggy mess.

- **Skip the deep fryer.**

Deep-frying on a weeknight is a deterrent to cooking. A quick, shallow fry in a quarter inch of hot oil in a cast-iron skillet achieves the exact same blistered, street-cart texture with a fraction of the mess.

- **Simplify the prep work with butcher shortcuts.**

Ask your local butcher for pre-chopped taco meat, or buy pre-sliced stir-fry beef and run your knife through it a few times at home to save yourself fifteen minutes of tedious chopping.



# The Leftover Guisado Burrito

*boo-REE-toh deh CAR-neh gee-SAH-dah*

If you grew up in a Mexican-American household, the smell of toasted flour and cumin blooming in hot fat means one thing: carne guisada. This isn't a pot roast, and it sure as hell isn't vegetable beef stew. It's a masterclass in turning cheap chuck roast into meltingly tender beef suspended in a rich, spiced brown gravy. But the real magic happens in the dark of the fridge overnight. The gravy tightens, the spices meld, and it becomes the ultimate, leak-proof filling for el lonche. Smearred with a protective barrier of refried beans and wrapped tight in a warm flour tortilla, this is the unpretentious, undeniable taste of the borderlands.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 1/2 lb</b>	beef chuck roast <i>cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil or lard	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper
<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 small</b>	green bell pepper or jalapeño <i>finely minced</i>	<b>8 oz</b>	canned tomato sauce
<b>3 small</b>	fresh garlic	<b>2 cup</b>	beef broth
<b>1 clove</b>	<i>minced</i>	<b>4 large</b>	flour tortillas <i>warmed</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1 cup</b>	refried beans <i>warmed</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Cube the roast yourself.**

Skip the pre-cut stew meat. Buying a whole chuck roast and breaking it down into uniform 1-inch pieces guarantees the proper ratio of fat and connective tissue needed for a meltingly tender braise.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the beef to build the foundation.**

Heat the oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Pat the beef cubes dry and sear in batches until aggressively browned on all sides, about 5 to 7 minutes per batch. Remove to a plate.

- 2. Sauté the aromatics.**

Lower the heat to medium. Drop the diced onion and bell pepper into the remaining beef fat and sauté until soft and translucent, about 4 to 5 minutes. Add the minced garlic and cook for one minute more until fragrant.

**1. Toast the spices and flour.**

Sprinkle the cumin, black pepper, and flour directly over the vegetables and fat. Stir constantly for 2 to 3 minutes. The mixture will look thick and pasty, but do not rush this—cooking out the raw flour is the secret to a rich, dark, authentic gravy.

**2. Deglaze and simmer the guisado.**

Pour in the beef broth and tomato sauce, scraping the bottom of the pot to release all the browned bits. Return the beef and any resting juices to the pot. Bring to a gentle boil, reduce the heat to your lowest setting, cover tightly, and simmer for 1 1/2 to 2 hours until the meat is fall-apart tender.

**3. Rest the guisado overnight.**

Serve what you want for dinner, but pack the rest into an airtight container and refrigerate overnight. The gelatin and starches will set in the cold, turning the gravy into a thick, highly viscous binder perfect for a packed lunch.

**4. Assemble the lonche.**

The next morning, warm the tortillas on a dry skillet until pliable and slightly blistered. Spread a protective barrier of refried beans in the center of each tortilla, top with the chilled or slightly warmed leftover guisado, fold the sides inward, and roll tightly. Wrap in foil.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Use bouillon like a true grandma.**

Don't stress about homemade stock; a jar of beef bouillon paste or cubes dissolved in water is culturally accurate and provides the intense, salty umami a proper guisado demands.

● **The bean barrier is structural.**

When packing a burrito for lunch, a thin layer of refried beans acts as a waterproof seal against the tortilla, ensuring the gravy doesn't turn the bread soggy by noon.

- **The slow cooker hack.**

If you lack two hours on a weeknight, perform the sear and flour-toasting steps on the stove, then transfer everything to a slow cooker on low for 6 to 8 hours. Reduce the broth to 1 1/2 cups since slow cookers trap moisture.



## Tortas de Milanesa de Res

*tor-tahs deh mee-lah-neh-sah deh rehhs*

There is no smell quite like a milanesa sizzling in a cast-iron skillet on a Tuesday night; it smells unequivocally like coming home. Across the borderlands and the Tejano diaspora, this is the ultimate working lunch—a portable masterclass in architecture built from crispy beef, savory refried beans, and sharp pickled jalapeños. The true, passed-down secret to that legendary crust isn't some imported breadcrumb; it is pulverized saltine crackers, a humble pantry staple that clings perfectly to the meat and survives the journey from the cutting board to the lunchbox. No fuss, no embellishment, just perfect technique.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	beef top round or sirloin <i>pounded to 1/4-inch thick</i>	<b>4 large</b>	bolillo rolls <i>sliced in half horizontally</i>
<b>4 oz</b>	saltine crackers <i>pulverized into coarse sand</i>	<b>15 oz</b>	refried pinto beans <i>warmed</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>4 tbsp</b>	mayonnaise
<b>2</b>	large eggs	<b>1 cup</b>	Monterey Jack cheese <i>shredded</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	whole milk	<b>1 large</b>	Roma tomato <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	yellow mustard	<b>1/2 med</b>	red onion <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	garlic powder	<b>1 med</b>	ripe avocado <i>sliced</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>1 cup</b>	iceberg lettuce <i>shredded</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/4 cup</b>	pickled jalapeño slices
<b>1 cup</b>	neutral frying oil		

## PREPARATION

- **Tenderize and thin the beef.**

If your cuts are thicker than 1/4-inch from the supermarket, cover them with plastic wrap and pound them gently with a meat mallet to ensure fast, even cooking.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Score the edges of the meat to prevent curling.**

Lay the pounded steaks flat and make shallow, 1/4-inch cuts along the fatty edges to sever the connective tissue, then pat the steaks completely dry with paper towels.

**1. Set up a three-station dredging line for the breading.**

Place the flour in the first dish; whisk the eggs, milk, and yellow mustard in the second until perfectly homogenous; and mix the pulverized saltines, garlic powder, black pepper, and salt in the third.

**2. Coat the steaks entirely using a firm triple dredge.**

Dust each steak lightly in flour and shake off the excess, submerge it fully in the egg wash, then bury it in the cracker crumbs, using the heel of your hand to firmly press the breading into the meat.

**3. Fry the milanesas in uncrowded oil at 350°F.**

Heat the neutral oil in a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat, frying one or two steaks at a time for 2 to 3 minutes per side until deeply golden, then transfer them to a wire rack or paper towels to drain.

**4. Toast the rolls and apply the hot bean sealant.**

Spread a thin layer of mayonnaise on the cut sides of the rolls, toast them face-down in a skillet until golden, and spread a thick layer of hot refried beans on the bottom buns to act as a moisture barrier.

**5. Assemble the sandwich immediately while the beef is hot.**

Lay the hot milanesa directly onto the beans, immediately top with the shredded cheese so it melts, and layer with the sliced tomato, onion, avocado, and pickled jalapeños.

**6. Crown the torta with lettuce and close it tight.**

Spread the remaining mayonnaise on the top bun, press a handful of shredded lettuce into it, cap the sandwich, press down firmly with your palm, and slice in half.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not cover the frying pan.**

Covering the pan will trap steam and instantly destroy the crispness of your crust. The meat is thin enough that it will cook perfectly in the hot, open oil.

- **Trust the saltines.**

While panko or Italian breadcrumbs are easy, they lack the specific dense crunch and seasoning profile of galletas saladas that characterizes an authentic Tejano milanesa.



# Empanadas de Camote

The secret to an empanada that tastes like it came straight from a South Texas ranch kitchen lies in two profoundly simple moves. First, you don't just mash the sweet potatoes; you cook them down in a pan with dark sugar until they form a dense paste, ensuring your pastry never turns soggy in a lunchbox. Second, you hydrate your dough not with plain water, but with an aromatic tea steeped with cinnamon and anise. It takes zero extra time, requires ingredients you can buy at any strip mall grocery store, and perfumes the entire house with the unmistakable, glorious smell of authentic borderland pan dulce.

## INGREDIENTS

**2 lb**

sweet potatoes  
*peeled and roughly chopped*

**1 cup**

dark brown sugar  
*firmly packed*

<b>2 large</b>	cinnamon stick	<b>1 tsp</b>	baking powder
<b>1 tsp</b>	anise seeds	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 cup</b>	water	<b>1 tbsp</b>	white vinegar
<b>4 cup</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1 large</b>	egg <i>beaten</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	vegetable shortening	<b>1 tbsp</b>	milk
<b>1/4 cup</b>	granulated sugar		

## PREPARATION

- **Preheat your oven to 350°F.**

Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper so it is ready when you are done assembling.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Brew the spiced tea for the dough.**

In a small saucepan, bring the water, anise seeds, and one cinnamon stick to a boil for one minute, then kill the heat and let it steep while you handle the potatoes.

- 2. Boil and mash the sweet potatoes.**

Place the chopped sweet potatoes in a pot, cover with water, and boil for about 20 minutes until fork-tender, then drain and mash them until completely smooth.

- 3. Cook the mashed sweet potatoes into a dense paste.**

Transfer the mash to a saucepan over medium heat, add the dark brown sugar and the second cinnamon stick, and cook, stirring constantly, for 5 to 7 minutes until the sugar melts and the mixture pulls away from the sides of the pan. Remove the cinnamon stick and set aside to cool.

- 4. Cut the shortening into the dry ingredients.**

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, granulated sugar, baking powder, and salt, then work the shortening in with your hands until the mixture resembles coarse, sandy crumbs.

**1. Hydrate and gently knead the dough.**

Strain exactly 1/2 cup of your warm spiced tea, discarding the seeds and stick, and add it to the bowl along with the white vinegar, kneading gently with your hands just until it forms a cohesive ball.

**2. Portion and press the dough.**

Pinch off pieces of dough and roll them into smooth balls about 1 1/2 ounces each, then use a tortilla press or a rolling pin to flatten each into a 4-inch circle about 1/8-inch thick.

**3. Fill and seal the empanadas.**

Place a generous tablespoon of the sweet potato paste in the center, run a wet finger along the inside edge of the dough, fold it over into a half-moon, and crimp firmly with the tines of a fork.

**4. Vent the tops and apply the egg wash.**

Poke the top of each empanada three times with a toothpick so steam can escape without blowing out the seams, then brush lightly with the egg and milk mixture.

**5. Bake until golden brown.**

Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet and bake in a 350°F oven for 25 to 30 minutes, letting them cool slightly before eating.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The magic of vinegar.**

A splash of white vinegar in the dough is a classic borderland trick; it inhibits gluten formation, guaranteeing an incredibly tender, flaky crust.

● **Sourcing traditional sugar.**

If you have access to a well-stocked Latin market, swap the dark brown sugar for one grated cup of piloncillo to add deeper notes of molasses and rum.



