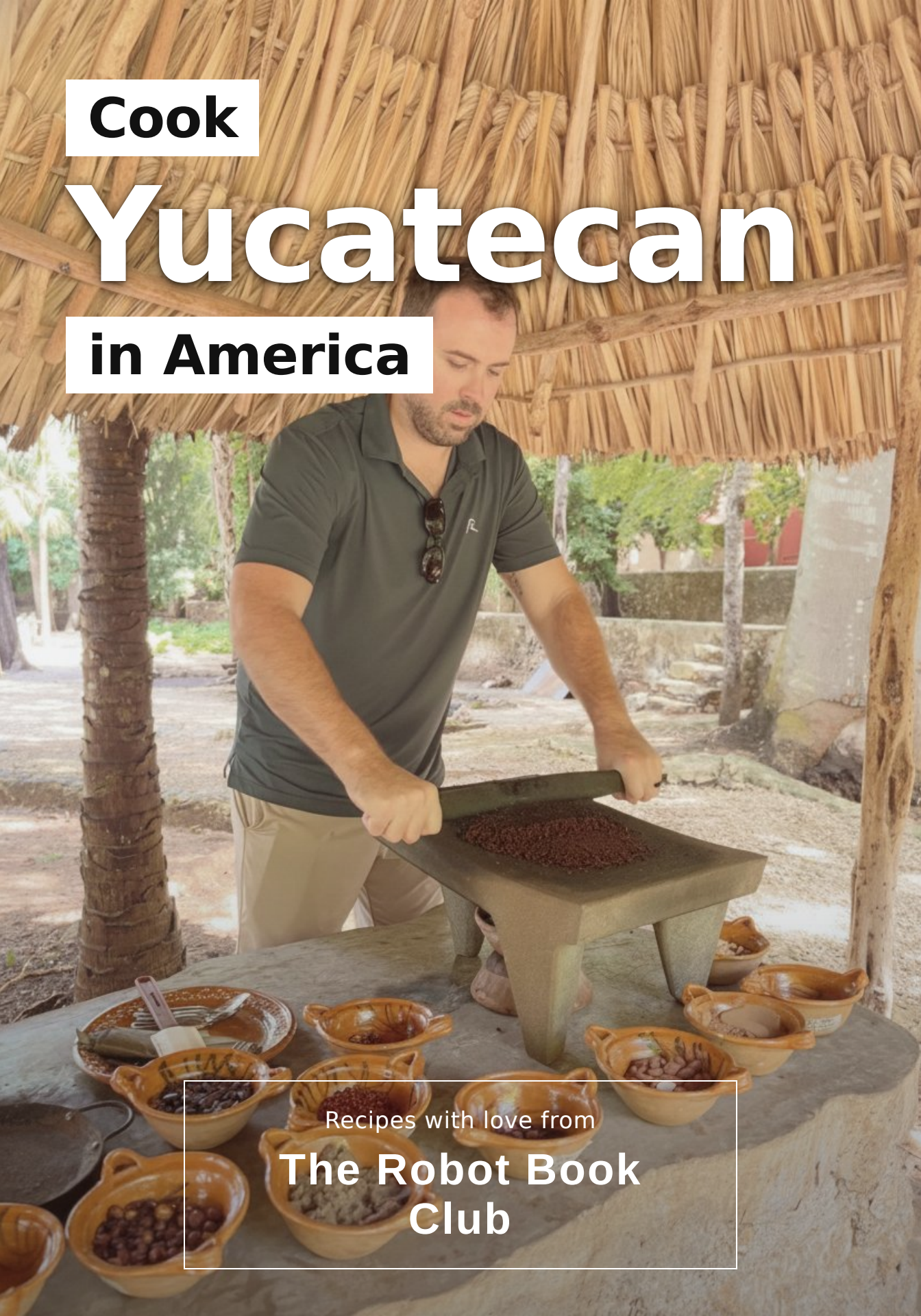


**Cook**

# Yucatecan

**in America**



Recipes with love from

**The Robot Book  
Club**

# **Cook Yucatecan in America**

*Authentic Mayan Flavors for the American Kitchen*

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: Yucatecan Home Cooking.

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

— Ted Benson

# Prologue

Travel enough, and one learns a fundamental truth about what truly satisfies: it's rarely the gilded, aspirational plate. More often, it's the corner stand, the family table, the scent that pulls you back to somewhere undeniably real. For those who left the Yucatán, or whose parents did, that specific aroma can feel a world away – trapped somewhere between the humid air of Mérida's markets and the fluorescent glare of a suburban American supermarket aisle.

This isn't a book for the curious tourist sampling a new flavor. This is for the initiated, for the ones who carry the memory. The cook who knows what *Cochinita Pibil* tastes like on a Sunday morning, even if they've never seen a traditional *pib*. The one who understands that Monday isn't just another Monday; it's *Frijol con Puerco* day. It's for the soul whose palate aches for the sharp, complex tang of *naranja agria*, but whose local grocer offers only sweet oranges and basic limes.

What lies within these pages is not a diluted, 'fusion' compromise. No. This is the honest-to-goodness flavor, translated through necessity and ingenuity. It is the Abuela-approved method, adapted for a kitchen with a slow cooker instead of a wood-fired hearth, where achiote paste is found next to the jarred salsa, and epazote might require a trip to a specialty market. It's about coaxing that unmistakable, ancient flavor profile from ingredients readily at hand, respecting the weekly rhythms that define Yucatecan home cooking.

Here, you'll find weeknight *panuchos*, Sunday morning *cochinita* perfected in a Dutch oven, and the bright, coastal essence of *tikin xic* made with easily sourced fish. The *recados* are demystified, the bitter orange hack revealed, and the habanero given its rightful, respected place at the table. This is about bringing

the sensory memory of home – the honest, unpretentious, deeply flavorful soul of the Yucatán – directly to your American kitchen. No compromises on taste, just clever, heartfelt adaptation. Let the cooking begin.





# Monday Night Comforts: Slow-Simmered Yucatecan Stews

*Hands-off, slow-cooked meals honoring the tradition of Lunes de Frijol con Puerco, tailored for busy American weeknights.*

Mondays are universally unforgiving, but in the Yucatán, they come with a built-in coping mechanism. Lunes de Frijol con Puerco isn't merely a tradition; it's a mandatory, slow-simmered reset button for the working class. When you're

navigating the American suburban grind—trading jungle heat for a frozen windshield and a demanding commute—you need that deep, restorative comfort without the all-day babysitting.

Here are the unapologetic, bone-deep stews that keep the diaspora moving forward. Through the strategic use of a slow cooker and the right cuts from the local *carnicería*, dishes like a charred-onion *pollo en escabeche* or an unabashedly rich *chocolomo* become viable after a long shift. It's honest, no-nonsense food for the people who actually have to get up and go to work in the morning.





# Slow Cooker Frijol con Puerco con Arroz y Chiltomate

*free-HOL kohn PWER-koh kohn ah-ROHS ee cheel-toh-MAH-teh*

Monday in the Yucatán historically meant laundry day, a laborious chore that demanded a meal capable of cooking itself over a low fire. Today, the slow cooker acts as that unattended hearth, gently simmering pork and dried black beans into an earthy, profound stew. But the real magic isn't in the pot—it's what happens at the table. You crown the heavy, comforting bowl with black rice cooked in the bean broth, a bright, crunchy salpicón of radish and cilantro, and a smoky chiltomate salsa where a single, whole habanero swims, lending its

floral aroma without blowing out your palate. This is how a grandmother in Mérida cooks it, unapologetically simple and deeply perfect.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	dried black beans <i>sorted and rinsed</i>	<b>1 med</b>	garlic <i>left unpeeled</i>
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	pork shoulder <i>cut into 2-inch chunks</i>	<b>1 med</b>	habanero pepper <i>left whole</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	bone-in pork neck bones	<b>1 cup</b>	long-grain white rice <i>rinsed</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>left intact</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	pork lard
<b>4 med</b>	garlic <i>peeled and left whole</i>	<b>4 med</b>	radishes <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1 large</b>	epazote <i>left whole</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 med</b>	lime <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>4 med</b>	roma tomatoes	<b>1 med</b>	avocado <i>sliced</i>
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion		

## PREPARATION

- **Sort and rinse the dried beans.**

Pick through the dried black beans carefully to remove any small stones or debris before adding them to the slow cooker.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the raw beans, pork, half onion, and peeled garlic in the slow cooker.** Cover with 6 to 8 cups of water, ensuring the liquid sits at least two inches above the ingredients. Cook on LOW for 8 to 10 hours, or HIGH for 5 to 6 hours.

**1. Wait until the beans are completely tender before seasoning.**

Salt hardens the skin of black beans if added too early. During the last 45 minutes of cooking, stir in the kosher salt and the epazote sprig, letting it finish simmering to absorb the seasoning.

**2. Roast the chiltomate vegetables in a dry cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat.**

Place the tomatoes, quarter onion, unpeeled garlic clove, and whole habanero in the dry pan. Turn occasionally until blistered and blackened on all sides, about 10 to 15 minutes. Remove the garlic skin.

**3. Blend the roasted salsa into a chunky, rustic chiltomate.**

Transfer the tomatoes, onion, and peeled garlic to a blender with a heavy pinch of salt. Pulse until chunky, not smooth. Pour into a bowl and drop the whole, intact roasted habanero directly into the salsa.

**4. Extract bean broth from the slow cooker to make the black rice.**

Ladle out 2 cups of the dark, rich bean broth. In a saucepan, heat the lard over medium, toast the rinsed white rice slightly, then add the broth. Bring to a boil, cover, reduce to low, and simmer for 20 minutes until tender.

**5. Serve the stew deconstructed, allowing everyone to build their own bowl.**

Place a scoop of black rice in a wide bowl, ladling the pork, beans, and rich broth over the top. Garnish heavily at the table with the diced radishes, chopped cilantro, a squeeze of lime, avocado slices, and a generous spoonful of the chiltomate.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **Keep the habanero whole for flavor, not fire.**

A grandmother's secret for feeding a family: roasting the habanero and letting it swim intact in the chiltomate imparts the signature Yucatecan floral aroma without blowing out a child's palate. Diners who want heat can crush the pepper in their own bowl.

- **Resist the urge to sear the pork.**

Boiling raw meat might feel counterintuitive to Americanized cooking rules, but it keeps the broth cleanly flavored and deeply earthy, exactly how it is traditionally prepared in Mérida.

- **Never use canned beans.**

The entire recipe, particularly the black rice, relies on the dark, starchy liquor that only comes from simmering dried black beans low and slow.



# Lomitos de Valladolid

*loh-MEE-tohs deh bah-yah-doh-LEED*

There is no achiote here, no underground oven. Just pork, tomatoes, and time. In Valladolid, grandmothers reduce this stew until the tomatoes surrender their water completely, forming a rich, brick-red paste that clings to the meat. Because American supermarket pork loin is tragically lean, we swap it for shoulder, which melts perfectly into the rendered lard. It is a humble, slow-simmered masterpiece of Yucatecan minimalism that tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	boneless pork shoulder <i>trimmed of excess surface fat and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>3 tbsp</b>	pork lard

**1 med** white onion  
*finely chopped*

**4 clove** garlic  
*minced*

**3 med** dried chiles de árbol  
*stemmed and seeded*

**2 1/2 lb** Roma tomatoes

**1/2 tsp** dried Mexican oregano

**1 sprig** fresh epazote

**4 large** eggs  
*hard-boiled, peeled, and roughly chopped*

**1 cup** refried black beans  
*warmed*

**8 med** corn tortillas  
*warmed*

**1/2 cup** pickled red onions

## PREPARATION

- **Blend half the tomatoes.**

Place half of the Roma tomatoes in a blender with the stemmed and seeded chiles de árbol and blend until completely smooth.

- **Chop the remaining tomatoes.**

Finely chop the other half of the tomatoes, making sure to retain all their juices and seeds to build the texture of the stew.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the pork in batches.**

Heat the lard in a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering, then sear the pork in a single, uncrowded layer for 8 to 10 minutes until richly browned on all sides.

- 2. Sweat the aromatics.**

Lower the heat to medium, push the pork to the edges of the pot, and sauté the chopped onion in the center for 3 to 4 minutes until translucent, followed by the garlic for 1 minute more.

- 3. Build the stew.**

Pour the blended tomato puree and the chopped tomatoes into the pot along with their juices, then stir in the oregano and epazote while scraping the bottom to release any browned bits.