# Gorditas de Harina Rellenas de Frijoles y Queso

*gor-dee-tas de ah-ree-nah*

If you grew up anywhere near the Texas borderlands, the smell of toasting flour on hot cast iron is the smell of home. While the rest of the world pictures corn masa when they hear the word, the arid north belongs strictly to the gordita de harina. These chubby, pillowy pockets of dough were designed to carry hearty beans and stews out to the fields for a midday lonche. The old-school secret to keeping them impossibly soft for days instead of turning them into hockey pucks is heat. Cutting hot, melted fat and near-boiling water into the dough

partially gelatinizes the starches. It is a simple, uncompromising technique that translates perfectly to a modern weeknight kitchen, resulting in pure borderland magic.

## INGREDIENTS

**4 cup** all-purpose flour

**1 1/2 tsp** baking powder

**1 1/2 tsp** kosher salt

**1/3 cup** vegetable shortening  
*melted and hot*

**1 1/4 cup** water  
*heated to 170°F*

**15 oz** pinto beans  
*undrained*

**1 tbsp** vegetable oil

**2 cup** Monterey Jack cheese  
*freshly shredded*

## PREPARATION

- **Refray the beans.**

Heat the vegetable oil in a skillet over medium heat, add the entire can of pinto beans including the liquid, and mash them thoroughly while simmering until thick, hot, and creamy.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the dry ingredients together.**

In a large mixing bowl, combine the all-purpose flour, baking powder, and kosher salt.

- 2. Work the hot fat into the flour.**

Pour the melted, hot vegetable shortening directly into the bowl, rubbing it into the flour with your fingers or a fork until the mixture resembles wet sand and no large lumps of fat remain.

**1. Hydrate the dough with near-boiling water.**

Slowly pour in the hot water—it should be as hot as your hands can comfortably stand—and bring the dough together until no dry flour sits at the bottom of the bowl.

**2. Knead the dough until smooth and let it rest.**

Turn the dough out onto a clean surface and knead vigorously for 5 to 8 minutes until it feels elastic and no longer sticks to your hands, then form it into a ball, cover tightly, and rest for 20 minutes to relax the gluten.

**3. Divide and roll the dough into testales.**

Portion the dough into 12 equal pieces, rolling each into a smooth ball before flattening them with a rolling pin into discs about 4 inches wide and a quarter-inch thick.

**4. Cook the gorditas using the three-flip method.**

Place a disc on a preheated medium-high cast-iron comal for 15 seconds, flip and cook for 45 seconds until spotted, then flip once more, pressing the edges gently with a folded kitchen towel to force the trapped steam to puff the gordita like a balloon.

**5. Immediately slit the pocket open.**

Pull the puffed gordita off the heat and instantly slice a slit around one-third of the edge with a serrated knife so the starchy interior doesn't glue itself shut as it cools.

**6. Fill the hot gorditas.**

Stuff each warm gordita with a generous spoonful of hot refried beans and a handful of shredded cheese, letting the residual heat melt everything together perfectly.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The Hot Secret.**

Do not use lukewarm tap water. Near-boiling water denatures the wheat proteins and swells the starches, keeping the dough incredibly soft and pliable even the next day.

- **Embrace the shortening.**

While rendered pork fat is historically accurate, typical American supermarket lard is hydrogenated and lacks pure flavor. High-quality vegetable shortening perfectly mimics authentic manteca vegetal and yields a flawlessly fluffy crumb.



## Tacos de Pollo Asado en Frío

The lonche is a masterclass in culinary survival, a vessel carrying the smoky, garlic-laced memory of Sunday's cookout into the sterile confines of an American breakroom. This quintessential act of *aprovechamiento*—maximizing leftovers—demands a chicken so aggressively saturated with achiote and sour citrus that its soul survives being stripped from the bone and eaten cold. Streamlined for a Tuesday night oven but entirely unapologetic in its authenticity, this bird emerges deep red, charred, and perfectly built to outlast the weekend.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 lb</b>	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs	<b>1 tbsp</b>	Mexican oregano
		<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh orange juice	<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper
<b>2 tbsp</b>	achiote paste	<b>12 med</b>	corn tortillas <i>warmed slightly</i>
<b>4 clove</b>	fresh garlic <i>peeled and roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 med</b>	fresh lime <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	pico de gallo or salsa verde
<b>2 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Blend the adobo until smooth.

Combine the orange juice, lime juice, achiote paste, garlic, onion, oil, oregano, cumin, salt, and pepper in a blender. Process on high until the mixture forms a vibrant, fiery red liquid.

### 2. Soak the chicken thighs.

Place the chicken in a large resealable bag or bowl, pour the marinade over, and massage it deeply into the meat and under the skin. Refrigerate for at least four hours, though a full twenty-four hours locks in the flavor needed to survive being eaten cold.

### 3. Roast at 425°F for thirty minutes.

Arrange the chicken skin-side up on a foil-lined, heavy baking sheet. The high oven heat immediately begins rendering the fat and mimicking the intensity of a live fire.

**1. Broil to simulate a charcoal sear.**

Switch the oven to broil on high for three to five minutes, watching closely, until the skin blisters and chars and the internal temperature hits 165°F.

**2. Cool completely and shred.**

Once the meat has entirely cooled, discard the skin and bones. Use your hands to shred the chicken into bite-sized pieces, distributing the residual fats evenly throughout.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Wake the meat up with acid.**

Cold temperatures mute flavors and congeal animal fats. Squeezing a fresh lime wedge directly over the cold shredded chicken right before eating cuts the fat and immediately reawakens the dormant spices.

● **Demand bone-in, skin-on thighs.**

Lean white meat eaten cold without a mayonnaise-based binder is famously dry. The rendered fat from the dark meat is non-negotiable for a juicy taco en frío.

● **The authentic color.**

If your hands are slightly stained yellow-red after massaging the marinade, you are using real achiote exactly the way it was intended.



# Sándwich Tejano de Ensalada de Huevo con Jalapeño

*sahn-weech teh-hah-noh de ehn-sah-lah-dah de weh-voh kohn hah-lah-peh-nyoh*

The internet will tell you Tex-Mex egg salad requires a fistful of cumin, chili powder, and shredded cheddar. Forget that fake Hollywood noise. When working-class Tejano families started packing American-style sandwiches for the midday lonche, they adapted them with a far humbler, infinitely better pantry secret: a can of jalapeños en escabeche. The trick isn't just the chopped peppers; it's whisking the tangy, carrot-infused pickling brine straight into the mayonnaise. It cuts the richness of the yolk and transforms a bland Anglo staple into something sharp, bright, and unmistakably rooted in the borderlands.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>8 large</b>	eggs	<b>2 tbsp</b>	red onion <i>finely minced</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	mayonnaise	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 tbsp</b>	yellow mustard	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	pickled jalapeños <i>finely diced</i>	<b>8 slices</b>	white sandwich bread
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	pickled jalapeño brine	<b>4 large</b>	iceberg lettuce <i>rinsed and dried</i>
<b>1 med stalk</b>	celery <i>finely diced</i>	<b>4 slices</b>	bacon <i>cooked until crispy</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare an ice bath.**

Fill a large bowl with cold water and a few handfuls of ice before you start boiling the eggs.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the eggs the right way.**

Place the eggs in a single layer in a medium saucepan and cover with cold tap water by about an inch. Bring to a rolling boil over high heat, then immediately turn off the heat, cover the pot, and set a timer for exactly 11 minutes.

- 2. Shock the eggs.**

Transfer the eggs immediately to the ice bath using a slotted spoon and let them sit for at least five minutes to halt the cooking process, preventing chalky green rings and making them effortless to peel.

- 3. Whisk the Tejano binder.**

In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together the mayonnaise, yellow mustard, diced pickled jalapeños, jalapeño brine, salt, and black pepper. Doing this before adding the eggs ensures every bite of the salad carries the same tangy, savory heat.

## 1. **Chop and fold.**

Peel and roughly chop the cooled eggs, leaving distinct chunks of white. Gently fold the eggs, celery, and onion into the dressing with a spatula until just combined, taking care not to mash it into a paste.

## 2. **Build the lonche.**

Place a dry, crisp piece of lettuce on the bottom slice of bread to act as a barrier against sogginess. Scoop a generous amount of egg salad onto the lettuce, top with a slice of crispy bacon, close the sandwich, and cut in half.

### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Modulate the heat.**

If cooking for kids, skip the chopped jalapeño flesh entirely. Use only the brine and substitute the chopped peppers with the sweeter, milder pickled carrots that come in the same can.

- **Work ahead.**

The eggs can be boiled and the dressing mixed up to three days in advance. Keep them in separate airtight containers in the fridge and fold together right before serving.

- **Serve it gluten-free.**

Skip the bread entirely and serve the salad scooped up with crispy tortilla chips (totopos) or over a baked corn tostada, which is equally traditional.



# Fin de Semana: Weekend Parrilladas and Sunday Suppers

*When time constraints vanish, cooking moves outdoors for the Tejano weekend, featuring backyard parrilladas and slow-cooked Sunday suppers.*

When the clock runs out on the workweek, the frantic scramble for dinner dies with it. The cooking moves outside. A proper Tejano weekend is measured in mesquite smoke, cold beer, and time—the kind of time required to do things

right. The parrillada isn't a mere cookout; it's an institution, a sprawling assembly of family and folding chairs where the air smells of sizzling ahuja norteña and roasting chiles.

Sunday demands its own rhythm. It's the slow, quiet simmer of Arroz con Pollo on the stove and the morning ritual of barbacoa—adapted here for the slow cooker, no buried pit required. These are the meals that anchor a week. They are stripped of pretense, built entirely on the essential truth that the best food is the kind you take all weekend to make for the people you actually want to see.





# Barbacoa de Cachete Estilo Olla de Presión

*bar-bah-koh-ah deh kah-cheh-teh*

If you grew up anywhere near the Texas-Mexico border, Sunday morning meant a styrofoam cup of fiery salsa, a paper-wrapped stack of hot tortillas, and a pound of barbacoa de cachete. Mainstream food media has co-opted the word for shredded chuck roast drowned in vinegar and canned chipotles, but any Norteño grandmother will tell you true barbacoa is an exercise in magnificent restraint. It is entirely about the meat. Beef cheeks are incredibly rich, dense, and woven with collagen. By treating a modern pressure cooker like a traditional vaporera—elevating the meat above the liquid—you can render that stubborn tissue into unctuous, sticky perfection in just over an hour.

No searing. No complex adobos. Just pure, unapologetic bovine glory resting above an aromatic bath of garlic and bay leaves, waiting for a sharp salsa to cut through the fat.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 lb</b>	beef cheeks <i>trimmed of only the largest, hardest exterior fat nodes</i>	<b>3 med</b>	dried bay leaves
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>12 small</b>	corn tortillas <i>warmed</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>coarsely ground</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	water	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>left intact</i>	<b>2 med</b>	limes <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>1 large</b>	head of garlic <i>halved horizontally to expose the cloves</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	spicy salsa verde

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Season the beef cheeks aggressively on all sides.

Leave the internal marbling and silvery connective tissue completely intact, as this collagen will melt into the signature sticky gelatin. Rub the meat thoroughly with the kosher salt and black pepper.

### 2. Set up the pressure cooker as a steamer.

Pour the water into the inner pot, then add the intact white onion half, the halved garlic head, and the bay leaves directly into the liquid. Insert a metal trivet or steamer basket so that it sits just above the water line.

### 3. Pressure cook the meat on high for 65 minutes.

Arrange the seasoned beef cheeks in a single, slightly overlapping layer on top of the trivet, ensuring they are elevated and not boiling in the water. Secure the lid, set the valve to sealing, and start the cycle.

**1. Allow the pressure to release naturally for at least 20 minutes.**

Do not rush this step. A quick release will shock the meat fibers, causing internal moisture to instantly vaporize and leaving the cheeks tough. After twenty minutes, manually vent any remaining steam.

**2. Shred the beef gently and serve immediately.**

Transfer the incredibly tender cheeks to a cutting board and use two forks to pull the meat into distinct, bite-sized chunks, taking care not to mash it into a fine paste. Pile the rich meat onto warm tortillas and garnish generously with raw diced onion, cilantro, a squeeze of lime, and a sharp salsa.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing beef cheeks is non-negotiable for true barbacoa.**

While a heavily marbled chuck roast can be substituted in a pinch, lean cuts will never yield the sticky, unctuous texture that defines this dish. You can find vacuum-sealed cachete in the meat department of most standard American supermarkets today.

- **Skip the sear entirely.**

Unlike Western braises that demand the Maillard reaction, authentic barbacoa al vapor relies on the deeply pure, unadulterated flavor of steamed beef. Browning the meat beforehand will ruin the canonical texture and add unnecessary work.



# Parrillada Norteña

*pah-ree-yah-dah nohr-tehn-yah*

If you drive through Monterrey on a Saturday afternoon, you don't need a map to find the party—you just follow the smoke. The parrillada is less a recipe and more a weekly ritual of fire, meat, and communal eating. Forget the sizzling, over-marinated fajita platters of generic Tex-Mex chains; authentic borderland barbecue is about high heat, heavily salted thin cuts of quality beef, and blistered sausages handed out straight from the coals. We've streamlined the beautiful, sprawling chaos of the weekend grill so you can pull off this massive platter on a busy weeknight in an Ohio suburb, anchored by the ultimate secret weapon of the north: deeply savory, pork-fat-laced frijoles con veneno.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	skirt steak <i>patted dry</i>	<b>to taste</b>	freshly cracked black pepper
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	boneless skinless chicken thighs	<b>30 oz</b>	canned pinto beans <i>undrained</i>
<b>14 oz</b>	smoked sausage loop <i>sliced in half lengthwise</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	raw Mexican pork chorizo <i>removed from casing</i>
<b>2 bunches</b>	green onions <i>roots trimmed</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	lard
<b>4 med</b>	jalapeño or serrano peppers	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ancho chili powder
<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>1 package</b>	yellow corn tortillas
<b>to taste</b>	coarse kosher salt	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	Monterey Jack cheese <i>shredded</i>
		<b>2 med</b>	limes <i>cut into wedges</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the grill.**

Preheat a gas or charcoal grill for two-zone cooking: one side screaming hot, the other side medium heat.

- **Prep the vegetables.**

Toss the green onions and peppers in the neutral oil and a pinch of salt.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Hack the veneno.**

In a medium saucepan, heat the lard over medium-high heat, add the raw chorizo, and fry hard for 5 to 7 minutes until crispy and the oil turns deep red, then stir in the chili powder for 30 seconds.

- 2. Reserve the poison.**

Use a slotted spoon to scoop out three-quarters of the crispy chorizo and 2 tablespoons of the red fat into a small bowl, leaving the rest in the pan.

**1. Mash the beans.**

Pour the undrained pinto beans into the saucepan, bring to a simmer, and smash them into a thick, rustic puree with a potato masher, keeping them warm.

**2. Start the chicken and appetizers.**

Season the chicken thighs with salt and pepper and place them on the medium-heat side of the grill for 6 to 8 minutes per side. Throw the butterflied sausages, green onions, and peppers onto the hot side, rolling until blistered and charred (about 3 to 4 minutes), then remove to a cutting board.

**3. Sear the steak.**

Aggressively salt the skirt steak on both sides and throw it onto the screaming hot side of the grill for 3 to 4 minutes per side until a dark crust forms.

**4. Rest the meat.**

Remove the steak and chicken to a cutting board and let them rest for 5 minutes.

**5. Make the olvidadas.**

Turn the grill to low, toss the corn tortillas directly on the grates, top with a handful of cheese, and close the lid for 2 to 3 minutes until the bottoms are crunchy and the cheese is bubbling.

**6. Assemble the platter.**

Slice the resting skirt steak against the grain, chop the chicken, and arrange all the meats and charred vegetables on a massive platter.

**7. Serve the feast.**

Pour the hot beans into a bowl, crown them with the reserved red chorizo fat, and serve everything immediately with the crispy olvidadas and fresh lime wedges.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Grandma's Rule.**

You are legally required to chop up one of the cooked sausages, wrap pieces in a warm tortilla, and feed it to whoever is standing next to the grill while the rest of the food cooks.

- **The authentic Norteño cut.**

If you want to be incredibly authentic to Monterrey, look for chuck eye steak (the native *aguja norteña*) and ask the butcher to slice it half an inch thick—it's rich, marbled, and a far more traditional alternative to skirt steak.



# Agujas Norteñas y Tablitas

*ah-GOO-has nor-TEN-yas ee tah-BLEE-tas*

If you grew up in a Tejano or Northern Mexican household, this is the unmistakable scent of a Saturday afternoon: the hypnotic, savory smoke of rendering beef fat, citrus, and garlic hitting hot coals. While American steakhouses worship the thick, rare ribeye, the borderlands mastered the art of the thin cut. Aguja (thinly sliced chuck) and tablitas (cross-cut short ribs) are cheap, highly marbled, and cook in literal minutes. The secret to recreating that exact taste of home isn't a complex, hours-long adobo, but a fast, punchy marinade relying on two bottles found in every Mexican grandmother's pantry: Jugo Maggi

and Salsa Inglesa. Whether you fire up the backyard grill or rip a cast-iron skillet on a Tuesday night, this is the unpretentious, deeply authentic soul of the border.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	flanken-cut beef short ribs <i>cut 3/8-inch thick</i>	<b>4 med</b>	garlic <i>finely grated or minced</i>
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	thin-cut chuck eye steaks <i>cut 1/2-inch thick</i>	<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>thinly sliced into half-moons</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	Jugo Maggi	<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>1/4 cup</b>	Worcestershire sauce	<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>coarsely ground</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1 tbsp</b>	coarse sea salt
<b>3 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil	<b>12 med</b>	corn tortillas

## PREPARATION

- **Source the right cuts.**

Look for flanken-cut or Korean-style short ribs for the tablitras, and chuck eye or Denver steaks for the agujas.

- **Ask the butcher for thin slices.**

If you cannot find pre-sliced thin cuts, ask the meat counter to machine-slice the short ribs to 3/8-inch thick and the chuck to 1/2-inch thick.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the liquid marinade ingredients.**

In a large bowl or a gallon-sized zip-top bag, combine the Jugo Maggi, Worcestershire sauce, lime juice, oil, garlic, cumin, and black pepper.

**1. Marinate the beef and onions.**

Add the sliced white onions, short ribs, and chuck steaks to the marinade, massaging the liquid into the meat to ensure every thin slice is well coated.

**2. Rest the meat in the refrigerator.**

Marinate for at least two hours, but absolutely no longer than four, as the acidic lime juice will begin to chemically cook the thin beef and turn it unpleasantly mushy.

**3. Preheat the grill or cast-iron skillet.**

Remove the meat from the fridge twenty minutes before cooking to take the chill off, and set up an outdoor grill for direct high heat or get a large cast-iron skillet smoking hot on the stove.

**4. Season the meat right before cooking.**

Pull the beef from the marinade, shaking off the excess liquid, and generously season both sides with coarse sea salt right before they hit the heat.

**5. Sear the tablitás over high heat.**

Place the short ribs on the hottest part of the grill or skillet, leaving them untouched for three to four minutes until the edges crisp and caramelize, then flip and cook for three more minutes.

**6. Grill the agujas past medium-rare.**

Cook the chuck steaks for four to five minutes per side, intentionally taking them to medium or medium-well so the heavy connective tissue and fat completely melt into a buttery, tender bite.

**7. Blister the reserved onions.**

Toss the marinated onions onto the grill or into the skillet, letting them char and soften in the residual beef fat.

**8. Rest, slice, and serve.**

Transfer the meat to a cutting board for five minutes, slice the agujas across the grain, and serve immediately alongside the charred onions and warm corn tortillas.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not undercook the chuck steaks.**

Unlike a standard American steakhouse cut, agujas are inherently tough if served rare; the magic happens when the fat fully renders at higher temperatures.

- **Sourcing Jugo Maggi.**

If you cannot find Jugo Maggi in the international aisle, substitute equal parts standard soy sauce and concentrated beef broth.



# Mollejas Asadas Rápidas

*mo-YEH-has ah-SAH-das RAH-pee-das*

Sweetbreads are the undeniable caviar of the South Texas parrillada. For the uninitiated, they are intimidating—an offal mystery traditionally demanding hours of mesquite smoke and generations of pitmaster intuition. But the true, passed-down borderland secret doesn't happen on the grill; it happens in a pot. By gently parboiling the mollejas on a Sunday afternoon, the tough membrane slips off like a glove, and the creamy interior sets. Come Wednesday night, a screaming hot cast-iron skillet and a spoonful of beef tallow are all you need to resurrect the violently crunchy, buttery soul of Monterrey in ten minutes flat. No smoke, no rubbery bites, just pure heritage.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	beef sweetbreads	<b>1 tsp</b>	coarse black pepper
<b>2 cup</b>	whole milk	<b>1 tbsp</b>	beef tallow
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion	<b>1/2 med</b>	yellow lemon
<b>3 small clove</b>	garlic <i>smashed</i>	<b>6 small</b>	corn tortillas
<b>1 large</b>	bay leaf	<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare your garnishes early.**

Dice the onion and chop the cilantro before you begin, as the searing process moves very quickly once the sweetbreads hit the pan.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Purge the sweetbreads.**

Submerge the raw sweetbreads in cold milk and refrigerate for at least 1 hour to draw out residual blood and tenderize the glands.

- 2. Parboil to set the texture.**

Rinse the sweetbreads thoroughly. In a large pot, combine them with the quartered onion, smashed garlic, bay leaf, and a heavy pinch of salt, cover with water, and simmer gently for 15 minutes.

- 3. Peel the membrane.**

Transfer the sweetbreads to an ice bath until cool enough to handle, then use your fingers to peel away and discard the thin, web-like outer membrane.