**1. Reduce to a paste.**

Bring the pot to a gentle boil, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer uncovered for 60 to 75 minutes. The dish is finished only when the liquid evaporates entirely, leaving the fat slightly separated and transforming the sauce into a thick, brick-red paste that tightly coats the spoon-tender meat.

**2. Garnish and serve.**

Remove the epazote sprig, taste for salt, and serve the rich pork spooned over warm tortillas or tostadas smeared with refried black beans, topped with the chopped hard-boiled egg and pickled red onions.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Source the right fat.**

Fresh rendered lard from a Mexican *carnicería* makes all the difference here. If you must use vegetable oil, add a spoonful of bacon grease to replicate that foundational depth.

● **Utilize your slow cooker.**

To make this on a busy weeknight, sear the pork and aromatics on the stove, then transfer everything to a slow cooker on low for 6 to 8 hours. If the resulting sauce is too thin, boil it down in a skillet before serving.

● **Swap tomatoes if necessary.**

If fresh Roma tomatoes are pale and watery during Midwestern winters, substituting a 28-ounce can of high-quality fire-roasted crushed tomatoes is a perfectly acceptable and often superior choice.



# Potaje de Lentejas Yucateco

In the sweltering heat of the Yucatán, comfort food isn't reserved for winter. It arrives on Mondays in the form of this massive, meat-heavy masterpiece. True potaje is an alchemy of indigenous roots and Spanish imports, but the secret weapon is the deeply spotted, overripe plantain. It stews in a smoky pork broth fortified by caramelized sofrito and rendered chorizo fat, bursting with a localized sweetness that makes total sense the moment you taste it. No chef tricks here—just the patient layering of cheap meats and vegetables you can find at any strip-mall grocery store.

## INGREDIENTS

**1 lb** boneless pork shoulder  
*cut into 1-inch cubes*

**1 lb** dried brown lentils  
*rinsed and picked over*

<b>8 cup</b>	water or low-sodium chicken broth	<b>3 large</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>chopped</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	smoked paprika
<b>1 med</b>	bay leaf	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>4 large</b>	thick-cut applewood-smoked bacon slices <i>chopped</i>	<b>2 med</b>	carrots <i>peeled and cut into 1/2-inch rounds</i>
<b>8 oz</b>	raw Mexican chorizo <i>casings removed</i>	<b>1 large</b>	russet potato <i>peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>
<b>1 large</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	chayote squash <i>peeled, cored, and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>
<b>1 med</b>	Cubanelle pepper <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 large</b>	very ripe plantain <i>peeled and cut into 1/2-inch rounds</i>
<b>4 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	<b>1/4 large</b>	white cabbage <i>cored and chopped into rough 2-inch chunks</i>
		<b>1 small</b>	fresh cilantro <i>stems tied together with kitchen twine</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the pork, lentils, water, salt, and bay leaf in a large Dutch oven and bring to a rolling boil.**

Skim off and discard any grey foam that rises to the surface, then lower the heat to a gentle simmer, cover with the lid slightly ajar, and cook for 30 minutes.

- 2. Render the chopped bacon in a large skillet over medium heat, then add the chorizo and cook until deeply browned.**

Break the chorizo apart with a wooden spoon so it releases its spiced, red oils into the pan.

- 3. Sauté the onion and Cubanelle pepper in the rendered pork fat until softened.**

Add the garlic, smoked paprika, and cumin, cooking until fragrant, then stir in the tomatoes and reduce until the mixture becomes a thick, jammy paste.

1. **Scrape the entire sofrito—fat and all—into the simmering lentil pot along with the carrots, potato, chayote, and tied cilantro bundle.**

Stir well to combine, partially cover, and simmer for 20 minutes until the root vegetables are tender.

2. **Submerge the sliced plantain and cabbage chunks into the broth and simmer for a final 15 minutes.**

The plantains will soften and release their natural sugars, while the cabbage wilts but retains a pleasant crunch.

3. **Remove from the heat, discard the bay leaf and cilantro bundle, and adjust the seasoning.**

Taste the broth; the sweetness of the plantain will likely demand a generous pinch of salt and black pepper to balance the richness.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **The plantain must be completely ripe and heavily spotted with black.**

A green plantain will act like a dry potato and leach starch, whereas an overripe one holds its shape while contributing the essential caramelized sweetness that makes this dish authentic.

- **Always finish the bowl with a squeeze of fresh lime juice.**

Without a sharp, acidic finisher cutting through the heavy pork fat, the stew will taste muddy. Serve with lime wedges, chopped cilantro, and minced habanero.

- **Make extra, because it's even better the next day.**

The starches hydrate overnight, thickening the broth into a rich gravy that locals traditionally reheat and serve for breakfast with a fried egg.



## Relleno Negro con "But" Rápido

Relleno negro is the undisputed crown jewel of the Yucatán, a profound dish steeped in Mayan history and the spiritual centerpiece of the Day of the Dead. It looks intimidating—an intensely dark, inky broth—but it yields an earthy, savory comfort that is entirely unique. Traditionally, it demands hours of roasting chilies into a smoky oblivion and boiling a massive, cheesecloth-wrapped meatloaf alongside a whole turkey. But modern grandmothers in Mérida have a weeknight secret: they buy a high-quality block of recado negro at the

local market. By swapping the whole bird for chicken thighs and rolling the meat into individual, egg-yolk-stuffed albóndigas, you get the exact, uncompromised soul of the homeland in under an hour.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	chicken thighs <i>bone-in, skinless</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	green bell pepper <i>very finely diced</i>
<b>6 cup</b>	chicken broth	<b>1/4 cup</b>	white onion <i>very finely diced</i>
<b>4 oz</b>	recado negro paste	<b>1 small</b>	Roma tomato <i>seeds removed, very finely diced</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>peeled but left intact</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	garlic powder
<b>2 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>halved</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper
<b>3 sprigs</b>	fresh epazote	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>4 large</b>	eggs <i>hard-boiled, yolks kept intact and whites finely chopped</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	all-purpose flour
<b>1 large</b>	egg <i>raw</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	cold water
<b>1 lb</b>	ground pork	<b>12 med</b>	corn tortillas <i>warmed</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	recado negro paste <i>dissolved in 1 tbsp warm water</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	white rice <i>cooked</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Hard-boil and carefully separate the eggs.**

Boil four eggs, chill them in an ice bath, and gently pry them open. You must keep the solid yolks completely intact to stuff the meatballs, and finely chop the cooked whites to mix into the meat.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Blend the primary recado negro paste with one cup of warm chicken broth until completely smooth.**
- 2. Build the black broth in a large heavy-bottomed pot.**

Combine the remaining five cups of chicken broth, the blended black liquid, chicken thighs, halved onion, halved tomatoes, and epazote. Bring to a gentle boil, reduce the heat, cover, and simmer for 15 minutes.
- 3. Mix the but meatball base gently but thoroughly.**

In a large bowl, combine the ground pork, finely chopped cooked egg whites, raw egg, diced bell pepper, diced onion, diced tomato, garlic powder, black pepper, kosher salt, and the dissolved tablespoon of recado negro paste until the meat takes on a dark, speckled appearance.
- 4. Form the stuffed albóndigas by hiding an intact egg yolk inside each.**

Take a golf-ball-sized handful of the meat mixture, flatten it in your palm, place one hard-boiled yolk in the center, and fold the meat around it to seal completely. Roll gently into a smooth ball.
- 5. Gently poach the stuffed meatballs in the dark broth.**

Uncover the pot and carefully drop the meatballs in, nestling them around the chicken. Do not stir vigorously. Cover and simmer on medium-low for 20 to 25 minutes until the chicken is fall-apart tender.
- 6. Thicken the broth with a simple flour slurry to create the k'ool.**

Whisk the flour and cold water until perfectly smooth. Temporarily remove the chicken and meatballs with a slotted spoon so they don't break, then slowly pour the slurry into the gently boiling broth, whisking constantly until it reaches a velvety, stew-like consistency.
- 7. Serve immediately with white rice and warm corn tortillas.**

Return the meat to the pot to warm through. Serve in deep bowls, ensuring every diner gets a meatball; cutting into the dark meat to reveal the bright yellow yolk is the aesthetic and nostalgic hallmark of the dish.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the meticulous egg separation.**

Chopping whole hard-boiled eggs directly into the meat is considered highly incorrect in traditional Yucatecan cooking. The distinct separation of the whites for texture and the intact yolks for a surprise center is the absolute secret that separates a thrown-together recipe from one learned from a Yucatecan grandmother.

- **Buying the paste is the authentic local shortcut.**

First-generation home cooks shouldn't feel guilty about buying commercial recado negro. Even in Mérida, grandmothers routinely purchase their pastes from specialized market millers. It saves you hours of noxious chili-charring while delivering uncompromising, authentic flavor.

- **Understand the chemistry of the char.**

You might assume burned chilies taste purely of bitter ash, but the intense tatemado process destroys the capsaicin heat and creates profound Maillard reactions, resulting in rich, earthy, almost chocolate-like flavors perfectly balanced by the rich pork.



# Suburban Chicolomo

*cho-ko-LO-mo*

In the Yucatán, Chicolomo is a restorative, slow-simmered weekend ritual born of the bullfights and built to cure the sins of Saturday night. The old-school grandmas utilized every piece of the cow to ensure nothing went to waste, but this adaptation is built for the American weeknight. By leaning hard on marrow bones and chuck roast, and honoring the non-negotiable ancestral char of the aromatics, you get the exact soul-warming, mint-laced broth of Mérida without needing to source fresh kidney on a Tuesday. It is a clear, clean soup meant to be heavily fortified at the table with crunch, acid, and heat.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	beef chuck roast <i>cut into 2-inch chunks</i>	<b>4 med</b>	whole allspice berries
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	beef marrow bones	<b>1 whole</b>	habanero pepper <i>left completely intact</i>
<b>1 large</b>	white onion <i>halved with skin left on</i>	<b>1 med</b>	banana pepper <i>left completely intact</i>
<b>1 large</b>	head of garlic <i>halved crosswise</i>	<b>1 med</b>	zucchini <i>cut into thick 1 1/2-inch half-moons</i>
<b>8 cup</b>	water	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>10 med</b>	spearmint leaves	<b>1 bunch</b>	radishes <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1 small bunch</b>	fresh cilantro	<b>1/2 med</b>	red onion <i>finely minced</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	Mexican oregano	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	whole black peppercorns <i>lightly crushed</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	bitter orange juice

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the Salpicón de rábano.**

While the stew simmers, mix the diced radishes, minced red onion, chopped cilantro, and bitter orange juice in a small bowl. Season with a pinch of salt and let it sit for at least 15 minutes so the acid lightly pickles the vegetables.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Aggressively char the onion and garlic in a dry skillet.**

Heat a dry cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Place the onion and garlic halves cut-side down directly on the metal and leave them entirely alone for 5 to 8 minutes until heavily blackened. This ancestral technique, *el tatemado*, is the smoky backbone of the broth.

**1. Boil the meat and bones, meticulously skimming the impurities.**

In a large Dutch oven, bring the beef chuck, marrow bones, and water to a rolling boil over medium-high heat. Skim off the grey foam that rises to the top with a fine mesh skimmer—take your time here, as a clear broth is a clean broth.

**2. Simmer the charred aromatics and spices.**

Once the broth is clear, drop in the blackened onion and garlic along with the peppercorns, allspice, Mexican oregano, and kosher salt. Reduce the heat to a gentle simmer, cover, and cook for 1 1/2 hours.

**3. Steep the fresh herbs and peppers without overwhelming the dish.**

Add the whole habanero, banana pepper, fresh mint, and the bunch of cilantro. Cover and simmer for another 30 to 45 minutes to extract their delicate volatile oils. Do not break the habanero skin, or the heat will overpower the entire pot.

**4. Finish with the squash until perfectly tender.**

Gently stir in the zucchini chunks and cook for 15 to 20 minutes. The stew is ready when the squash is soft and the beef chuck shreds easily with a fork.

**5. Strain the broth and serve the Yucatecan way.**

Carefully remove and discard the spent onion, garlic, herb stems, and whole peppers. Ladle the clear broth, meat, and squash into deep bowls, passing the Salpicón de rábano at the table so everyone can dress their own bowl.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **Sourcing bitter orange.**

If you cannot find bottled naranja agria at your local Latin market, do not stress. Substitute with equal parts fresh orange juice and lime juice to hit the precise acidic resonance required for the garnish.

● **The weeknight pressure cooker shortcut.**

Char the aromatics directly in an Instant Pot on Sauté mode, then add the meat, bones, spices, and water. Cook on high pressure for 35 minutes, quick release, skim the fat, add the herbs and squash, and simmer on Sauté for 10 minutes.



# Sopa de Lima

*soh-pah deh lee-mah*

If you grew up in a Mexican household, you know chicken soup isn't just food; it's medicine. In the Yucatán, they elevate it to an art form. The secret isn't just the spices—it's how you treat the citrus. The ultimate grandma-approved trick is to char the limes to release their essential oils, drop them in the broth for exactly five minutes, and pull them out before the bitter pith ruins the pot. Because true Yucatecan limas are nearly impossible to find in an American grocery store, we use a calculated blend of Persian lime and sweet orange juice to perfectly replicate that iconic, nostalgic flavor. It's unpretentious, incredibly fragrant, and exactly what it tastes like back home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs	<b>1 med</b>	Anaheim chile <i>seeded and finely diced</i>
<b>8 cup</b>	water	<b>2 large</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>seeded and diced</i>
<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>left intact</i>	<b>2 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>
<b>4 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled and smashed</i>	<b>1 med</b>	Persian lime <i>cut into thick slices</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>3 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	whole black peppercorns	<b>3 tbsp</b>	fresh sweet orange juice
<b>3 med</b>	whole cloves	<b>6 med</b>	corn tortillas <i>cut into thin strips</i>
<b>2 med</b>	allspice berries	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1 small</b>	Mexican cinnamon stick	<b>1 med</b>	avocado <i>diced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 med</b>	fresh habanero pepper <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil		
<b>1/2 large</b>	red onion <i>finely chopped</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Fry the tortilla strips.**

Before starting the soup, shallow-fry the thin corn tortilla strips in a bit of neutral oil until golden brown and crispy, then drain them on paper towels.

## INSTRUCTIONS

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

Combine the chicken, the intact half-onion, smashed garlic, oregano, peppercorns, whole cloves, allspice, cinnamon, and salt in a large heavy-bottomed pot, cover with water, and bring to a boil.

**1. Skim the impurities.**

As it boils, skim off and discard any grey foam that rises to the top to guarantee a beautiful, clear broth, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 40 minutes until the chicken is completely tender.

**2. Shred the meat and strain the liquid gold.**

Remove the chicken to a cutting board, discard the skin and bones, and shred the meat; meanwhile, strain the broth through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl, discarding the boiled aromatics.

**3. Build the sofrito.**

Wipe out the heavy pot, heat the oil over medium heat, and sauté the chopped red onion and diced Anaheim pepper for 5 to 7 minutes until soft, then add the minced garlic and tomatoes, cooking until it forms a jammy paste.

**4. Marry the broth and the sofrito.**

Pour the strained spiced broth back into the pot with the tomato mixture, bring to a gentle simmer, and stir in the shredded chicken to warm through.

**5. Char the limes.**

Quickly sear the thick lime slices in a dry skillet over high heat for about a minute per side until they have a little char.

**6. Execute the five-minute lime trick.**

Drop the charred lime slices directly into the simmering soup, set a timer for exactly five minutes, and immediately fish them out when it rings so the bitter pith doesn't ruin the pot.

**7. Finish and serve.**

Turn off the heat, stir in the fresh lime and orange juices, taste for salt, and serve the hot soup ladled over crispy tortilla strips, garnished with avocado, cilantro, and a sliver of habanero if you're brave.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the five-minute rule.**

The most common mistake beginners make is leaving the limes in the pot; limonin in the pith will aggressively extract in the hot broth and turn the whole soup irreparably bitter.

- **The citrus substitution.**

True lima yucateca is sweet, tart, and highly aromatic. Blending standard Persian lime juice with sweet orange juice is the ultimate hack for mimicking that elusive flavor profile in a standard American kitchen.

- **Keep the tortillas crispy.**

Never cook the tortilla strips in the soup or let them soak in the main pot. Place them in the bottom of individual bowls right before serving so they retain their satisfying crunch.



# Pollo en Escabeche Oriental

*poh-yoh ehn ehs-kah-BEH-cheh oh-ryehn-TAHL*

If you walk the streets of Valladolid, you smell this dish long before you see it—an intoxicating cloud of toasted cinnamon, garlic, and sharp citrus hanging in the humid air. The secret isn't some esoteric jungle vine; it's technique. Yucatecan grandmothers know you have to cook the bird twice to get the best of both worlds: a rich, deeply savory broth built from charred aromatics, followed by a quick blast of heat to crisp the skin. We're faking the native sour orange with a blend of everyday citrus and leaning on a homemade spice paste that will make your kitchen smell exactly like home, without requiring a weekend of your time.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>2 med</b>	Anaheim or yellow wax pepper
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt		
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>	<b>3 lb</b>	bone-in skin-on chicken piece
<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh orange juice
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground coriander	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh grapefruit juice
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground allspice	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cinnamon	<b>1/4 cup</b>	white vinegar
<b>1/8 tsp</b>	ground cloves	<b>2 med</b>	white onion <i>halved and sliced into thick half-moons</i>
<b>1 large</b>	garlic head <i>unpeeled</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken stock
<b>3 med</b>	garlic clove <i>minced</i>	<b>2 med</b>	bay leaf
		<b>1 tbsp</b>	bacon fat, lard, or neutral oil
		<b>12 med</b>	corn tortilla

## PREPARATION

- **Mix the dry spice blend.**

In a small bowl, whisk together the oregano, salt, black pepper, cumin, coriander, allspice, cinnamon, and cloves.

- **Build the citrus marinade.**

In a large bowl, whisk the orange juice, grapefruit juice, lime juice, white vinegar, and minced garlic, then stir in half of your dry spice blend.

- **Marinate the chicken.**

Add the chicken pieces to the marinade and toss aggressively, massaging the liquid into the skin.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Char the aromatics under the broiler.**

Place the unpeeled head of garlic and whole peppers on a foil-lined baking sheet under a high broiler for 5 to 10 minutes until the peppers are blistered and the garlic is lightly blackened, then set aside.

### 2. **Soften the onions in your cooking fat.**

In a large heavy-bottomed pot, heat the bacon fat over medium-high heat, add the sliced onions and the remaining dry spice blend, and sauté for 5 to 7 minutes until softened and deeply colored.

### 3. **Simmer the stew until the chicken is tender.**

Pour the chicken and its marinade into the pot, nestle in the charred peppers and garlic head, add the chicken stock and bay leaves, bring to a boil, then cover and simmer on medium-low for 25 to 30 minutes.

### 4. **Crisp the chicken skin under high heat.**

Transfer the cooked chicken pieces skin-side up back to the foil-lined baking sheet and place under the broiler for 4 to 6 minutes until the skin sizzles, renders, and browns beautifully.

### 5. **Reduce the broth and serve.**

While the chicken crisps, boil the broth uncovered over medium-high heat to concentrate the flavors, then ladle the hot onion broth around the crispy chicken in shallow bowls and serve immediately with warm tortillas.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the charring step.**

Charring is non-negotiable; it mellows the raw garlic and releases the smoky oils of the chile, forming the backbone of this rustic dish.

- **The citrus blend is a precise stand-in.**

Blending orange, grapefruit, and lime juice perfectly mimics the pH and complex sugar levels of the native Yucatecan sour orange.



## Puchero de Tres Carnes

There is the version of Mexico sold to tourists, and then there is the Yucatán of Sunday afternoons, where families gather over massive, steaming pots of Puchero de Tres Carnes. It is a chaotic collision of indigenous Mayan roots, Spanish colonialism, and Caribbean trade—a marrow-rich, multi-meat broth fortified with starchy tropical tubers and sweet plantains. Traditionally an all-day affair, this pressure cooker adaptation delivers the deeply restorative flavor your grandmother coaxed out over a wood fire, giving you back your weeknight. The real magic happens at the table with a ritual called *hacer puch*, where you aggressively mash the tender meat, sweet plantain, and fiery radish relish into a profoundly perfect paste.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 med</b>	white onion <i>unpeeled, halved</i>	<b>1 med</b>	chayote squash <i>peeled, cored, and cubed</i>
<b>1 med head</b>	garlic <i>unpeeled, top third sliced off</i>	<b>2 med</b>	ears of corn <i>husked and cut into 2-inch rounds</i>
<b>8 whole</b>	black peppercorns	<b>1 large</b>	ripe plantain <i>ends trimmed, cut into 3 pieces with peel left on</i>
<b>4 whole</b>	allspice berries	<b>1 small</b>	zucchini <i>cut into thick half-moons</i>
<b>2 whole</b>	whole cloves	<b>1/4 med</b>	green cabbage <i>cut into 2 thick wedges leaving core intact</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro sprigs
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	cumin seeds	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh mint sprigs
<b>1 small</b>	cinnamon stick	<b>1 bunch</b>	radishes <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground turmeric	<b>1/2 large</b>	red onion <i>finely minced</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	bone-in beef shank or short ribs	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	pork shoulder <i>cut into 2-inch chunks</i>	<b>1 small</b>	habanero pepper <i>seeds and ribs removed, minced</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh orange juice
<b>1 cup</b>	dried chickpeas <i>soaked overnight</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>2 large</b>	carrots <i>peeled and sliced into thick rounds</i>	<b>2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 large</b>	sweet potato <i>peeled and cubed</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	fideos or broken spaghetti
		<b>2 cup</b>	cooked white rice

## PREPARATION

- **Macerate the salpicón de rabanitos.**

In a small bowl, combine the diced radishes, red onion, chopped cilantro, habanero, orange juice, and lime juice with a heavy pinch of salt, setting aside so the acid mellows the raw onion.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Char the aromatics to build a wood-fire depth.**

Heat a dry cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat and roast the onion halves and head of garlic cut-side down for 5 to 7 minutes until deeply blackened.

2. **Toast the spices and initiate the pressure cook.**

In a large electric pressure cooker, toast the peppercorns, allspice, cloves, cumin, and cinnamon stick for one minute until fragrant.

3. **Extract the heavy marrow and tough connective tissues.**

Add the charred onion, charred garlic, beef, pork, soaked chickpeas, turmeric, oregano, kosher salt, and 8 cups of water, then seal and cook on high pressure for 35 minutes.

4. **Simmer the dense root vegetables and plantain.**

Release the pressure naturally for 10 minutes, skim any heavy foam from the surface, switch to the sauté function, and nestle the chicken thighs, carrots, sweet potato, chayote, corn, and skin-on plantain into the broth to simmer for 15 minutes.

5. **Finish with the delicate squashes and herbs.**

Add the zucchini, cabbage wedges, and whole cilantro and mint sprigs, simmering for a final 5 to 7 minutes until the chicken is cooked through and the root vegetables are tender.

**1. Cook the fideos in the rendered fat.**

Ladle about 2 cups of the rich, fat-laden surface broth into a small saucepan and boil the noodles until they are tender and have absorbed the savory liquid.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

- **Leave the plantain peel on during the simmer.**

This old-school grandmother trick prevents the highly sugary fruit from disintegrating and clouding your savory broth.

- **Hacer puch to eat it like a true Yucatecan.**

Transfer the solid meats, tubers, and peeled plantain to a wide bowl, then aggressively mash them together with a fork before folding in the acidic radish relish and a spoonful of rice.



# Estofado de Pollo Yucateco

*es-toh-fah-doh de poh-yo yoo-kah-teh-koh*

Forget the endless online variations dyed red with achiote; this is the everyday comfort food simmering in the kitchens of Mérida on a rainy evening. A beautiful culinary snapshot of the Yucatan's history as a massive trading port, this slow-simmered stew relies on a Moorish pantry of briny olives, sweet raisins, and crunchy almonds. The grandmother's secret lies in a quick vinegar-spice rub before searing and a late splash of sherry right before serving, resulting in a deeply aromatic, complex sauce that requires nothing more than a busy weeknight and a pile of warm tortillas.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	bone-in skinless chicken thighs <i>patted dry</i>	<b>15 oz</b>	canned crushed tomatoes
<b>2 tbsp</b>	white vinegar	<b>1 cup</b>	chicken broth
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cinnamon	<b>2</b>	bay leaves
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground cloves	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried oregano
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	<b>1 sprig</b>	fresh thyme
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/2 cup</b>	pitted green Manzanilla olives
<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>2 tbsp</b>	capers <i>drained</i>
<b>1 large</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	dark raisins
<b>3 clove</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	blanched slivered almonds
		<b>1 tsp</b>	granulated sugar
		<b>2 tbsp</b>	dry sherry

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Impregnate the meat with the foundational warming spices.