**1. Butterfly the meat.**

Slice the cold, cleaned sweetbreads horizontally down the middle to create thinner, flatter pieces, maximizing the surface area. Season both sides aggressively with kosher salt and coarse black pepper.

**2. Sear in screaming hot cast-iron.**

Heat the beef tallow in a large cast-iron skillet over high heat until shimmering. Press the butterflied sweetbreads flat into the pan and sear undisturbed for 4 to 5 minutes per side until deeply browned and crunchy.

**3. Deglaze with lemon.**

In the final minute of cooking, squeeze the yellow lemon juice directly over the crust to brighten the pan drippings and cut through the intense fat.

**4. Assemble the tacos.**

Roughly chop the crispy sweetbreads, warm the corn tortillas in the residual pan fat, and serve immediately topped with the diced onion and chopped cilantro.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Sunday prep secret.**

The purging, boiling, and peeling steps can be completed up to three days in advance. Pat the cleaned sweetbreads completely dry and store them in an airtight container in the refrigerator until you are ready to sear for a 10-minute weeknight dinner.



# Queso Flameado con Chorizo

*keh-so flah-may-ah-doh kohn cho-ree-so*

Before the main cuts of a weekend carne asada hit the table, there is Queso Flameado. Born on the campfires of the borderlands, this is a far cry from the sad, liquid pump-cheese of commercial sports bars. This is a dense, highly elastic skillet of real melting cheese studded with crispy, spiced pork sausage, meant to be scooped heavily into warm tortillas. The secret to making it taste exactly like it does back home in Monterrey or San Antonio is twofold: you must grate your own cheese from the block to achieve that perfect stringy pull, and you absolutely must pour off the excess chorizo fat so the cheese doesn't break into an

oil slick. Hitting it with a splash of tequila and setting it on fire isn't just cheap tableside theater—it caramelizes the top layer and gives it the authentic, smoky campfire finish it deserves.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>8 oz</b>	fresh Mexican pork chorizo <i>removed from casings</i>	<b>8 oz</b>	Monterey Jack cheese <i>freshly grated from a block</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>8 oz</b>	Muenster cheese <i>freshly grated from a block</i>
<b>1 med</b>	jalapeño pepper <i>seeded and finely diced</i>	<b>1 1/2 oz</b>	blanco tequila
<b>1 small</b>	garlic clove <i>minced</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
		<b>8 med</b>	flour tortillas <i>warmed</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Preheat the oven.**

Set your oven to 400°F before you begin cooking.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Blend the grated cheeses.**

Toss the freshly grated Monterey Jack and Muenster together in a bowl until evenly mixed. Under no circumstances should you use pre-shredded bagged cheese; the anti-caking agents will ruin the smooth, stringy melt.

- 2. Render the chorizo.**

Place a 10-inch cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat and add the loose chorizo. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes, breaking the meat apart with a wooden spoon until deeply browned and slightly crispy.

**1. Manage the fat.**

Remove the skillet from the heat and transfer about a quarter cup of the crispy meat to a paper towel. Carefully pour off and discard all but a tablespoon of the vibrant red fat left in the pan; skipping this step guarantees a broken, greasy soup.

**2. Sauté the aromatics.**

Return the skillet to medium heat and add the diced onion, jalapeño, and garlic to the remaining fat. Sauté for 2 to 3 minutes until the onions are translucent and fragrant, then spread the mixture evenly across the bottom of the pan.

**3. Bake until molten.**

Distribute the cheese blend evenly over the hot chorizo and transfer the skillet directly to the oven. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes until the cheese is completely melted, bubbling furiously at the edges, and showing light golden spots.

**4. Ignite the flambé.**

Carefully remove the skillet to a heat-proof surface. Pour the tequila evenly over the bubbling cheese and immediately ignite it with a long lighter, letting the flames burn out naturally after 15 to 30 seconds to caramelize the dairy.

**5. Garnish and serve immediately.**

Top with the reserved crispy chorizo and fresh cilantro. Serve straight from the hot skillet, instructing guests to scoop the stringy mass into warm tortillas rather than dipping chips.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The right chorizo.**

You need raw, fresh Mexican pork chorizo for this, not the cured, sliceable Spanish variety which won't render the necessary spiced fat.



# Frijoles Charros de Fin de Semana

*free-HOH-les CHAH-rros*

If you grew up going to summer carnes asadas, you know the grilled steak is just an excuse to stand around the massive pot bubbling at the edge of the fire. Born in the arid ranchlands of Northern Mexico, real cowboy beans are a deeply savory, smoky stew built entirely on the back of rendered pork fat. The grandmother's secret that separates a watery imitation from the authentic borderlands soul is simple: fry your aromatics directly in the neon-red grease of the chorizo, embrace the humble hot dog, and hit the pot with a splash of jalapeño brine right at the end.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>46 1/2 oz</b>	canned pinto beans <i>undrained, do not rinse</i>	<b>3 large clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	thick-cut bacon <i>chopped into 1/4-inch pieces</i>	<b>3 med</b>	Roma tomato <i>diced</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	raw Mexican pork chorizo <i>casings removed</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken broth
<b>4 med</b>	standard hot dog <i>sliced into thin rounds</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>1 cup</b>	cooked ham <i>cut into small cubes</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano <i>crushed</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>2 med</b>	jalapeño pepper <i>finely diced, seeds removed if desired</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	pickled jalapeño brine <i>straight from the can</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Take the weekend route and cook dry beans from scratch if you have the time.** Place 1 lb of dry pinto beans, half a white onion, and 2 garlic cloves in a heavy pot with 8 cups of water. Simmer for 1.5 to 2 hours until tender, adding 1 tbsp kosher salt at the end. Do not drain, and use this entire pot in place of the canned beans and chicken broth.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the bacon fat slowly over medium heat.**  
Place the chopped bacon in a large heavy pot or Dutch oven. Cook for 8 to 10 minutes until the fat renders out and the bacon crisps, leaving the precious fat in the pot.
- 2. Bloom the chorizo in the rendered bacon fat.**  
Push the crispy bacon to the edges, add the raw chorizo to the center, and break it apart with a wooden spoon. Fry for about 5 minutes until cooked through and releasing its vibrant red oils.

**1. Brown the preserved meats.**

Add the sliced hot dogs and cubed ham. Stir everything together and cook for 3 to 4 minutes just until they brown slightly on the edges and absorb the seasoned fats.

**2. Build the sofrito directly in the meat grease.**

Add the diced onion and fresh jalapeños, sautéing for 4 to 5 minutes until soft and stained red by the chorizo. Stir in the minced garlic and cook for one more minute until fragrant.

**3. Deglaze the pot with the diced tomatoes and spices.**

Stir in the Roma tomatoes, cumin, and Mexican oregano. Cook for about 5 minutes as the natural juices release, scraping up any browned bits on the bottom until it forms a thick, jammy paste.

**4. Marry the beans with the meat and simmer.**

Pour the undrained cans of beans and the chicken broth into the pot. Bring to a gentle boil, reduce the heat to low, and simmer uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes so the starches slightly thicken the broth.

**5. Finish with the grandmother's secret acidic punch.**

Turn off the heat, then stir in the fresh cilantro and the pickling liquid from a can of jalapeños. This cuts the heavy richness of the pork fat and elevates the stew to true borderlands authenticity.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Make them drunken beans.**

To make Frijoles Borrachos, substitute one cup of the chicken broth with a light Mexican lager like Modelo or Tecate when you add the liquids.

● **Let the leftovers rest.**

These beans are famously better the next day as the flavors deepen and the broth thickens in the fridge. Reheat with a splash of water or broth to loosen them back into a soup.

- **Embrace the hot dog.**

Do not assume hot dogs are a bastardized Tex-Mex addition; sliced salchichas are completely canonical in modern Northern Mexican homes.



# Elotes Callejeros Asados

*eh-loh-tes cah-yeh-heh-ros ah-sah-dos*

There is a profound, messy magic to the elotero's cart. You do not need complicated modern marinades or fussy dressings; you just need high heat, good mayonnaise, salty Cotija cheese, and a wooden stick to hold the whole glorious thing together. Roasting everyday American yellow sweet corn directly over an open flame caramelizes its natural sugars, creating a smoky, savory-sweet profile that immediately transports you back to the bustling borderlands of your childhood.

## INGREDIENTS

**6 med** yellow sweet corn ears  
*shucked and silks completely removed*

**1/2 cup** mayonnaise

**1/2 cup** Crema Mexicana or sour  
cream

**1 cup** Cotija cheese  
*finely crumbled*

**2 tbsp** Tajín or chile piquín

**2 med** limes  
*cut into wedges*

**1 tbsp** neutral oil

## PREPARATION

- **Drive sturdy wooden skewers firmly into the flat, bottom cores of the raw corn before grilling.**

This essential vendor trick gives you a much-needed handle to turn the corn on the hot grill and saves your guests from covering their hands in mayonnaise.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat an outdoor gas or charcoal grill to medium-high heat.**  
You are aiming for an aggressive surface temperature around 400 to 450 degrees Fahrenheit.
- 2. Rub the bare corn kernels very lightly with neutral oil to prevent sticking.**
- 3. Place the corn directly onto the hot grill grates and cook for 8 to 12 minutes, turning every few minutes.**  
You want the kernels to turn vibrant yellow, plump up, and develop distinct, dark char marks without overcooking them into mush.
- 4. Mix the mayonnaise and Crema Mexicana in a shallow dish while the corn grills.**  
Spread the crumbled Cotija cheese out evenly on a separate large plate to set up your assembly line.
- 5. Slather the corn completely in the mayonnaise mixture the exact second it comes off the grill.**  
The corn must be steaming hot so the fat melts slightly into the crevices of the charred kernels.
- 6. Immediately roll the wet, hot corn in the Cotija cheese until it is heavily blanketed.**

1. **Dust generously with Tajín or chile piquín and serve immediately with fresh lime wedges.**

Squeeze the lime over the corn right before taking the first bite to prevent the cheese from becoming soggy.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not compromise on the Cotija cheese.**

Cotija provides a sharp, salty bite that defines the soul of this dish, and substituting mild cheeses like mozzarella or cheddar will ruin the authentic flavor profile.