In a large bowl, mix the vinegar, cinnamon, cloves, black pepper, and salt. Add the chicken thighs and toss thoroughly to ensure every piece is coated, letting the meat sit while you prepare the remaining ingredients.

### 2. Blend the aromatic tomato base.

In a blender, combine the chopped onion, peeled garlic, crushed tomatoes, and chicken broth, processing until completely smooth.

### 3. Sear the chicken to build a deeply flavored fond.

Heat the neutral oil in a large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat. Sear the chicken thighs until beautifully browned, about 3 to 4 minutes per side, then transfer them to a plate.

**1. Deglaze the pot and initiate the braise.**

Reduce the heat to medium and carefully pour the blended tomato mixture into the pot, scraping up all the incredible browned bits from the bottom. Stir in the bay leaves, oregano, and thyme.

**2. Simmer gently to tenderize the chicken and integrate the flavors.**

Nestle the chicken thighs and any resting juices back into the sauce, bring to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes.

**3. Introduce the Moorish embellishments to balance the stew.**

Uncover the pot and stir in the olives, capers, raisins, almonds, and sugar. Leave uncovered and simmer for another 15 minutes, allowing the sauce to thicken slightly and the raisins to plump up as the chicken becomes fall-off-the-bone tender.

**4. Finish with sherry to preserve its volatile aromatics.**

Exactly two minutes before serving, stir in the dry sherry. Let it bubble just long enough to cook off the harsh alcohol, leaving behind its complex, oxidized aroma, then remove from the heat and serve.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Omit the alcohol without losing the acid trip.**

If you prefer to cook without alcohol, completely omit the sherry. Instead, stir in 1 tablespoon of apple cider vinegar mixed with a tiny pinch of brown sugar at the very end of cooking to provide a similarly bright, complex finish.



# Mérida Market Afternoons: Antojitos & Front Porch Snacks

*Authentic, scalable Yucatecan street snacks and masa masterclasses built for standard American kitchens and crowded front porches.*

When the brutal afternoon heat finally breaks over Mérida, the plastic chairs scrape against the pavement, and the day shifts gears. This is the hour of the antojito—a loud, beautiful collision of toasted masa, sputtering lard, and

neighbors trading gossip over sweating bottles of beer. These aren't fussy appetizers; they are handheld miracles of utility and unapologetic flavor, built to punctuate the end of a long shift.

You don't need a street cart or a grandmother's seasoned comal to pull this off in a standard kitchen. From coaxing grocery-store masa into crisp, inflated panuchos to hijacking bagged pork rinds into a deeply respectable chicharra, these snacks are engineered for shared tables and stained napkins. They're fast, they're loud, and they're exactly what you want when the work is done.





# Sikil P'aak

*see-keel pahk*

If guacamole is the ubiquitous king of Mexican party dips, Sikil P'aak is the ancient, deeply revered Mayan ancestor your grandmother brings out for the people who really matter. It's pure alchemy. It relies entirely on the natural, rich fats of toasted pumpkin seeds, the smoky backbone of deeply charred tomatoes, and the bright, floral hum of a habanero. In the Yucatán, this is the ultimate gesture of hospitality. The secret to making it taste exactly like it does back home isn't some magical, impossible-to-find ingredient—it's patience. Let the tomatoes truly blacken on the skillet. Toast the seeds until your kitchen smells like roasted nuts. No extra oil, no cumin, no shortcuts. Just fire, seeds, and time.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	raw hulled green pumpkin seeds	<b>3 med clove</b>	garlic <i>left in their papery skins</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	whole roasted white pumpkin seeds <i>in their shells (or substitute an extra 1/2 cup green pumpkin seeds)</i>	<b>1 med</b>	habanero pepper
<b>3 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>fully ripe</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>cut into a thick slab</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	fresh orange juice
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>leaves and tender stems finely chopped</i>
		<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Toast the seeds in a dry skillet.

Place a large, dry cast-iron skillet over medium heat with absolutely no oil. Add both the green and white pumpkin seeds and toast them, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until they swell slightly and emit a distinct popping sound.

### 2. Transfer the seeds immediately to cool.

The line between beautifully toasted and bitterly burnt is razor-thin. The moment they smell deeply nutty and turn golden, transfer them to a plate.

### 3. Char the aromatics.

Wipe the skillet clean with a dry towel and return it to medium-high heat. Place the tomatoes, onion slab, skin-on garlic, and whole habanero directly onto the dry metal.

### 4. Let the vegetables blister and burn.

Turn them occasionally. The garlic will soften first (about 5 to 7 minutes); remove it and peel off the burnt papery skin. The habanero takes about 10 minutes. The tomatoes and onions need to be deeply charred and collapsing in on themselves, which takes about 15 minutes. Do not peel the black char off the tomatoes or onions—that ash is where the authentic flavor lives.

**1. Manage the habanero's heat.**

Cut the charred habanero open. For a mild dip that retains the pepper's amazing floral flavor without the intense pain, scrape out and discard all the seeds and white membranes. If you want it authentically spicy, keep half the seeds, then mince the pepper finely.

**2. Grind the seeds into a sandy powder.**

Transfer your cooled, toasted pumpkin seeds to a food processor. Add the salt and pulse until broken down into a coarse powder, similar to almond flour. Do not over-process it into a paste.

**3. Marry the charred vegetables with the seeds.**

Add the peeled roasted garlic, charred onion, minced habanero, and charred tomatoes (along with any juices that leaked onto your board) to the seed powder. Pulse everything together until you have a chunky, rustic paste.

**4. Finish with citrus and herbs.**

Transfer the dip to a serving bowl and fold in the lime juice, orange juice, and chopped cilantro. Taste for salt. If it feels too stiff, stir in a tiny splash of water, one tablespoon at a time, until it reaches the consistency of a thick hummus.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Nail the traditional texture.**

Using unhulled white pumpkin seeds from the snack aisle mimics the fibrous hull of the native chihua seeds. If you can't find them, going all-in on green pepitas is perfectly fine.

● **Replicate the sour orange.**

Native Yucatecan recipes use Naranja Agria (sour orange). A 50/50 mix of standard lime and sweet orange juice perfectly replicates that bitter, highly aromatic acidity.

● **Respect the serving tradition.**

Serve at room temperature alongside crispy tortilla chips (totopos) or thick strips of raw, crunchy vegetables like cucumber, carrot, and jicama.



# Grandma's Chicharra Preparada con Salsa Xnipec

*chee-chah-rah pre-pah-rah-dah kohn sahl-sah shnee-pek*

True Yucatecan chicharra isn't a stale pork rind pulled from a plastic bag. It's a decadent, fatty mix of crispy skin, rich pork belly, and crunchy rendered offcuts meant to be shared on a hot Mérida afternoon. While grandma might have rendered her own pork over a wood fire, the modern secret is befriending the butcher at your local *carnicería*. Buy their best assorted pork belly cracklings, then focus your energy where it belongs: on the bright, fiery, slow-cured citrus salsa that cuts straight through the richness.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 med</b>	red onion <i>very finely diced</i>	<b>1/2 lb</b>	pork belly cracklings
<b>2 small</b>	habanero peppers <i>stemmed, seeded, and minced</i>	<b>1/2 lb</b>	pork rinds
<b>2 large</b>	tomato <i>cored, seeded, and diced</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	white cabbage <i>finely shredded</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>finely chopped</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	English cucumber <i>diced</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	fresh sweet orange juice	<b>5 med</b>	radishes <i>sliced into thin rounds</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1 large</b>	avocado <i>cubed</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	white distilled vinegar	<b>12 med</b>	corn tortillas <i>warmed</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 med</b>	limes <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano		

## PREPARATION

- **Cure the Xnipec salsa.**

In a glass or ceramic bowl, combine the red onion, habanero, half of the diced tomatoes, and cilantro. Pour the orange juice, lime juice, and vinegar over the top to mimic the native sour orange, then stir in the salt and oregano. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours to denature the harsh sulfurous compounds of the onion and turn the juice a beautiful pink.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Prepare the crisp cabbage salad.**

In a large serving bowl, gently toss together the shredded cabbage, cucumber, radishes, and the remaining diced tomato. Fold in the avocado just before serving so it doesn't turn to mush.

**1. Chop the chicharra into bite-sized pieces.**

Using a heavy chef's knife or cleaver, roughly chop the meaty pork belly cracklings and the standard pork rinds. Gather up any shattered crumbs of fat from the cutting board—these are the "puyul," the highly concentrated nuggets of flavor that locals fight over.

**2. Assemble the platter at the last possible moment.**

Never mix the pork into the wet salad before sitting at the table, or the skin will instantly turn soggy. Pile the chopped chicharra high on a serving platter and surround it with the fresh cabbage salad.

**3. Build your tacos like a local.**

Take a warm corn tortilla, add a spoonful of the crispy, fatty pork, top it with a generous mound of the crunchy cabbage salad, and finish with a spoonful of the fiery Xnipec, making sure to get some of the pink citrus juice on the meat.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Navigating the carnicería for the perfect mix.**

True Yucatecan chicharra is 'surtida' (assorted). Asking your local Mexican butcher for half 'chicharrón con carne' (the prized, meaty castacán) and half standard 'chicharrón de pella' perfectly replicates this essential textural contrast without the need to deep-fry whole pork bellies at home.



# Panuchos y Salbutes

*pah-NOO-chos ee sahl-BOO-tes*

To the uninitiated, a panucho and a salbute look like identical twins—fried discs piled high with shredded chicken, crisp lettuce, and the electric pink of pickled red onions. But the magic lies in the masa. The panucho is a masterclass in texture, a pure corn tortilla coaxed into puffing on a screaming hot comal, sliced open, and stuffed with velvety black beans before frying to a rigid crunch. The salbute is the softer, richer sister, its raw dough spiked with a secret dash of wheat flour and baking powder, dropped directly into hot oil to puff into a pillowy, greasy canvas. This is the food that defines an afternoon in Mérida, adapted here so you can capture that exact olfactory memory on a Tuesday night in America.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 cup</b>	masa harina	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried epazote
<b>3 tbsp</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>2 tbsp</b>	lard
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	baking powder	<b>2 cup</b>	rotisserie chicken meat <i>shredded</i>
<b>2 tsp</b>	salt	<b>1 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil
<b>3 cup</b>	warm water	<b>1/4 cup</b>	chicken broth
<b>1 med</b>	red onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	achiote paste
<b>1/2 cup</b>	sweet orange juice	<b>2 cup</b>	vegetable oil
<b>1/3 cup</b>	lime juice	<b>1 cup</b>	iceberg lettuce <i>very thinly shredded</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	white vinegar	<b>1 med</b>	tomato <i>sliced into thin half-moons</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>1 med</b>	cucumber <i>sliced into thin half-moons</i>
<b>1 med</b>	habanero pepper <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	avocado <i>sliced</i>
<b>15 oz</b>	canned black beans <i>undrained</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Replicate the acidity of the elusive naranja agria.**

Blanch the sliced red onion in boiling water for sixty seconds to remove its harsh bite, then drain and toss with the orange juice, lime juice, white vinegar, oregano, a half teaspoon of salt, and the habanero, resting for at least thirty minutes.

- **Hack the labor-intensive frijol colado.**

Blend the entire undrained can of black beans with the epazote and a pinch of salt until completely liquefied, then fry aggressively in the lard over medium heat for ten minutes until it reduces to a thick, spreadable paste.

- **Prepare a quick weeknight achiote chicken.**

Toss the shredded rotisserie chicken in a skillet with a tablespoon of oil, the chicken broth, and the achiote paste until the meat is warmed through and stained a vibrant, earthy red.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Knead the pure corn masa for the panuchos.**

Combine two cups of the masa harina with a half teaspoon of the salt and one and a half cups of warm water, working it with your hands until it mimics the texture of soft play-dough.

- 2. Press the panucho dough into thin discs.**

Form the dough into one-ounce spheres and flatten them to an eighth-inch thickness using a tortilla press lined with a cut-up plastic bag.

- 3. Coax the tortillas to puff on a hot comal.**

Lay the raw tortilla on a screaming hot, ungreased cast-iron skillet for forty-five seconds, flip for sixty seconds until golden spots form, then flip once more and tap the center to force the trapped steam to balloon the dough.

- 4. Slit and stuff the puffed tortillas.**

Once cool enough to handle, carefully slice open the edge of the pocket with a paring knife, smear exactly one teaspoon of the prepared black bean paste inside, and press gently to seal.

- 5. Mix the enriched salbute dough.**

In a separate bowl, blend the remaining two cups of masa harina with the all-purpose flour, baking powder, a half teaspoon of salt, and one and a half cups of warm water until perfectly smooth.