# Plato Tejano

*plah-toe teh-hah-noh*

Growing up, "Mexican food" often meant watery salsa and ground beef from a seasoning packet, but when the smell of toasted cumin, rendering beef fat, and bubbling chili gravy hit the air, you knew you were home. The Plato Tejano isn't just a recipe; it is the unapologetic, beautiful reality of borderland cooking. This isn't a diluted version of Mexican food—it is authentic Tex-Mex, exactly as generations of Tejanas engineered it, proudly utilizing yellow cheddar and a proper flour roux. It takes a Sunday afternoon to pull off, but learn these four master recipes, and you possess the true culinary DNA of the borderlands.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	beef chuck roast <i>cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	bacon grease or manteca
<b>1/2 cup</b>	neutral oil	<b>12 med</b>	yellow corn tortillas
<b>1 med</b>	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	Colby-Jack or sharp yellow Cheddar cheese <i>freshly shredded</i>
<b>5 cloves</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>
<b>2 med</b>	jalapeño <i>1 finely diced, 1 left whole</i>	<b>1 thick slice</b>	white onion
<b>6 tbsp</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1 cup</b>	long-grain white rice
<b>2 tsp</b>	whole cumin seeds	<b>2 cup</b>	hot water or low-sodium chicken broth
<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>1 tbsp</b>	Knorr Chicken Bouillon with Tomato
<b>1 tsp</b>	whole black peppercorns	<b>1 sprig</b>	fresh cilantro
<b>3 tbsp</b>	chili powder <i>preferably a Tex-Mex blend like Gebhardt's</i>	<b>3 cup</b>	cooked pinto beans with liquid
<b>1 tsp</b>	garlic powder	<b>to taste</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano		
<b>4 cup</b>	beef broth		
<b>2 tbsp</b>	tomato sauce		

## PREPARATION

- **Cook the beans ahead of time.**

Two days before, cook a pot of pinto beans, or buy high-quality canned whole pinto beans for a weeknight shortcut.

- **Pace your afternoon.**

Carne Guisada actually tastes better the next day, so consider making it on Saturday. On Sunday, start the Chili Gravy 1 hour before dinner, the rice 40 minutes out, and mash the beans 30 minutes out.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Grind the whole spices.

Using a molcajete or spice grinder, pulverize the whole cumin seeds and black peppercorns into a fine powder. The aroma of freshly ground cumin is the defining scent of Tejano cooking.

### 2. Sear the beef for the Carne Guisada.

Heat 2 tablespoons of neutral oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Working in batches so you don't overcrowd the pan, sear the beef cubes until heavily browned on all sides, then remove to a plate.

### 3. Build the guisada gravy and simmer.

Lower the heat to medium and sauté the diced yellow onion and diced jalapeño in the rendered beef fat until translucent. Add 3 cloves of the minced garlic, then sprinkle in 2 tablespoons of flour, stirring for 2 minutes. Stir in the freshly ground spices, 1 teaspoon of chili powder, 2 cups of beef broth, and the tomato sauce. Return the beef, cover, and simmer on the lowest setting for 2 to 2.5 hours until the meat falls apart with a fork.

### 4. Prepare the Tex-Mex chili gravy.

In a saucepan, heat the bacon grease or manteca over medium heat. Whisk in 1/4 cup of flour and cook for 3 to 5 minutes, stirring constantly, until the roux smells nutty and turns the color of peanut butter. Whisk in the remaining 2 tablespoons of chili powder, ground cumin, garlic powder, and oregano. Slowly whisk in the remaining 2 cups of beef broth and simmer until the gravy is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.

### 5. Toast the rice.

Heat 1 1/2 tablespoons of oil in a saucepan with a tight-fitting lid over medium heat. Sauté the dry white rice, stirring constantly, for 5 to 7 minutes until the grains turn opaque and golden brown. This toasts the starches and is the non-negotiable secret to preventing mushy rice.

**1. Simmer the Arroz a la Mexicana.**

Stir in 1/4 cup of the diced white onion and the remaining minced garlic for 1 minute. Pour in the hot water and Knorr bouillon, stirring exactly once. Toss in the whole jalapeño and cilantro sprig. Bring to a rapid boil, immediately reduce the heat to a whisper of a simmer, and put the lid on tight. Do not lift the lid for 20 minutes, then turn off the heat and let rest covered for 10 more minutes before fluffing.

**2. Infuse the fat and mash the Frijoles Refritos.**

Heat 1/4 cup of manteca or bacon grease in a cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Fry the thick slice of white onion until deeply caramelized and blackened on the edges to infuse the fat with a smoky, savory flavor. Carefully add the cooked pinto beans and a splash of their liquid. Let bubble, then crush the beans directly in the pan with a masher until thick and creamy.

**3. Flash-fry the corn tortillas.**

Heat 1/3 cup of neutral oil in a small skillet over medium-high. Dip each corn tortilla into the hot oil for just 5 to 8 seconds per side. This creates a barrier so the enchiladas remain pliable and do not dissolve into cornmeal mush in the oven. Transfer to a paper-towel-lined plate.

**4. Assemble and bake the cheese enchiladas.**

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Spread 1/2 cup of chili gravy across the bottom of a 9x13 baking dish. Fill each softened tortilla with a generous handful of shredded cheese and a pinch of diced white onion, roll tightly, and place seam-side down. Drench completely with the remaining hot chili gravy, top with the rest of the cheese, and bake for 15 to 20 minutes until bubbling.

**5. Plate the combination.**

Serve on large, warm plates. Place a generous scoop of the Frijoles Refritos and Arroz a la Mexicana side-by-side. Add two hot Cheese Enchiladas, dripping with chili gravy. Ladle a hearty portion of the Carne Guisada next to the enchiladas, letting the rich beef gravy barely bleed into the rice and beans.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not fear the bouillon.**

High-end chefs might scoff, but stepping into almost any abuela's kitchen from South Texas to Sonora will reveal a jar of Knorr Tomato Bouillon. It delivers the perfect restaurant-style color and foundational flavor without needing to pull out a blender on a weeknight.

- **Sourcing authentic fats.**

Authentic Tejano beans demand manteca (pork lard). You can find tubs of it in the baking or Hispanic aisle of most supermarkets. If you prefer not to use it, saved bacon grease is the next best authentic substitute. Neutral oil works, but sacrifices a massive layer of traditional flavor.



# Camarones a la Plancha Estilo Golfo

For years, sanitized food media told us grilled shrimp meant peeling them and tossing them in olive oil. If you want the real, unapologetic taste of a weekend cookout on the borderlands, there are two ancestral secrets you need to respect. First, you butterfly the shrimp but leave the shell intact to protect the delicate meat from a blazing iron plancha. Second, the marinade is bound with mayonnaise and butter. To an uninitiated palate, searing mayonnaise might sound strange, but on a scorching cast-iron skillet, that emulsion breaks down and fries the

spices directly against the shrimp. It creates a deeply savory, charred crust that locks the juices inside without burning. It's fast, it's fierce, and it tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 med</b>	dried guajillo chiles <i>wiped clean, stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	chicken bouillon powder
<b>2 small</b>	dried chiles de árbol <i>stems removed</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	water
<b>3 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	extra-large raw shell-on shrimp
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>3 tbsp</b>	full-fat mayonnaise	<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt
<b>2 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>melted</i>	<b>1 pinch</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1 med</b>	lime <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	Maggi seasoning sauce or soy sauce	<b>2 tbsp</b>	cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>

## PREPARATION

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

The chili and mayonnaise emulsion can be blended up to three days in advance and kept in the fridge until you're ready to fire up the skillet.

## INSTRUCTIONS

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

Place a dry cast-iron skillet over medium heat and lightly press the guajillo and árbol chiles into the pan for about 30 seconds per side until fragrant and pliable. Transfer them to a small bowl, submerge in boiling water for 15 minutes to soften, then drain.

**1. Blend the adobo binder.**

In a blender, combine the softened chiles, garlic, onion, mayonnaise, melted butter, lime juice, Maggi seasoning, chicken bouillon, and water. Blend on high until you have a smooth, creamy, vibrant red paste.

**2. Butterfly the shrimp while keeping the shells attached.**

Using a sharp paring knife, cut a deep slit down the back of each unpeeled shrimp from the head to the tail, stopping just before you cut through the belly shell. Press the meat open flat like a book and wipe away the dark intestinal vein.

**3. Massage the adobo into the shrimp.**

Place the butterflied shrimp in a large bowl and pour the adobo over them, using your hands to ensure the exposed flesh of every shrimp is coated. Do not add salt at this stage.

**4. Sear on a blazing hot plancha.**

Wipe your cast-iron skillet clean, set it over medium-high heat until smoking, and add the neutral oil. Just seconds before cooking, sprinkle the shrimp lightly with salt and black pepper.

**5. Cook fast and hard.**

Working in batches to avoid crowding, lay the shrimp shell-side down for about 2 minutes to insulate the meat, then flip to flesh-side down for 1 minute until the mayonnaise emulsion chars perfectly against the iron. Serve immediately with fresh lime wedges and chopped cilantro.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not peel the shrimp.**

The protective shell acts as a crucial heat shield against the screaming hot iron. If you peel them, the high heat will turn the delicate protein into rubber.

● **Hold the salt until the very end.**

Salting the shrimp while they marinate draws out vital moisture. Only season them in the final seconds before they hit the hot pan.





# La Tamalada: The Sacred Rituals of Holiday Gatherings

*A tribute to the communal, intergenerational process of holiday cooking, honoring the matriarchs who pass down the tactile memories of tamale-making and celebratory stews.*

A tamalada is less a cooking session and more an assembly line of muscle memory, presided over by the formidable matriarchs of the family. The air in these kitchens hangs heavy with the scent of simmering pork, red chile, and the damp, earthy steam of soaking corn husks. It is a sacred, tactile ritual—hands perpetually moving, spreading masa, folding husks—where survival skills and family secrets are quietly passed down between the gossip and the grease.

This is a roadmap to those deep-winter borderland celebrations, translated for the modern kitchen without stripping away their soul. From mastering the mechanics of the perfect tamal to the restorative, hangover-obliterating depths of a simmering pot of menudo or posole, these dishes are the true, unfiltered taste of the holidays.





# Tamal de Cazuela Estilo Tejano

*tah-MAHL deh kah-SWEH-lah ehs-TEE-loh teh-HAH-noh*

The traditional tamalada is a sacred, multi-day affair of rolling, tying, and steaming—a beautiful ritual that frankly doesn't fit on a Tuesday night. Enter the tamal de cazuela. It's the pragmatic, brilliant borderland solution that sacrifices none of the soul. By beating real pork lard and masa harina into an airy cloud, wrapping it in soaked corn husks, and steam-baking it in a water bath, you get the exact texture and intoxicating aroma of the real thing without the grueling labor. Forget the mid-century American home-ec bastardizations with boxed cornbread mix; this is genuine Tejano heritage, streamlined for a busy kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>15 med</b>	dried corn husks <i>submerged in hot water for 30 minutes, then drained</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	pork lard <i>softened to room temp</i>	<b>4 large cloves</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>
<b>3 1/2 cup</b>	masa harina	<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>1 tbsp</b>	baking powder	<b>1 tsp</b>	Mexican oregano
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>3 1/2 cup</b>	chicken, beef, or pork broth <i>warmed</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	pre-cooked shredded meat
<b>3 large</b>	dried Ancho chiles <i>stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	Monterey Jack or Oaxaca cheese <i>shredded</i>
<b>3 large</b>	dried Guajillo chiles <i>stems and seeds removed</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Preheat the oven.**

Preheat your oven to 375°F before you begin assembling.

## INSTRUCTIONS

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

Heat a dry skillet over medium heat and briefly toast the chiles for about 15 seconds per side until fragrant. Transfer them to a bowl, cover with boiling water, and soak for 15 minutes until soft and pliable.