- 6. Fry the salbutes straight from the raw dough.**

Press the enriched dough into slightly thicker discs and drop them directly into a deep skillet of 350°F vegetable oil, watching them instantly sizzle and inflate into soft, pillowy canvases. Fry for about a minute per side, then drain.

**1. Fry the stuffed panuchos to a rigid crunch.**

In that same hot oil, fry the bean-stuffed panuchos for a minute or two per side until they turn golden and unyieldingly crispy.

**2. Build the antojitos from the base up.**

Lay the warm panuchos and salbutes flat on a plate, lay down a protective bed of thinly shredded lettuce to catch the grease, and pile high with the warm achiote chicken.

**3. Crown with acidity and fresh crunch.**

Finish each disc with thin half-moons of tomato and cucumber, a generous drape of the pickled red onions, and a rich slice of fresh avocado.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the physics of the puff.**

If your tortillas refuse to balloon on the comal, the pan isn't hot enough or your dough is too dry. Knead in a splash of water and ensure the iron is smoking before trying again.

- **Protect the delicate masa.**

Never force a tear when stuffing the panuchos. Let them cool slightly before slicing, and ensure your black bean puree is blended perfectly smooth so stray bean skins don't rupture the dough from the inside out.

- **Embrace the failed puff.**

If a panucho simply won't separate to form a pocket, don't throw it away. Drop the unstuffed, cooked tortilla into the hot oil for a perfectly satisfying, if slightly less canonical, tostada.



# Kibis Yucatecos con Queso de Bola

Remember the glass boxes carried by vendors on the beaches of Progreso, or the smells wafting through the Kukulcán baseball stadium? That is the magic of the Kibi. Born from Syrian-Lebanese immigrants who arrived in the Yucatán in the late 1800s, this Middle Eastern croquette was embraced and fundamentally transformed by the local landscape. The ultimate Yucatecan twist is stuffing them with Queso de Bola—Dutch Edam cheese left over from historic henequen trade routes. Making them at home is surprisingly simple, provided you respect the grandmother's secret: wringing the wheat bone-dry before mixing.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 cup</b>	fine bulgur wheat <i>rinsed until clear</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	ground beef <i>80/20 blend</i>	<b>2 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt <i>divided</i>
<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1/4 lb</b>	Edam cheese <i>cut into 1/2-inch thick, 1.5-inch long sticks</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	green bell pepper <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 pt</b>	neutral oil <i>for frying</i>
<b>2 large cloves</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 large</b>	red onion <i>halved and very thinly sliced</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh spearmint leaves <i>tightly packed</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh orange juice
<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	Mexican oregano <i>divided</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	white vinegar
		<b>1/2 med</b>	habanero pepper <i>finely minced</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Make the quick pickle.**

Place the thinly sliced red onion in a heatproof bowl and pour boiling water over them for 10 seconds to soften the bite, then drain immediately. Toss the warm onions with the orange juice, lime juice, vinegar, minced habanero, 1/2 teaspoon of oregano, and 1 teaspoon of salt. Massage the onions briefly with your hands so they absorb the liquid and turn a brilliant pink, then set aside to marinate.

- **Hydrate the wheat.**

Place the fine bulgur in a bowl and cover with warm water by about an inch. Let it soak for 20 to 30 minutes until the grains are tender.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Wring the wheat bone-dry.**

This is the cardinal rule. Drain the hydrated wheat. Working in handfuls, place the wet wheat inside a clean, thin kitchen towel or a double layer of cheesecloth. Twist and squeeze over the sink with all your strength to wring out every possible drop of water. If you skip this, the trapped steam will cause your Kibis to explode in the frying pan.

### 2. **Blend the aromatic paste.**

In a food processor, combine the chopped white onion, green bell pepper, garlic, and spearmint leaves. Pulse until it forms a finely minced, wet paste. This ensures the aromatics are evenly distributed without large chunks breaking the structure of the Kibi.

### 3. **Knead the meat and wheat.**

Transfer the dry wheat to a large mixing bowl. Add the ground beef, the aromatic paste, cumin, 1 teaspoon of oregano, black pepper, and 1 1/2 teaspoons of salt. Mix everything together aggressively using your hands. Knead it like bread dough for 3 to 4 minutes until the mixture becomes sticky, cohesive, and holds together easily.

### 4. **Stuff and shape the Kibis.**

Take a golf ball-sized handful of the meat mixture and roll it into a smooth sphere. Press your thumb deep into the center to create a hollow cavity and insert a stick of the Edam cheese. Pinch the opening completely shut, smoothing over any seams so the cheese cannot escape. Gently roll it between your palms, tapering the ends to form a traditional football shape about 3 inches long. Repeat with the remaining mixture.

**1. Fry to a hard, crispy crust.**

Fill a heavy-bottomed skillet with about 1 inch of neutral oil. Heat over medium heat until the oil reaches 350°F, or until a pinch of the meat mixture sizzles steadily upon contact. Carefully lower the Kibis into the oil in batches. Fry for 3 to 4 minutes per side. Keep the heat at a steady medium; if it is too high, the outside will burn while the beef inside remains raw.

**2. Drain and serve like a local.**

Transfer the fried Kibis to a paper towel-lined plate. Serve them hot by slicing them open down the middle to reveal the melted cheese, stuffing the inside with a generous pinch of the pickled red onions.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Spearmint, never peppermint.**

Ensure you are buying spearmint for this recipe. Peppermint has a high menthol content and will make the dish taste like toothpaste.

● **The sour orange substitution.**

Authentic Yucatecan pickled onions rely on native naranja agria (Seville sour orange). Mixing standard orange juice, lime juice, and a splash of white vinegar perfectly mimics its bitter-tart profile for the American kitchen.



# Polcanes de Toksel Rápido

*pohl-KAHN-es deh tohk-SELL*

If you walk the streets of Mérida on a humid afternoon, you will smell them before you see them. Named for the Maya words for snake head, these elongated masa fritters are canonically stuffed with toksel—a profoundly earthy mix of native white beans, scallions, epazote, and ground pumpkin seeds. In the old villages, grandmothers plunge a red-hot mineral stone straight into the pot to scorch the seeds and release their oils. In an American suburb on a Tuesday night, we fake that ancient magic by blasting the filling in a screaming-hot cast-iron skillet. It's crispy, unapologetically smoky, cheap to make, and tastes like a direct line to the Yucatán.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 cup</b>	whole pumpkin seeds, in-shell	<b>1 tsp</b>	fine sea salt <i>divided</i>
<b>15 oz</b>	Great Northern or Navy beans <i>rinsed and very well drained</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>4 med</b>	scallions <i>roots removed, finely chopped</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>1 med</b>	habanero pepper <i>stem and seeds removed, minced into a paste</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	warm water
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh epazote leaves <i>minced</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	vegetable oil or melted pork lard <i>for frying</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>finely chopped</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	pickled red onions <i>for serving</i>
		<b>1 cup</b>	green cabbage <i>finely shredded, for serving</i>
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	simple cooked tomato salsa <i>for serving</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the whole pumpkin seeds in a dry cast-iron skillet until fragrant, then grind to a coarse powder.**

You want the white, in-shell seeds for the authentic texture. Toast them over medium-high heat for about 4 to 5 minutes until they pop and smell deeply nutty, then pulse in a food processor or spice grinder until they look like coarse sand.

- 2. Mash the drained white beans lightly and combine with the ground seeds, scallions, habanero, epazote, and a half teaspoon of salt.**

Do not turn it into a smooth paste; leave about half the beans whole for texture. This mixture will become our toksel filling.

- 1. Sear the bean mixture in a screaming-hot cast-iron skillet with a tablespoon of oil to replicate the traditional hot-rock scorch.**

Press the mixture flat with a spatula and let it sit undisturbed for 2 to 3 minutes until the bottom lightly scorches and toasts. Give it a good stir, let it sizzle for one more minute, then immediately remove from the heat and fold in the cilantro. Set aside to cool.

- 2. Whisk the masa harina with the remaining half teaspoon of salt and slowly knead in the warm water until it feels like soft playdough.**

If the dough cracks easily when pressed, add water a tablespoon at a time. If it sticks to your fingers, dust in a little more masa.

- 3. Form the dough into ten little cups, stuff with the cooled toksel, and seal into elongated ovals.**

Divide the masa into golf ball-sized portions. Press your thumb into each to make a well, spoon in a generous tablespoon of filling, and pinch closed. Gently roll and flatten each one between your palms until it mimics the thick, slightly flattened shape of a snake's head.

- 4. Shallow-fry the polcanes in a half-inch of hot oil until they develop a hard, golden-brown crust.**

Work in batches so you don't crowd the pan, frying for about 3 to 4 minutes per side over medium-high heat. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain.

- 5. Split the hot fritters open lengthwise and stuff with cabbage, salsa, and pickled red onions.**

Polcanes demand to be eaten immediately, straight from the oil, while the crust is still shattering and hot.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- The secret to the taste is the unhulled pumpkin seeds.**

Do not buy the bright green, hulled pepitas if you can help it. Go to the Latin aisle and buy the white, in-shell pumpkin seeds. Grinding them with the shell on gives the toksel its authentic, rustic texture and deep flavor.



# Empanadas de Chaya y Queso de Bola

*em-pah-nah-das de cha-yah ee keh-so de boh-lah*

The smell of these empanadas frying in bubbling oil is the undisputed olfactory signature of a Mérida afternoon. But for those trying to recreate that magic on a Tuesday night in an Ohio suburb, pure corn masa has a nasty habit of cracking in the hands. The secret, passed down from Yucatecan abuelas to local market vendors, is a spoonful of standard wheat flour mixed into the dough—a pragmatic trick that ensures a pliable, shatteringly crisp crust. With true Mayan tree spinach nearly impossible to find stateside, Swiss chard steps in as a dead ringer, bringing the necessary earthy minerality to balance the

salty melt of the Edam cheese. It's an unpretentious, perfect snack, meant to be dragged through a pool of smoky, mild roasted habanero salsa.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 large</b>	plum tomatoes	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	warm water
<b>1 large clove</b>	garlic <i>unpeeled</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	Swiss chard leaves <i>stems removed and finely chopped</i>
<b>1</b>	fresh habanero pepper <i>left whole and unbroken</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	Edam cheese <i>grated</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>2 cup</b>	neutral oil <i>for shallow frying</i>
<b>to taste</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/2 cup</b>	pickled red onions
<b>2 cup</b>	masa harina	<b>1/2 cup</b>	green cabbage <i>finely shredded</i>
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	all-purpose flour		

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Wilt and wring out the Swiss chard.

Place the finely chopped chard in a colander, pour boiling water over it to wilt, and squeeze it utterly dry in a clean kitchen towel. Removing this water is crucial to keep the masa from turning into a sticky mess on the counter.

### 2. Char the aromatics for the Chiltomate sauce.

Heat a dry cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Place the tomatoes, onion, unpeeled garlic, and the whole habanero directly on the hot metal. Let them char, turning occasionally, until blackened in spots, about 10 minutes.

**1. Blend and simmer the sauce with the whole habanero.**

Peel the garlic and blend with the tomatoes and onion until mostly smooth but still a bit rustic. Heat a teaspoon of oil in a saucepan, pour in the blended sauce, and drop in the whole, unbroken roasted habanero. Simmer for 10 minutes; the chili will perfume the sauce beautifully without adding agonizing heat.

**2. Mix the masa with the grandmother's secret ingredient.**

In a large bowl, whisk the masa harina, all-purpose flour, and 1 teaspoon of kosher salt. Add the squeezed-dry chard, then gradually pour in the warm water while kneading with your hands. Aim for the texture of soft Play-Doh; keep it covered with a damp towel to prevent drying.

**3. Press and fill the empanadas.**

Cut a zip-top bag at the seams to create two plastic sheets to prevent sticking. Press a golf-ball-sized portion of masa in a tortilla press to an eighth of an inch thick. Place two tablespoons of grated Edam in the center, fold into a half-moon using the plastic to guide you, and press the edges firmly to seal out any air pockets.

**4. Shallow fry until shatteringly crisp.**

Heat half an inch of oil in a heavy skillet to 350°F. Carefully slide the empanadas into the bubbling oil and fry for 2 to 3 minutes per side until deeply golden. Drain on paper towels and serve immediately, resting in a pool of Chiltomate and garnished with shredded cabbage and pickled red onions.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **A note on the cheese.**

If you can't find Dutch Edam (Queso de Bola) with its signature red wax at your local deli counter, a mild Gouda or Muenster will perfectly mimic the salty melt required for this dish.

- **Respect the habanero.**

Do not puncture or blend the habanero for the Chiltomate. Keeping it whole and simmering it gently allows its floral, fruity aroma to permeate the sauce without releasing the capsaicin that would blow your palate out.



# Sopes Yucatecos con "Sobras" de Pibil

*so-pehs yoo-cah-teh-kohs kohn soh-brahs deh pee-beel*

The best meals in any Mexican household rarely happen during Sunday's grand feast. They happen on a Tuesday night, born from the spectacular leftovers, or sobras. While the Yucatán is famed for the delicate, bean-stuffed panucho, the humble sope offers a sturdier, far more forgiving vessel for a weeknight. This recipe bridges the gap between an Ohio suburb and a Mérida market: aerating commercial masa with a pinch of baking powder for an essential crisp bite, and shocking red onions in boiling water to tame their harshness before a quick citrus pickle. It is smart, uncompromising cooking that tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>15 oz</b>	canned black beans <i>undrained, liquid reserved</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	sweet orange juice
<b>1 tbsp</b>	pork lard	<b>1/2 cup</b>	lime juice
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	white vinegar
<b>1 small</b>	fresh epazote <i>sprig left whole</i>	<b>1 med</b>	habanero pepper <i>sliced, seeds removed for mildness</i>
<b>2 cup</b>	masa harina	<b>1 tsp</b>	Mexican oregano
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	salt	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	whole black peppercorns
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	baking powder	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	salt
<b>1 3/4 cup</b>	warm water	<b>2 cup</b>	leftover cochinita pibil <i>warmed in its own juices</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	pork lard <i>for shallow frying</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	iceberg lettuce <i>shredded</i>
<b>1 large</b>	red onion <i>sliced into thin half-moons</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	Mexican crema
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	queso fresco <i>crumbled</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Shock the red onions in boiling water.**

Place the sliced red onions in a heat-proof colander, pour rapid-boiling water over them, and let sit for exactly one to two minutes before draining immediately to remove their harsh sulfurous bite.

- **Steep the onions in their citrus cure.**

Transfer the softened onions to a glass jar, add the habanero, oregano, peppercorns, and salt, then pour the orange juice, lime juice, and vinegar over the top and shake well to begin the pickling.

- **Purée the black beans.**

In a blender, combine the canned black beans with their liquid and the sprig of epazote, blending until completely smooth.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Fry the bean purée into a rich paste.**

Heat one tablespoon of lard in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat, fry the diced white onion until deeply browned, then carefully pour in the bean purée and stir constantly until it thickens and pulls cleanly from the pan.

**2. Hydrate the masa for the sopes.**

In a large bowl, whisk the masa harina, salt, and baking powder, then gradually stream in the warm water, kneading until you form a soft dough that leaves your hands clean.

**3. Press and toast the masa disks.**

Divide the dough into golf-ball-sized portions, flatten each into a quarter-inch thick disk, and cook on a dry, medium-high skillet for one to two minutes per side until dry and lightly speckled.

**4. Pinch the edges to form the protective walls.**

Remove the hot disks from the skillet and immediately pinch the edges upward with your fingers to create a small rim around the border of each sope.

**5. Shallow-fry the sopes for an impenetrable crust.**

Heat a shallow layer of lard in the skillet and fry the formed sopes for thirty to sixty seconds per side until golden and exceptionally crispy, then drain on paper towels.

**6. Assemble the sopes with contrasting textures.**

Spread a thick layer of the hot bean paste across the base of each sope, top with shredded lettuce, pile high with warm cochinita pibil, drizzle with crema and queso fresco, and crown with the bright pink pickled onions.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The citrus substitution perfectly mimics the native naranja agria.**

Mixing sweet orange, lime, and a splash of vinegar perfectly replicates the pH and bitterness of the Seville oranges found in Yucatecan markets.

- **Baking powder is the modern home cook's secret to mimicking fresh nixtamal.**

A half teaspoon of baking powder aerates commercial masa harina, ensuring the thick sope base stays light and crispy rather than dense and gummy.



# Marquesitas de Sartén

*mar-keh-SEE-tas deh sar-TEN*

Walking through a lively plaza in the Yucatán at twilight is defined by an intoxicating, perfume-heavy cloud of toasted vanilla, caramelized sugar, and melting cheese. The marquesita is a brilliantly eccentric street food—a sweet, shatteringly crisp wafer rolled around salty Dutch Edam cheese and rich caramel. While vendors rely on massive cast-iron presses for that paper-thin crunch, home cooks figured out the hack years ago. By adding extra egg whites for structural rigidity and spreading the batter wafer-thin in a standard non-stick skillet, you get all the incredible snap and nostalgia of a Mérida night out, no special equipment required.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 cup</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1/2 cup</b>	neutral oil
<b>2/3 cup</b>	white granulated sugar	<b>1 tsp</b>	Mexican vanilla extract
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>8 oz</b>	Edam cheese <i>finely grated</i>
<b>2 large</b>	whole eggs	<b>1/2 cup</b>	cajeta
<b>2 large</b>	egg whites	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Nutella
<b>2/3 cup</b>	whole milk		

## PREPARATION

- **Blend the batter.**

In a blender, combine the flour, sugar, salt, whole eggs, egg whites, milk, oil, and vanilla. Blend on medium speed until completely smooth and lump-free, about 30 seconds.

- **Rest the batter for at least 30 minutes.**

This allows the flour to hydrate and the gluten to relax, preventing the wafer from shrinking when it hits the hot pan. You can also refrigerate it for up to 12 hours.

- **Prep your filling station.**

Cooking marquesitas is a fast-paced game. Set up your grated Edam cheese, cajeta, and Nutella right next to the stove before you turn on the heat.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat and lightly grease the skillet.**

Heat a 10-inch flat-bottomed non-stick skillet or crepe pan over medium heat. Lightly grease it with a tiny drop of oil, wiping away the excess with a paper towel.

**1. Pour and spread the batter wafer-thin.**

Pour about 1/4 cup of the batter into the center of the pan. Working immediately, use a wet silicone spatula or the back of a spoon to push and swirl the batter out to the edges until it is as thin as paper and almost translucent in spots.

**2. Toast until deeply golden and lacy.**

Let the batter cook undisturbed for 2 to 3 minutes. You are waiting for the moisture to evaporate and the sugar to caramelize. Once the bottom is dark golden brown and the edges look dry, loosen the edges and gently flip it over. Cook the second side for 30 to 45 seconds.

**3. Fill and roll immediately.**

While the marquesita is still hot in the pan or immediately after sliding it onto a board, quickly sprinkle a generous handful of grated Edam cheese over one half and drizzle with cajeta or Nutella. As soon as the cheese begins to sweat, roll it up tightly from the filled side like a cigar.

**4. Hold the shape to set the crunch.**

You only have about 10 to 15 seconds to roll it before it cools down and shatters. Once rolled, hold it gently seam-side down against the plate for a few moments so it locks into its rigid cone shape as it cools.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Heat management is everything.**

If your skillet is too hot, the batter will set into a thick pancake before you can spread it thin. Adjust to medium-low if your first batch seizes up too fast.

● **Embrace the dark, lacy edges.**

Unlike French crepes, a marquesita should look well-toasted, almost pushing the boundary of burnt sugar. This dark golden color is what ensures the shatter-crisp crunch.

● **Serve them immediately.**

Marquesitas wait for no one. Eat them while they are warm, crispy, and the sharp cheese is beautifully melted against the sweet caramel.





# Sunday Morning Rituals: Cochinita Pibil & The Suburban Pib

*Unlocking the secrets of the ancient Maya earth oven for modern kitchens.*

Sunday mornings in the Yucatán belong to the pig. Long before the church bells ring, the air is thick with the intoxicating, heavy perfume of sour orange, charred achiote, and slow-rendered fat. For centuries, this meant burying pork

in the earth, surrendering it to the slow, smoky magic of the pib. It is a ritual built on patience and the implicit understanding that the best things in life cannot be rushed.

But you don't need a backyard pit to conjure that same bruised, beautiful magic. You just need a heavy Dutch oven, a healthy respect for the alchemy of banana leaves, and the sense to let the ingredients do the talking. What follows isn't some sanitized suburban compromise; it's the genuine article. From the master cochinita to the glorious, dripping morning-after tortas and the labor-of-love tamales colados. Wrap it up, walk away, and let it simmer.





# Cochinita Pibil

*co-chee-nee-tah pee-beel*

The scent of toasted banana leaves and roasting pork is a time machine. Real Cochinita Pibil doesn't compromise for the clock; it is an overnight ritual demanding patience. Traditionally buried in an underground pit of hot stones, this canonical version relies on the Suburban Pib—your trusty heavy-bottomed Dutch oven. The secret to that unmistakable, haunting flavor isn't just the achiote, but replicating the sharp, bitter tang of the native *naranja agria* using a precise blend of supermarket citrus.

## INGREDIENTS

**1 cup**

sweet orange juice  
*freshly squeezed*

**1/2 cup**

lime juice  
*freshly squeezed*

<b>1/2 cup</b>	grapefruit juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>	<b>4 lb</b>	pork shoulder <i>cut into large 2-inch chunks</i>
<b>3 1/2 oz</b>	achiote paste	<b>1 large</b>	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed</i>
<b>6 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>charred in a dry skillet until blackened in spots</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	pork lard or neutral oil
<b>1 tbsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>1 large</b>	red onion <i>very thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	ground cumin	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>3/4 tsp</b>	ground allspice <i>divided (1/2 tsp for pork, 1/4 tsp for onions)</i>	<b>1 med</b>	habanero pepper <i>very thinly sliced, seeds removed for less heat</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt		

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Mix the citrus triad to replicate the unmistakable bite of the native sour orange.**  
Combine the sweet orange, lime, and grapefruit juices, setting aside 1/2 cup of this blend for the pickled onions.
- 2. Blend the recado rojo marinade.**  
In a blender, combine the remaining citrus juice, the achiote paste block, charred garlic, Mexican oregano, cumin, 1/2 teaspoon of allspice, and kosher salt, blending until it becomes a completely smooth, bright red liquid.
- 3. Bathe the pork and let the acid do its work.**  
Place the pork chunks in a large bowl, pour the vibrant red marinade over the meat, and massage it into every crevice. Cover tightly and refrigerate for at least 8 hours, ideally 24—patience is an essential ingredient here.
- 4. Macerate the red onions.**  
Combine the thinly sliced red onion with the reserved 1/2 cup of citrus juice, black pepper, the remaining 1/4 teaspoon of allspice, and the sliced habanero. Cover and refrigerate overnight so they become bright pink, crunchy, and tangy by morning.

**1. Fire-roast the banana leaves to make them pliable.**

Preheat the oven to 300°F. Pass the brittle banana leaves over a medium-low stove burner for a few seconds until they turn a glossy, vibrant dark green and become soft and pliable without tearing.

**2. Build the Suburban Pib.**

Line the bottom and sides of a large heavy-bottomed Dutch oven with the softened leaves in an overlapping pattern, leaving enough overhang to wrap the meat like a present.

**3. Seal the pork for its slow roast.**

Transfer the marinated pork and all its juices into the leaf-lined pot, dabbing the lard over the top if using, and fold the overhanging leaves over to seal it completely. Cover the top with a sheet of heavy-duty aluminum foil for an extra seal, press the heavy lid on top, and bake undisturbed for three and a half to four hours.

**4. Shred the meat directly into its own rendered fat.**

Remove from the oven, carefully peel back the banana leaves to avoid the fragrant steam, and use two forks to vigorously shred the pork directly in the pot. Serve immediately on warm corn tortillas, generously topped with the pickled onions.