- 2. Blend the Tejano adobo.**

Transfer the softened chiles to a blender with the onion, garlic, cumin, oregano, a heavy pinch of salt, and 1 cup of the chile soaking liquid, blending until completely smooth.

**1. Simmer the filling.**

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Carefully pour in the blended red sauce—it will splatter—and simmer for 5 minutes before folding in the shredded meat until it is thoroughly coated in the thick adobo. Remove from heat.

**2. Whip the fat into an airy cloud.**

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the room-temperature lard on medium-high speed for 3 to 5 minutes until it transforms from dense and yellow to fluffy, airy, and white. Do not skip this; aerating the fat is the difference between a soft tamal and a dense brick.

**3. Hydrate the masa dough.**

Whisk the masa harina, baking powder, and salt together in a separate bowl. Turn the mixer to low and add the dry mixture to the whipped fat in three batches, alternating with the warm broth. Beat on medium until the dough resembles thick, spreadable buttercream frosting.

**4. Line the baking dish with the soaked corn husks.**

Lightly grease a 9x13-inch glass baking dish and overlap the softened corn husks across the bottom and slightly up the sides to create a seamless barrier. As the casserole bakes, these husks will release essential oils that infuse the masa with the exact aroma of a freshly steamed tamal.

**5. Assemble the cazuela.**

Using a wet spatula, spread half the masa evenly over the husks. Top with the meat filling and an even layer of cheese, then drop spoonfuls of the remaining masa over the top, spreading it gently with wet hands or a spatula to seal the filling completely inside.

### **1. Bake in a water bath.**

Lay a few more softened husks flat across the top, cover the dish tightly with heavy-duty aluminum foil, and place it inside a larger roasting pan. Fill the roasting pan with an inch of hot water and bake at 375°F for 60 to 75 minutes. This *baño maría* perfectly mimics a tamale steamer, ensuring the masa cooks gently and stays moist.

### **2. Rest before serving.**

Remove the dish from the water bath and let the casserole rest, still covered in foil, for 15 to 20 minutes to allow the masa to firm up. Peel back the foil and top husks, slice into squares, and serve.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Avoid the fake Hollywood trap.**

Many quick internet recipes for 'Tamale Pie' call for boxes of sweetened yellow cornbread mix. While fine for a midwestern potluck, it tastes nothing like a tamal. A real tamal has zero sugar and relies entirely on the earthy, alkaline flavor of true masa harina.

- **Streamlining the meat.**

Traditionally, you'd spend all day boiling a pork shoulder. For a Tuesday night, leverage modern convenience by shredding a high-quality plain rotisserie chicken and simmering it in the homemade red chile sauce. You get the exact flavor profile in a fraction of the time.

- **The magic of the stand mixer.**

A traditional tamalada involves passing a massive bowl of masa around the table for vigorous hand-kneading to aerate the lard. Letting your stand mixer whip the fat for five full minutes does the work of three grandmothers' arms with zero physical exertion.



# Pozole Rojo Rápido para Celebrar

*poh-soh-leh ro-ho rah-pee-doh pah-rah seh-leh-brar*

The secret your grandmother knew, but perhaps never wrote down, is the magic of a stale corn tortilla. Authentic pozole is a sacred ritual of gathering, born from days of simmering bones and raw corn. But for the diaspora cooking on a Tuesday night in an Ohio suburb, the pressure cooker is a godsend. By blending a single soaked tortilla into the chili paste, you give a forty-five-minute soup the thick, velvety texture of a stew that has bubbled on a wood-fired stove all day. Keep the garnishes fresh, insist on bone-in pork, and let the aroma take you straight home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	boneless pork shoulder <i>cut into 2-inch chunks</i>	<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion
<b>1 lb</b>	pork neck bones or spare ribs	<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>1 large</b>	white onion <i>halved, root intact</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
<b>1 large</b>	head garlic <i>halved crosswise, unpeeled</i>	<b>1 med</b>	stale corn tortilla <i>torn into pieces</i>
<b>3 med</b>	bay leaves	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>108 oz</b>	canned white hominy <i>thoroughly rinsed and drained</i>
<b>8 cup</b>	water	<b>1/2 med</b>	green cabbage <i>very thinly shredded</i>
<b>6 med</b>	dried guajillo chiles <i>wiped clean, stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>1 bunch</b>	radishes <i>thinly sliced into coins</i>
<b>3 med</b>	dried ancho chiles <i>wiped clean, stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>1 large</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>
<b>2 med</b>	dried arbol chiles <i>wiped clean, stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>4 large</b>	limes <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>3 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
		<b>12 med</b>	crisp corn tostadas

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the garnishes.**

Before the soup finishes cooking, arrange the shredded cabbage, radishes, diced onion, and lime wedges on a large communal platter so guests can build their own bowls.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the foundation of the broth.**

Place the pork chunks, bones, halved onion, garlic head, bay leaves, and salt into an electric pressure cooker, then add enough water to cover the meat by an inch without exceeding the maximum fill line.

**1. Cook under pressure.**

Seal the lid and cook on high pressure for 35 minutes, followed by a 15-minute natural release to let the meat relax and keep the broth from clouding.

**2. Hydrate the chiles and the secret thickener.**

While the meat cooks, briefly toast the guajillo, ancho, and arbol chiles in a dry skillet over medium heat until fragrant, then submerge them in boiling water with the torn corn tortilla for 15 minutes.

**3. Shred the tender pork.**

Once the pressure is fully released, transfer the meat to a board, discard the aromatics and bones, shred the pork with two forks, and reserve the golden stock in the pot.

**4. Blend the adobo.**

Blend the softened chiles, the soaked tortilla, raw garlic, quartered onion, cumin, one teaspoon of oregano, and a cup of the chile-soaking liquid on high until completely smooth.

**5. Fry the chili paste.**

Turn the pressure cooker to sauté, heat the neutral oil, and aggressively fry the blended chili paste for five minutes to cook out the raw garlic flavor and deepen the color to a rich brick red.

**6. Simmer the hominy.**

Pour the reserved pork stock and shredded meat back into the fried paste, add the rinsed hominy, and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes so the kernels absorb the spiced broth without turning to mush.

**7. Serve with intention.**

Ladle the deep-red stew into wide bowls and let guests finish the dish at the table with an abundance of crisp shredded cabbage, radishes, diced onion, a heavy squeeze of lime, and crushed oregano.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The cabbage imperative.**

In the Norteño tradition, sturdy shredded cabbage replaces the delicate lettuce used in central Mexico, standing up to the thermal shock of the near-boiling broth to provide a lasting crunch.

- **Respect the canned hominy.**

Canned hominy has already been nixtamalized and par-cooked. Boiling it for the full duration of the soup will turn it into disintegrated mush; add it only at the very end to heat through and absorb flavor.



# Capirotada Norteña con Queso Colby

*kah-pee-roh-TAH-dah nor-TEHN-yah*

For those who grew up along the Texas-Mexico border, the scent of cinnamon, clove, and dark sugar signals the arrival of the holidays. While central Mexico relies on tomatoes and dry cotija, the Norteña and Tejano tradition embraces the addictive contrast of sweet, spiced syrup and melted, salty commodity cheese like Colby. The generations before didn't mess around with pretension; they used what was accessible to recreate the flavors of home. This streamlined version ditches the messy old-school frying in favor of butter-toasting the bread, but it keeps the sacred rule intact: the bread must be allowed to

soak and rest. The result is a perfect collision of textures—golden crust, custardy interior, and gooey, caramelized cheese that tastes exactly like a borderland kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>16 oz</b>	French bread <i>cut into 1/2-inch thick slices</i>	<b>4 med</b>	cinnamon sticks
<b>6 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>softened</i>	<b>6 small</b>	whole cloves
<b>4 1/2 cup</b>	water	<b>12 oz</b>	Colby cheese <i>freshly shredded</i>
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	dark brown sugar <i>packed</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	raisins
		<b>1 cup</b>	pecans <i>chopped</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Preheat the oven to 350°F.**
- **Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish with nonstick spray or butter.**

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Dehydrate and toast the bread.

Spread a thin layer of softened butter on both sides of each slice, arrange them in a single layer on a large baking sheet, and bake at 350°F for 5 to 8 minutes per side until completely dried out and golden on the edges.

### 2. Brew the spiced syrup.

In a medium saucepan, combine the water, dark brown sugar, cinnamon sticks, and whole cloves, bringing to a rapid boil over medium-high heat before dropping the temperature to simmer for 15 to 20 minutes.

**1. Strain the syrup.**

Remove the saucepan from the heat and use a slotted spoon to discard the cinnamon sticks and cloves.

**2. Assemble the first layer and rest.**

Arrange one-third of the toasted bread snugly in the bottom of a greased 9x13-inch baking dish, top with one-third of the raisins, pecans, and cheese, pour 1 1/2 cups of the hot syrup over the top, and let it sit undisturbed for exactly 15 minutes.

**3. Repeat the layering process.**

Add the second third of ingredients topped with another 1 1/2 cups of syrup, followed by the final third of ingredients and the remaining syrup, then let the entire dish rest for a final 15 minutes.

**4. Bake the capirota.**

Cover the dish tightly with greased aluminum foil and bake at 350°F for 40 minutes, then remove the foil and bake for another 10 to 15 minutes until the edges puff and the cheese becomes beautifully melted and caramelized.

**5. Cool before serving.**

Let the dish stand for at least 15 to 20 minutes to allow the custard to set before serving warm.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The rest periods are non-negotiable.**

Pouring all the syrup at once or skipping the 15-minute resting phases will result in dry spots and a mushy texture rather than a proper custard.

● **Use whole cloves, never ground.**

Ground cloves will turn the syrup bitter and cloudy, completely ruining the clean, spiced flavor profile.



# Champurrado de la Abuela

*chahm-poo-RAAH-doh*

When the first frost hits the windows of an Ohio suburb, the smell of toasted corn and melting chocolate becomes a time machine. La Tamalada—the marathon family gathering where dozens of tamales are assembled for the holidays—requires fuel, and that fuel is Champurrado. It is a pre-conquest survival drink wrapped in a cozy, modern, chocolatey hug. You don't need to hunt down a traditional metate to grind your own cacao; this uses what you can grab at the local grocery store after work. By steeping a spiced tea first to build depth, and leaning on a blender to guarantee a lump-free texture, it tastes exactly like home without the weeknight hassle.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 cup</b>	water	<b>4 cup</b>	whole milk
<b>1 large</b>	Mexican canela stick	<b>12 oz</b>	evaporated milk
<b>1 med</b>	piloncillo cone <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>3/4 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	warm water
<b>2 med</b>	Mexican chocolate discs <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	vanilla extract

## PREPARATION

- **Sourcing the right corn.**

Ensure you are using masa harina, the nixtamalized corn flour used for tortillas (like Maseca or Masienda). Standard cornmeal or raw corn flour will not work and will ruin the texture.

- **Pantry substitutions.**

If piloncillo isn't available, substitute a half cup of packed dark brown sugar mixed with a half teaspoon of molasses. If you can only find standard American cassia cinnamon, use half a stick to prevent it from overpowering the drink.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Steep the ancestral tea to build the flavor foundation.**

In a large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed stockpot, combine the 4 cups of water, the canela stick, piloncillo, and the pinch of salt. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Once boiling, reduce the heat to a gentle simmer and let it cook for about 10 minutes until the piloncillo is completely dissolved into a deeply infused syrup.

- 2. Melt the chocolate into the hot liquid.**

Add the chopped Mexican chocolate discs to the pot. Stir continuously with a whisk until the chocolate is completely melted and the liquid becomes frothy.

**1. Build the creaminess with the dairy.**

Pour in the whole milk and the evaporated milk, keeping the heat on medium-low. Do not let the mixture come to a rolling boil from this point forward, or you risk scorching the milk proteins on the bottom of the pot.

**2. Blend the masa and water into a perfectly smooth slurry.**

While the milk mixture gently heats, place the masa harina and the 1 1/2 cups of warm water into your blender. Blend on high for 30 to 45 seconds until completely smooth and entirely free of lumps.

**3. Whisk in the slurry and simmer to thicken.**

Slowly pour the blended masa slurry into the pot while whisking the hot chocolate mixture constantly. Continue to cook over medium-low heat for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring frequently and scraping the bottom of the pot. This simmer is non-negotiable; it cooks out the raw taste of the corn flour and unlocks the authentic roasted flavor.

**4. Finish with vanilla and serve immediately.**

Remove the pot from the heat. Fish out the canela stick and stir in the vanilla extract. Serve in thick mugs; it should coat the belly in pure comfort and will thicken further as it cools.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Respect the texture.**

Champurrado is an atole, not watery hot cocoa. It should coat the back of a spoon and feel almost like a drinkable, velvety pudding.

● **Embrace the graininess.**

Real Mexican chocolate contains unrefined sugar crystals and roasted cacao solids that do not fully dissolve. That slight grain at the bottom of the mug is a hallmark of absolute authenticity and should not be strained out.

- **Smart reheating.**

It thickens considerably in the fridge. To reheat, simply place it back on the stove over low heat and whisk in a splash of milk or water to loosen it back to a drinkable consistency.



# Buñuelos Rápidos de Tortilla de Harina

*boo-NYWAY-lohs RAH-pee-dohs de tor-TEE-yah de ah-REE-nah*

Making from-scratch buñuelos is a labor of love reserved for the long, joyous, exhausting days of La Tamalada, but the abuelas have a brilliant secret for random weeknights. Across the borderlands, dropping raw, uncooked flour tortillas into hot oil is a respected act of culinary resourcefulness that produces an airy, blistered miracle in seconds. Tossed immediately in floral Ceylon cinnamon and served with a quick piloncillo syrup, this is the uncompromising taste of the holidays, delivered effortlessly on a Tuesday.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>12 small</b>	uncooked flour tortillas	<b>2 cup</b>	water
<b>2 cup</b>	neutral vegetable oil	<b>8 oz</b>	piloncillo
<b>1/2 cup</b>	granulated cane sugar	<b>1 large</b>	cinnamon stick
<b>1 tbsp</b>	ground Ceylon cinnamon		

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the granulated sugar and ground cinnamon together in a wide, shallow dish.**

Place this dish directly next to the stove with a paper-towel-lined plate nearby to establish a seamless frying station.

- 2. Combine the water, piloncillo, and cinnamon stick in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat.**

Once the unrefined sugar dissolves entirely, lower the heat to medium-low and simmer for roughly fifteen minutes until it reduces to a light, aromatic syrup, then remove from the heat.

- 3. Heat an inch of neutral oil in a heavy-bottomed skillet to 350 degrees.**

If you lack a thermometer, dip the edge of a raw tortilla into the oil; it should immediately sizzle and enthusiastically bubble.

- 4. Carefully lower a raw tortilla into the hot oil and gently press down any massive bubbles with tongs to ensure an even fry.**

Fry for thirty to forty-five seconds until the bottom turns a beautiful golden brown, then flip and fry the other side for another thirty seconds.

- 5. Remove the buñuelo, letting excess oil drip back into the pan for exactly two seconds, and instantly submerge it in the cinnamon sugar.**

Do not rest it on a paper towel first. The science here is unforgiving; if the residual oil cools and dries, the sugar will refuse to stick.

- 1. Toss and press the spiced sugar into both sides of the blistering dough.**  
Repeat the process with the remaining tortillas, stacking them high and serving them warm alongside small cups of the miel de piloncillo for dipping or drizzling.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **If you are hosting a crowd, use a pizza cutter to slice the raw tortillas into quarters before frying.**

This yields a mountain of bite-sized, blistered chips in a fraction of the time and is highly favored by kids.

- **If you cannot source a piloncillo cone, substitute one cup of dark brown sugar mixed with a teaspoon of molasses.**

It lacks the profound smoky depth of unrefined Mexican cane sugar, but it remains a highly effective stand-in.



# Empanadas de Calabaza

*em-pah-NAH-dahs deh kah-lah-BAH-sah*

To walk into a borderland panadería during the autumn is to be hit by the intoxicating smell of toasted cinnamon, dark sugar, and the licorice hum of anise. Generic recipes will tell you to dump canned pumpkin and pie spice into a crust, but that is not how a Tejano grandmother does it. The true soul of these empanadas relies on two non-negotiable secrets: hydrating the dough with a quick anise tea, and aggressively reducing the pumpkin into a dense, dark jam. It takes just minutes, but it is the difference between a sad imitation and a bite that tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 cup</b>	water	<b>3 1/2 cup</b>	all-purpose flour
<b>2 whole</b>	star anise pods	<b>1/2 cup</b>	granulated sugar
<b>1 large</b>	cinnamon stick	<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	baking powder
<b>1 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 cup</b>	dark brown sugar <i>tightly packed</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	vegetable shortening <i>softened to room temp</i>
<b>15 oz</b>	canned pumpkin puree	<b>1 large</b>	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cinnamon	<b>1/2 cup</b>	granulated sugar
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cloves	<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cinnamon

## PREPARATION

- **Stage the prep to save your weeknight.**

The anise tea and the pumpkin reduction can both be made up to a week in advance and stored in the refrigerator, turning the actual assembly into a fast, manageable task.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Simmer the water, star anise, and cinnamon stick in a small saucepan for five minutes.**

Remove from the heat and let it steep while it cools completely to room temperature, then strain out the spices. You will need about a half cup of this heavily perfumed liquid to hydrate your dough.

- 1. Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat, then add the dark brown sugar, pumpkin puree, cinnamon, and cloves.**

Turn the heat down to medium-low and cook for 15 to 25 minutes, stirring frequently so it doesn't scorch. You are cooking out the water until it transforms from a pale puree into a dense, dark, sticky jam. Let it cool entirely; hot filling will melt the fat in your dough and ruin the pastry.

- 2. Whisk the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt together in a large bowl, then rub the room-temperature shortening in with your fingers.**

Keep snapping and rubbing until the mixture resembles damp, coarse sand with no large lumps of fat remaining. This tactile step is how you guarantee a flaky, tender crust.

- 3. Gradually pour a half cup of the cooled anise tea into the flour mixture and knead gently until a cohesive dough forms.**

If it feels dry, add another splash of tea. Wrap the dough tightly in plastic and let it rest on the counter for 30 minutes to relax the gluten, making it much easier to roll out.

- 4. Preheat your oven to 350°F and divide the rested dough into eighteen golf-ball-sized spheres.**

Roll each ball into a thin circle about an eighth of an inch thick. Place a generous spoonful of the cooled pumpkin jam in the center, wet the edges of the dough slightly, fold into a half-moon, and crimp tightly with a fork to seal.

- 5. Brush the empanadas lightly with the beaten egg and bake for 18 to 22 minutes until the edges are golden brown.**

While they bake, mix the remaining sugar and cinnamon in a shallow bowl. Let the empanadas cool for just five minutes on the tray, then toss them gently in the cinnamon-sugar while they are still warm so it sticks perfectly.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Never place hot filling onto raw dough.**

If the pumpkin jam has not cooled completely, the heat will instantly melt the vegetable shortening in your masa, destroying the flaky layers and turning your empanadas into a soggy mess.



# The Borderlands Pantry: Salsas, Bases, and Grocery Store Hacks

*The foundational raw materials, homemade salsas, and essential bases needed to elevate everyday grocery store produce into authentic Tejano cuisine.*

The American supermarket aisle is a landscape of compromise—rows of dull, preservative-heavy jars and stiff, lifeless tortillas that taste of factories rather than fire. But true Tejano cooking doesn't survive in a jar. It lives in the sharp bite of raw garlic, the earthiness of cumin, and the unapologetic heat of fresh

chiles. This chapter is about walking into any standard grocery store, ignoring the center aisles, and turning basic produce into the vibrant foundations of the borderlands.

The magic here isn't complicated; it's just honest. It's the muscle memory of pressing out fresh flour tortillas and the bright shock of quick-pickled jalapeños cutting through rich roasted meats. These recipes—the blistering salsas and the holy trinity of ajo, pimienta, y comino—aren't just condiments. They are the essential, non-negotiable building blocks of a kitchen that refuses to forget where it came from.





# Tacos de Tinga de Pollo con Adobo de Lata

*TAH-cohs deh TEEN-gah deh POH-yoh*

Tinga de Pollo was born in Puebla as a brilliant, frugal way to turn market-weary produce into a masterpiece. While the matriarchs of old might have spent the afternoon slowly poaching a chicken breast and blistering fresh tomatoes on a hot comal, this version is built for the reality of a Tuesday night in the suburbs. By deploying a store-bought rotisserie chicken and a can of high-quality fire-roasted tomatoes, you bypass the labor without sacrificing an ounce of the soul. There is no fake Hollywood Mexican food here—just the smoky, sweet, and spicy taste of home, anchored by the slow caramelization of onions and the heavy lifting of canned adobo.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>2 tbsp</b>	adobo sauce from chipotle can
<b>1 large</b>	white onion <i>halved and sliced into very thin half-moons</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	chicken broth
<b>3 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	Mexican oregano <i>crumbled</i>
<b>1 med</b>	rotisserie chicken <i>skin and bones discarded, meat shredded into bite-sized pieces</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>14 1/2 oz</b>	canned fire-roasted diced tomatoes <i>undrained</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>3 med</b>	canned chipotle peppers in adobo	<b>12 med</b>	corn tortillas <i>warmed</i>
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	Mexican crema
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Break down the rotisserie chicken.**

Pull the meat from the chicken, discarding the skin and bones, and shred it into bite-sized pieces before you begin cooking.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Blend the adobo sauce base.**

In a high-powered blender, combine the undrained fire-roasted tomatoes, chipotle peppers, adobo sauce, chicken broth, Mexican oregano, and cumin, blending on high until completely smooth and a rich brick-red color.