## Tortas de Cochinita con Cebollas Encurtidas

If you grew up with roots in the Yucatán, the smell of toasted banana leaves and sweet, earthy achiote meant it was Sunday. Traditionally, cochinita pibil is buried in a backyard earth oven and left to roast overnight, but for those raised in the American suburbs, digging a pit isn't exactly practical. Instead, a heavy Dutch oven lined with banana leaves perfectly replicates that humid, fragrant microclimate. You roast the meat low and slow on the weekend, and the real magic happens on a Tuesday night when you pull the leftovers to assemble the ultimate torta: butter-toasted bread, silky strained black beans, rich pork, and the sharp, bright crunch of neon pink pickled onions.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 1/2 lb</b>	pork shoulder <i>cut into 3-inch chunks</i>	<b>1 large package</b>	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed and wiped clean</i>
<b>3 1/2 oz</b>	achiote paste	<b>1 large</b>	red onion <i>halved and thinly sliced</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>2 med</b>	fresh habanero peppers <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh sweet orange juice	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>2 tbsp</b>	white vinegar	<b>1/2 cup</b>	white vinegar
<b>6 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
<b>1 tbsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 tsp</b>	cumin seeds <i>lightly toasted</i>	<b>15 oz</b>	canned black beans <i>undrained</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	whole allspice berries	<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black peppercorns	<b>1 small</b>	fresh epazote
<b>3 med</b>	whole cloves	<b>2 tbsp</b>	pork lard
<b>1 small</b>	Mexican cinnamon stick	<b>8 large</b>	bolillo or telera rolls <i>halved lengthwise</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>4 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>softened</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	pork lard <i>melted</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Blend the achiote paste, citrus juices, vinegar, garlic, spices, and salt until completely smooth.**

Massage this vivid red marinade into the pork chunks, cover tightly, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, or ideally overnight.

- **Toss the sliced red onion, habaneros, oregano, and salt with the lime juice and vinegar.**

Chill in the refrigerator for at least two hours; the acid will cook the onions, mellowing their bite and turning them a brilliant neon pink.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Pass the thawed banana leaves briefly over a medium stovetop flame until they turn glossy and pliable.**

This essential step awakens the oils and prevents the leaves from shattering when folded.

- 2. Line a heavy Dutch oven with the toasted leaves, add the marinated pork, and drizzle with melted lard.**

Fold the overhanging leaves over the meat to seal it, add a splash of water to the bottom of the pot outside the leaves for steam, cover tightly, and roast at 325°F for 4 hours.

- 3. Shred the tender pork directly in the pot using two forks.**

Allow the meat to soak up all the rendered fat and vivid red roasting juices.

- 4. Blend the undrained black beans and chopped white onion until completely smooth.**

- 5. Force the bean puree through a fine-mesh strainer into a bowl using the back of a spoon.**

Discard the fibrous skins left behind to achieve the luxurious, velvety texture required for authentic frijoles colados.

- 6. Fry the strained bean puree in hot lard with a sprig of epazote until it thickens into a rich, spreadable paste.**

- 7. Toast the buttered bolillo halves face-down in a hot skillet until deeply golden and structurally sound.**

- 8. Assemble the tortas by spreading the warm bean paste on the toasted bread, piling on the shredded pork, and topping with the pickled onions.**

Serve immediately.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **A precise citrus blend perfectly mimics traditional naranja agria.**

True Yucatecan cochinita relies on highly acidic sour oranges to tenderize the pork and cut the rich rendered fat; the lime, sweet orange, and vinegar mix recreates this necessary pH.

- **Wear gloves when handling fresh habaneros.**

To maintain the fruity, floral flavor of the pepper without overwhelming heat, remove the seeds and membranes before slicing, or leave them whole to gently infuse the brine.



# El Gran Pib de Molde

*mook-beel-poy-oh*

The Pib is the undisputed heavyweight champion of Yucatecan soul food. Traditionally buried in a smoldering pit for the Day of the Dead, it is a majestic monolith of achiote-stained masa, rich pork, and a gravy so good it ought to be illegal. Out in the American suburbs, where digging a geothermal oven in the backyard might attract the wrong kind of attention, this sheet-pan adaptation delivers the exact same devastatingly authentic flavor. It relies on a tight foil seal and a scorching oven finish to mimic the earth's embrace, summoning the real tastes of the homeland without compromise.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	bone-in pork shoulder <i>cut into 2-inch chunks</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black peppercorns
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	bone-in chicken breast	<b>1 tbsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano
<b>1/2 cup</b>	sour orange juice <i>or equal parts fresh grapefruit, sweet orange, and lime juice</i>	<b>3 lb</b>	fresh corn masa for tamales <i>unprepared</i>
<b>1 large</b>	white onion <i>half charred, half sliced into strips</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	pork lard
<b>1 med</b>	head of garlic <i>roasted whole</i>	<b>2 oz</b>	whole achiote seeds
<b>2 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>1 chopped, 1 sliced</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	frozen black-eyed peas <i>thawed</i>
<b>1 1/2 oz</b>	achiote paste	<b>1 lb</b>	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed, washed, and wiped clean</i>
<b>5 sprig</b>	fresh epazote	<b>2 med</b>	habanero peppers <i>roasted whole</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	whole allspice berries	<b>2 large</b>	large eggs <i>hard-boiled and sliced</i>
		<b>2 tbsp</b>	kosher salt

## PREPARATION

- **Toast the banana leaves.**

Frozen banana leaves are brittle and will tear if used raw. Thaw them, wash them, and pass them swiftly over a hot skillet or open gas flame until they change to a glossy, vibrant green; this releases their essential oils and makes them perfectly pliable.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Purify the chicken.**

Rub the raw chicken pieces generously with the sour orange juice to kill any off-odors, a non-negotiable grandmother's trick.

**1. Build the aromatic broth.**

In a dry skillet, lightly char the half onion, roasted garlic, allspice, and peppercorns. Blend these aromatics with the achiote paste, oregano, and a splash of water, then add to a large stockpot with the pork, chopped tomato, and enough water to cover. Simmer for 45 minutes, add the chicken and epazote, and cook until both meats are fall-apart tender. Shred the meat and strain the rich broth, reserving every drop of that liquid gold.

**2. Paint the lard.**

In a saucepan over medium-low heat, melt the pork lard and fry the whole achiote seeds for about 5 minutes until the fat transforms into a brilliant, violent red. Strain immediately into a heat-proof bowl to prevent the seeds from turning bitter and let it cool slightly.

**3. Conjure the K'ool.**

Dissolve a fist-sized ball of raw masa in a ladle of cooled broth until perfectly smooth and strain it. Bring the reserved meat broth back to a simmer and slowly whisk in the masa slurry, stirring constantly until it thickens into a glossy, velvety gravy that coats the back of a spoon.

**4. Knead the masa.**

Crumble the remaining masa into a massive bowl, pour in the warm red lard, and season generously with salt. Knead vigorously until it resembles wet, pliable sand, then gently fold in the black-eyed peas, reserving about a third of the dough to form the lid.

**5. Architect the Pib.**

Line a 9x13 metal roasting pan with overlapping, toasted banana leaves, leaving generous overhang. Press the larger portion of masa evenly across the bottom and up the sides to create a sealed basin, fill it with the shredded meats, and flood it heavily with the K'ool. Scatter the raw sliced onions, tomato slices, remaining epazote, sliced egg, and whole roasted habaneros across the top.

## 1. **Seal and bake.**

Press the reserved masa into a flat rectangle on a spare piece of banana leaf, invert it over the filling, and pinch the edges tightly to seal the monolith. Fold the overhanging leaves over the top, cover the entire pan tightly with aluminum foil, and bake at 400°F for 90 minutes. Remove the foil and peel back the top leaves for the final 30 minutes to fry the crust into golden, crackling perfection.

### CHEF'S NOTES

- **The Maseca rule.**

If you cannot source fresh masa and must use dehydrated masa flour, hydrate it with warm broth instead of water. Ensure it is almost uncomfortably wet before kneading in the lard, as the corn will continue to absorb massive amounts of liquid during the long bake.

- **Mind the chill.**

Native lore warns that cooks with cold hands will cause the Pib to refuse to cook. Counteract this by sprinkling a tiny pinch of salt over the final wrapped bundle just before it goes into the oven.



# Huevos Motuleños de la Abuela

*WEH-vos mo-too-LEHN-yos*

Yucatán has always been a crossroads of the world, and this magnificent, messy masterpiece proves it. Invented in the 1920s to feed a hungry governor and his VIP entourage, the dish piles ancient staples—corn, beans, and the floral perfume of habanero—with European imports like smoked ham, green peas, and Dutch Edam cheese. The secret here is the chiltomate sauce: simmer the habanero entirely whole. You'll extract a beautiful, fruity aroma without unleashing the blisteringly aggressive heat hidden inside. It is a perfect, uncompromising plate of heritage.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 small</b>	fresh epazote sprig
<b>1/4 large</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>8 large</b>	eggs
<b>2 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	<b>1 large</b>	ripe plantain <i>peeled and sliced diagonally</i>
<b>1 med</b>	fresh habanero pepper <i>stem intact, absolutely no cracks or splits</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	thick-cut deli ham <i>diced into small cubes</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	vegetable oil	<b>1 cup</b>	frozen green peas <i>thawed</i>
<b>8 med</b>	corn tortillas <i>left out overnight to dry slightly</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Edam cheese <i>grated</i>
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	canned black beans <i>pureed until smooth</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt

## PREPARATION

- **Dehydrate the tortillas.**

Leave the corn tortillas out on the counter overnight to dry out slightly, which prevents them from absorbing too much oil during frying.

- **Puree the black beans.**

Blend the canned black beans, liquid included, until completely smooth before cooking.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the aromatics for the mother sauce.**

In a medium saucepan, boil the tomatoes, onion, and garlic in just enough water to cover them until the tomato skins begin to peel, about 10 minutes.

- 2. Blend the tomatoes into a textured puree.**

Transfer the boiled vegetables to a blender with a splash of the cooking water, blending until smooth but still retaining a little texture.

**1. Simmer the chiltomate with the unbroken habanero.**

Heat a tablespoon of oil in a saucepan, pour in the tomato puree, and gently drop in the whole habanero pepper and a pinch of salt.

**2. Steep the flavors without breaking the chili.**

Reduce the heat to low and simmer gently for 10 to 15 minutes to extract the floral aroma of the habanero, taking absolute care not to let the pepper burst or crack open, then remove from heat.

**3. Fry the garnishes.**

In a skillet, quickly brown the diced ham and set aside, then fry the plantain slices in a couple of tablespoons of oil until deeply caramelized and golden-brown.

**4. Infuse and heat the black beans.**

In a small saucepan, simmer your pureed black beans with the sprig of epazote for 5 minutes to infuse that distinct, earthy flavor, then keep warm.

**5. Fry the tortillas.**

Heat a quarter inch of oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat and fry the dried tortillas one at a time for about 20 to 30 seconds per side until crispy but not rock-hard, draining them on paper towels.

**6. Fry the eggs.**

In the same skillet, fry the eggs sunny-side-up so the yolks remain runny.

**7. Assemble the base.**

Place two fried tortillas side-by-side on each warm plate, smear generously with the hot black bean puree, and carefully slide a fried egg onto each.

**8. Garnish and serve.**

Blanket the egg whites with the hot chiltomate sauce, scatter the browned ham and green peas over the top, shower the entire plate with grated Edam cheese, and arrange the fried plantains around the edges.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the chili.**

The unbroken habanero is the grandmother's trick to unlocking the pepper's sweet, fruity perfume without ruining the dish with capsaicin fire. If your pepper has a crack or split, do not use it.

- **Source the Dutch cheese.**

Using grated Edam (Queso de Bola) instead of standard queso fresco is the ultimate Yucatecan insider move, a delicious relic of Caribbean maritime trade routes. Never substitute sharp cheddar.

- **Don't over-fry the base.**

You want the tortillas structured enough to hold up under the heavy sauce and beans, but not so rigid that you need a hammer to cut through them with a fork.



# Tamales Colados de Sartén

*tah-MAH-les coh-LAH-dos de sar-TEN*

To recreate the sensory landscape of a Sunday morning in Mérida inside a Midwestern suburb, you must respect the Maya technique. The secret to the most elegant tamal in the Mexican repertoire isn't just what is inside, but what you take out. By pressing watered-down masa through a cloth, you discard the heavy corn fiber and extract pure starch. Cooked on the stove in a pool of hot lard, it undergoes a miraculous molecular shift from a watery mess to a silky, pudding-like dough. Wrapped in fire-toasted banana leaves with a spoonful of rich achiote gravy, the result is an ethereal, gelatinous marvel that tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	chicken thighs <i>boneless and skinless</i>	<b>3 cup</b>	masa harina
<b>4 tbsp</b>	achiote paste <i>crumbled</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	chicken broth <i>chilled</i>
<b>3 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken broth	<b>1 cup</b>	pork lard
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>thickly sliced</i>	<b>3 large</b>	fresh epazote leaves
<b>4 small</b>	garlic cloves <i>smashed</i>	<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	salt
<b>2 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>quartered</i>	<b>16 oz</b>	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed</i>
<b>2 sprig</b>	fresh epazote	<b>1 med</b>	Roma tomato <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	salt	<b>1/4 med</b>	red onion <i>thinly sliced in julienne</i>
		<b>10 small</b>	fresh epazote leaves

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Extract the pure starch for the masa.