- 2. Caramelize the onions slowly.**

Heat the oil in a large, deep skillet over medium heat and add the sliced onions. Cook them patiently until they are deeply softened, translucent, and golden brown at the edges—about 8 to 10 minutes—before stirring in the minced garlic during the final minute.

**1. Dry-fry the shredded chicken.**

Add the shredded rotisserie chicken directly to the pan with the caramelized onions. Toss it in the fragrant oil and let it cook for a few minutes to open up the meat fibers so they can absorb the sauce.

**2. Simmer and reduce the tinga.**

Pour the blended chipotle-tomato sauce over the chicken and onions, stirring well to combine. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until the liquid evaporates and the sauce clings tightly to the meat, leaving almost no loose liquid in the pan.

**3. Assemble the tacos.**

Spoon the hot tinga generously into warm corn tortillas, topping with a drizzle of Mexican crema and crumbled queso fresco.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Stretch the dollar like a matriarch.**

Unexpected guests? Shred half a head of green cabbage or grate two Mexican zucchinis and sauté them down with the onions. They melt into the sauce, absorb all the smoky flavor, and double the volume of the meal for pennies.

● **Respect the adobo.**

Canned chipotles pack a serious punch. If cooking for young children, reduce the whole peppers to just one, but never skip the two tablespoons of adobo sauce. It carries the vital smoke and vinegar that define the DNA of the dish.



# Arroz a la Mexicana con Huevo Frito

Forget the dry, flavorless filler shoved onto generic combination plates. True Mexican red rice is a deeply savory, tomato-infused masterpiece meant to stand alone, traditionally crowned with a bleeding fried egg. The secret to recreating the exact nostalgic flavor of a borderlands kitchen isn't an all-day homemade stock. It's the unapologetic use of Knorr tomato bouillon, the patience to toast the rice until it sounds like glass, and the ironclad rule of never lifting the lid while it steams.

## INGREDIENTS

**2 med**

Roma tomatoes  
*roughly chopped*

**1/4 med**

white onion  
*roughly chopped*

<b>2 small</b>	fresh garlic <i>peeled</i>	<b>3 cup</b>	very hot water
<b>1/4 cup</b>	water	<b>1/2 cup</b>	frozen peas and carrots
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	long-grain white rice <i>rinsed under hot water until clear and thoroughly drained</i>	<b>1 whole</b>	serrano pepper
<b>3 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil	<b>4 large</b>	large eggs
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	Knorr Tomato Bouillon with Chicken Flavor	<b>4 tsp</b>	vegetable oil
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1 pinch</b>	black pepper

## PREPARATION

- **Blend the tomato base.**

In a blender, combine the Roma tomatoes, white onion, garlic, and 1/4 cup of water, blending on high until completely smooth and liquefied.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the washed rice in oil over medium-high heat.**

Cook the rice in a heavy-bottomed pot with the 3 tablespoons of neutral oil, stirring frequently for 5 to 8 minutes, until the grains turn light golden brown and sound like coarse sand or glass scraping the bottom.

- 2. Fry the tomato puree into the toasted rice.**

Pour the blended tomato mixture directly into the hot pot—stand back, it will sizzle violently—and cook for 2 to 3 minutes until the puree deepens to a dark, thick brick red.

- 3. Add the hot water, seasonings, and aromatics.**

Pour in the 3 cups of very hot water, then stir in the Knorr bouillon, cumin, and frozen vegetables, resting the whole serrano pepper on top.

- 1. Cover tightly and simmer on the lowest possible heat for 18 minutes without peeking.**

Bring the pot to a rolling boil, immediately drop the heat to low, cover, and under no circumstances lift the lid—doing so releases the steam needed for the rice to cook evenly.

- 2. Turn off the heat and let the pot rest undisturbed for 10 minutes.**

Leave the lid firmly in place to allow the starches to firm up so the rice becomes fluffy instead of mushy, then finally remove the lid and gently separate the grains with a fork.

- 3. Steam-fry the eggs in a covered nonstick skillet.**

Heat a teaspoon of oil per egg over medium-low, crack the egg into the pan, add a few drops of water to the edge, and cover immediately to steam the whites perfectly while keeping the yolk runny.

- 4. Serve the rice topped directly with a fried egg.**

Spoon the fluffy red rice into shallow bowls, slide an egg over each portion, and break the yolk so it bleeds into the grains.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Use a heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven.**

Thin aluminum pots create hot spots that will scorch the rice on the bottom before the steam can fully cook the top layer.

- **Don't skip rinsing the rice.**

Washing the dry grains under hot tap water strips away the surface starches that cause sticky clumps, ensuring beautifully distinct, fluffy grains.



## Tostadas de Frijoles "Engañados"

Meat was an expensive luxury in the borderlands, but grandmothers are nothing if not culinary magicians. They figured out that blending a stale corn tortilla with the exact aromatics of chorizo—dried red chiles, garlic, and onions—creates a paste that tastes and feels indistinguishable from the real thing. Fried in hot oil and mashed with humble pintos, this "fooled" bean hack yields the rich, fatty, smoky depth of a Sunday feast on a Tuesday night. Pile it on a crisp tostada with sturdy shredded cabbage—never iceberg lettuce—and you've captured the absolute soul of Northern Mexican ingenuity.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2</b>	dried Guajillo chiles <i>stems and seeds removed</i>	<b>8</b>	corn tostada shells
<b>1</b>	yellow corn tortilla <i>stale, torn into pieces</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	green cabbage <i>finely shredded</i>
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 large</b>	Roma tomato <i>diced</i>
<b>2 clove</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>	<b>1/4 med</b>	red onion <i>finely diced</i>
<b>30 oz</b>	canned pinto beans <i>undrained</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Queso Fresco <i>crumbled</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil or pork lard	<b>1/4 cup</b>	Crema Mexicana
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/4 cup</b>	pickled jalapeños

## PREPARATION

- **Stale the tortilla.**

If your tortillas are fresh, just leave one out on the counter for a few hours, or toast it lightly in a dry pan until stiff before blending.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Awaken the chiles.**

Place the dried chiles in a small bowl, cover them with boiling water, and let them steep for 5 to 10 minutes until they are soft and pliable.

- 2. Blend the fake chorizo base.**

Toss the softened chiles, stale tortilla pieces, white onion, and garlic into a blender with a quarter cup of the chile-soaking liquid. Blend on high until you have a thick, brick-red paste. That stale nixtamalized corn is going to toast in the fat and perfectly mimic the crumbly texture of actual ground chorizo.

**1. Fry the illusion.**

Heat the oil or lard in a large skillet over medium heat. Once shimmering, carefully pour in the paste—it will sputter. Stir constantly for about 2 to 3 minutes until the paste darkens slightly and the oil separates into a deep, beautiful orange-red.

**2. Mash the beans.**

Pour the entire contents of both cans of pinto beans, including the liquid, into the skillet with the fried paste. Bring to a gentle simmer, then mash the beans directly in the pan until they are thick, creamy, and have completely absorbed the red adobo. Taste and adjust salt as needed.

**3. Assemble the tostadas.**

Spread a generous, edge-to-edge layer of the hot beans onto a crispy tostada shell to act as the glue. Immediately top with a heavy handful of shredded cabbage, scatter the tomatoes and onions, drizzle with crema, and finish with a dusting of Queso Fresco.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Respect the cabbage.**

Do not substitute iceberg lettuce; authentic borderlands tostadas rely on the sturdy crunch of shredded green cabbage to stand up to the hot beans without turning into a soggy mess.

● **Fix metallic canned beans.**

If your canned beans have a tinny smell, drain and rinse them thoroughly in a colander first, then add a half cup of chicken or vegetable broth to the skillet when mashing to wash away the can flavor.



# Sopa Campesina de Caldo de Bote

*soh-pah kahm-peh-SEE-nah deh KAHL-doh deh BOH-teh*

In the rural borderlands, a proper *sopa campesina* starts with the daily harvest and a slow-simmered, pulque-spiked broth. In an Ohio suburb on a Tuesday, you make do. This is a love letter to first-generation ingenuity: taking the pejorative 'caldo de bote'—literally, boxed supermarket broth—and hacking it into something magnificent. By aggressively frying a traditional tomato *recaudo* and splashing in a bit of Mexican lager to mimic the funky tang of ancient fermented agave, you cheat an all-day grandmother's stock in thirty minutes. No apologies. Just a deeply comforting, vibrantly fresh bowl of home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	button mushrooms <i>sliced</i>
<b>1/4 large</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>32 oz</b>	low-sodium chicken bone broth
<b>2 clove</b>	garlic <i>smashed</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	light Mexican lager
<b>1 med</b>	chipotle pepper in adobo	<b>2 sprig</b>	fresh epazote
<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	white corn kernels	<b>1/2 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>
<b>1 large</b>	poblano pepper	<b>1/2 cup</b>	crispy tortilla strips
<b>2 med</b>	zucchini <i>diced into half-moons</i>	<b>1 med</b>	lime <i>cut into wedges</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Blister the poblano pepper.**

Place the poblano directly on gas burner grates over medium-high heat, turning until completely blackened and blistered. Steam it in a covered bowl or plastic bag for 5 minutes, then peel, seed, and slice into thin strips.

- **Blend the recaudo.**

Combine the tomatoes, onion, garlic, and chipotle pepper in a blender and process until completely smooth. Have this ready before you turn on the stove.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the corn to replicate a rustic fire-cooked flavor.**

Heat the oil in a large heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the corn kernels and leave them entirely alone for a minute or two until they start to brown and pop.

**1. Fry the recaudo to build the soup's foundation.**

Push the corn to the edges of the pot and pour the blended tomato puree directly into the hot center. Let it fry aggressively, stirring frequently, until the paste darkens from a raw red to a deep brick orange. Do not rush this step; it is the soul of Mexican soup making.

**2. Hack the boxed broth.**

Pour in the chicken broth and the Mexican lager, scraping up every bit of fond and browned bits from the bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon.

**3. Simmer and infuse the aromatics.**

Toss in the epazote sprigs and a generous pinch of salt. Bring the liquid to a rolling boil, then drop the heat to medium-low, cover, and let it simmer for 10 minutes to allow the commercial broth to absorb the complex flavors.

**4. Add the final vegetables.**

Remove the lid and stir in the zucchini, mushrooms, and your reserved poblano strips. Simmer gently for 5 to 7 minutes until the zucchini is tender but still has some bite. Mushy vegetables are the enemy here.

**5. Garnish and serve.**

Discard the epazote sprigs and ladle the hot soup into deep bowls. Top heavily with crumbled queso fresco, crispy tortilla strips, and a strong squeeze of fresh lime juice.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Keep the roasted oils intact.**

When peeling your blistered poblano, resist the urge to rinse it under running water. You will wash away all the hard-earned charred flavor.

● **The epazote substitution.**

If your local market does not carry fresh epazote, toss in a quarter cup of fresh cilantro stems and a half teaspoon of dried Mexican oregano instead.

- **Squash blossoms.**

If you happen to find fresh flor de calabaza at a farmer's market or specialty store, roughly chop a cup and fold them in during the final two minutes of simmering.