In a blender, process the masa harina and 4 cups of chilled chicken broth in batches until completely smooth and watery. Drape a double layer of cheesecloth over a large bowl and pour the mixture through it, forcefully twisting and squeezing the cloth to press the liquid out. Discard the dry fibrous clump left behind and reserve 1/2 cup of the strained starchy liquid for the gravy.

### 2. Simmer the achiote broth and chicken.

In a large pot, dissolve the crumbled achiote paste into the 3 cups of low-sodium chicken broth. Add the chicken thighs, sliced white onion, smashed garlic, quartered tomatoes, epazote sprigs, and 1 tablespoon of salt, simmering for 25 to 30 minutes until the chicken easily pulls apart.

**1. Prepare the meat and the k'ol gravy.**

Remove the cooked chicken, shred it with two forks, and set it aside. Strain the remaining red achiote broth, discarding the boiled vegetables, and return 2 cups of the liquid to a saucepan over medium heat. Whisk in the reserved 1/2 cup of strained masa liquid and simmer constantly until it thickens into a glossy, rich gravy called k'ol.

**2. Sizzle epazote in hot lard to build the base flavor.**

Place a deep cast iron skillet or heavy Dutch oven over medium heat and melt the pork lard. Carefully drop in 3 large epazote leaves, letting them sizzle in the hot fat for 30 seconds to infuse the oil with a distinctly Yucatecan aroma.

**3. Cook the masa colada on the stovetop until gelatinized.**

Pour the large bowl of strained masa liquid into the hot lard, add 1 1/2 teaspoons of salt, and stir constantly. Do not panic when the mixture initially looks broken; after 15 to 20 minutes of continuous scraping with a wooden spoon, it will miraculously shift into a thick, shiny, pudding-like paste that pulls slightly away from the sides of the pan.

**4. Fire-roast the banana leaves to make them pliable.**

Cut the thawed banana leaves into 12-inch squares, discarding the hard central veins. Using tongs, slowly pass each square directly over a medium open stove flame until the dull leaf releases its natural oils and turns glossy and bright green, which prevents it from shattering during folding.

**5. Assemble the tamales with the masa, meat, and gravy.**

Lay a glossy banana leaf square flat and spread a half-cup of the warm pudding-like masa into a small rectangle in the center. Top with shredded chicken, two tablespoons of the k'ol gravy, a slice of tomato, julienned red onion, and a single small fresh epazote leaf.

**6. Fold and tie the parcels securely.**

Bring the bottom edge of the banana leaf up over the filling, fold the top down to overlap, and tuck the sides underneath to form a tight, flat rectangular package. Tie the tamal gently with a thin strip of excess banana leaf or butcher's twine.

## 1. **Steam the tamales and let them rest.**

Line a steamer basket with leftover banana leaves, stack the tamales flat, cover tightly, and steam over medium heat for 60 minutes. Crucially, turn off the heat and let them rest in the steamer for at least 20 minutes before serving, allowing the delicate starch to fully set into its signature ethereal texture.

### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Pork lard is essential for true authenticity.**

While you can substitute vegetable shortening or oil infused with toasted garlic for dietary reasons, nothing replicates the rich, deep flavor of true manteca de cerdo.

- **The grandmother's coin trick.**

Place a clean coin at the bottom of your steamer pot. If the water boils away, the coin will stop rattling, alerting you before you burn the tamales.



# Huevos con Longaniza Yucateca Rápida

To understand the Yucatán is to understand the alchemy of the morning meal. True Longaniza de Valladolid is tough to score outside the peninsula, but a sharp home cook can hack that deep, smoky, achiote-stained magic using standard Latin market chorizo, a hit of citrus, and the good sense to fry it all in real pork lard. It is a rapid-fire weeknight scramble that hits with the emotional weight of a Sunday morning in Mérida.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>10 oz</b>	longaniza or standard Mexican pork chorizo <i>casings removed</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	pork lard
<b>1 tsp</b>	achiote paste	<b>1/4 large</b>	red onion <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1 med</b>	habanero pepper <i>pierced once with a knife but left whole</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	fresh orange juice	<b>8 large</b>	eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	fresh grapefruit juice	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	salt

## PREPARATION

- **Replicate the Valladolid flavor profile.**

If using standard Latin market chorizo instead of true Yucatecan longaniza, dissolve the achiote paste in the fresh lime, orange, and grapefruit juices. Massage this mixture directly into the raw meat with your hands before cooking.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the spiced fat.**

Heat a large skillet over medium heat and melt the pork lard. Add the doctored sausage meat, breaking it apart slightly with a wooden spoon to leave distinct chunks, and let it fry undisturbed for a couple of minutes so it develops a slight crust.

- 2. Perfume the oil.**

Once the longaniza releases its bright red oils and is mostly cooked through, push the meat to the edges of the pan. Drop the chopped red onion and the whole pierced habanero into the center pool of fat, sautéing until the onion is soft and the pepper releases its floral aroma without spilling its punishing heat into the dish.

**1. Execute the scramble.**

Reduce the heat to medium-low and pour the lightly beaten eggs directly over the meat and aromatics. Let them sit for a few seconds to set, then gently fold them from the edges to the center, taking care not to over-stir so you maintain distinct ribbons of fluffy egg contrasting with the achiote-stained meat.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Serve with the proper supporting cast.**

Plate immediately alongside a generous smear of frijoles colados (strained black beans) and a bright heap of pickled red onions to cut through the rich fat. Warm corn tortillas are mandatory.



# Tacos de Poc Chuc de Sartén

*pohk-CHOOK*

A Yucatecan Sunday is announced by the sharp, floral tang of sour orange mingling with pork fat dripping onto hot coals. For those of us living far from the peninsula, relying on a standard American stove instead of a zapote-wood fire pit, the magic of Poc Chuc might seem lost to memory. It isn't. The grandmother's secret isn't the smoke, but the violent alchemy of highly acidic citrus tenderizing paper-thin pork, flashed in a screaming-hot cast-iron skillet. No achiote, no unnecessary spices—just the purest expression of meat, acid, and heat, yielding a blistered, caramelized taco that tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	boneless pork loin chops	<b>4 med</b>	Roma tomatoes
<b>1 cup</b>	sour orange juice <i>divided</i>	<b>1 large</b>	red onion <i>peeled and cut into thick quarters with the root intact</i>
<b>4 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>smashed into a paste</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>chopped and divided</i>
<b>2 tsp</b>	kosher salt <i>divided</i>	<b>12 med</b>	corn tortillas
<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>	<b>15 oz</b>	canned black beans <i>rinsed and drained</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>1 med</b>	avocado <i>sliced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>4 med</b>	radishes <i>sliced</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Blend the black beans until completely smooth, then warm them gently in a small saucepan.**

This mimics the traditional, velvety texture of Yucatecan frijoles colados, which serves as the essential earthy base for the tacos.

- **Warm the corn tortillas on a dry skillet.**

A cold tortilla is a tragedy; heat them until they are pliable and fragrant before assembling the tacos.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Pound the pork chops between two sheets of plastic wrap until they are uniformly one-eighth of an inch thick.**

This extreme thinness is the absolute key to the dish, allowing the meat to sear rapidly in the skillet without drying out.

- 1. Whisk three-quarters of a cup of the sour orange juice with the garlic, one and a half teaspoons of the salt, the black pepper, and the oregano, then submerge the pork to marinate for exactly thirty minutes.**

Do not leave the meat in the marinade overnight; the highly acidic citrus will break down the delicate pork and turn it to mush.

- 2. Heat a large, dry cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat and blister the whole tomatoes and quartered red onions until they are deeply charred and softened.**

Peel away the thickest blackened skins from the tomatoes and mash the flesh with a quarter cup of the cilantro and a pinch of salt to make the chiltomate; chop the charred onions and toss them with the remaining sour orange juice, salt, and cilantro.

- 3. Wipe the skillet clean, add the neutral oil, and sear the drained pork over screaming high heat for one to two minutes per side.**

You want the pan barely beginning to smoke before the meat hits it; shake off the excess marinade so the pork fries rather than steams, giving you dark, caramelized edges.

- 4. Chop the charred pork into bite-sized strips and build the tacos on warm corn tortillas smeared with the silky black beans.**

Pile the pork high and top with the smoky chiltomate, the vibrant charred onions, sliced avocado, and radishes.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Replicate the precise pH and flavor of authentic Naranja Agria if you cannot find it bottled at a local Latin market.**

Mix one-half cup of fresh sweet orange juice, one-quarter cup of fresh lime juice, and one tablespoon of white vinegar (or two tablespoons of grapefruit juice) to mimic the sharp, bitter tang of the Seville orange.

- **Resist the urge to add achiote or heavy chili powders to the marinade.**

Many internet recipes conflate Poc Chuc with Cochinita Pibil; true Yucatecan grandmothers know this dish relies purely on garlic, citrus, and a hard sear.



# Frijoles Colados de Fin de Semana

*free-HOH-les coh-LAH-dos*

For a first-generation kid growing up in an Ohio suburb, Sunday mornings didn't always smell like pancakes—sometimes they smelled like roasting pork and the deep, earthy aroma of black beans simmering on the stove. If Cochinita Pibil is the undisputed king of the Yucatecan weekend table, these strained beans are the quiet matriarch holding the entire meal together. The secret the grandmothers brought over isn't just taking the time to push pureed beans through a fine sieve until they're as luxurious as a French purée; it's blistering a whole

habanero in hot pork lard to perfume the dish without unleashing its fiery heat. It is the perfect, comforting foundation for a suburban weekend feast, tasting exactly like the homeland.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	dried black beans <i>sorted to remove small stones</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>10 cup</b>	water	<b>4 tbsp</b>	pork lard
<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>left intact</i>	<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>thickly sliced</i>
<b>1 large sprig</b>	fresh epazote	<b>1 whole</b>	fresh habanero pepper

## PREPARATION

- **Soak the beans overnight.**

Place the sorted black beans in a large bowl, cover with a few inches of cold water, and soak overnight to draw out the gas-producing starches.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Simmer the beans with epazote and onion.**

Drain the soaked beans, discarding the water, and place them in a heavy pot with 10 cups of fresh water, the intact quarter of onion, and the epazote sprig. Bring to a boil, skim any foam, then lower to a gentle simmer for 1 1/2 to 2 hours until completely tender, stirring in the salt during the last 30 minutes.

- 2. Blend the beans into a fine puree.**

Discard the spent epazote sprig, then transfer the beans, their cooking liquid, and the boiled onion to a blender and process on high until entirely smooth, working in batches if necessary.

**1. Force the puree through a fine-mesh sieve.**

Place a wire strainer over a large bowl and vigorously press the blended mixture through with a rubber spatula. Discard the fibrous skins left behind in the strainer, leaving you with pure, black silk.

**2. Infuse the lard with habanero and onion.**

In a heavy skillet, heat the pork lard over medium until shimmering, then add the sliced onion and the whole, uncut habanero pepper, sautéing for 5 to 8 minutes until the onion edges brown and the habanero blisters. Keeping the habanero whole perfumes the fat without making the beans overly spicy.

**3. Fry and reduce the strained beans.**

Carefully pour the silky bean puree into the hot, infused lard, stirring continuously as it sizzles and splatters. Simmer on medium-low for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring frequently, until it thickens to the consistency of a rich, creamy pudding.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Source the right ingredients.**

Seek out butcher-rendered pork lard and fresh epazote at a local Latin market; they are the non-negotiable foundations of authentic Yucatecan flavor.

● **Plan for leftovers.**

These beans naturally thicken in the refrigerator overnight, evolving into the perfect dense filling for next-day panuchos or tostadas.





# Gulf Coast Sunsets: Bright & Fast Seafood

*Channeling the coastal towns of Progreso and Celestún with fast, bright, and deeply authentic seafood recipes adapted for the everyday kitchen.*

Forget the resort towns. The real Yucatán eats out of plastic chairs on the blistering Gulf coast—places like Progreso and Celestún, where the breeze smells intensely of salt, sour orange, and woodsmoke. Down there, seafood isn't a luxury meant to be fussed over with tweezers. It's daily sustenance, bathed in bright citrus and earthy achiote, cooked fast while the sun drops into the water.

This is how you eat when you live by the sea and have better things to do than stand over a stove. It's a philosophy that travels perfectly. You don't need a pristine, line-caught grouper straight off a local panga to make it work. A solid

cut of supermarket salmon, treated with the respect of a proper tikin xic paste, or a sharp, fast ceviche brings that exact coastal vitality straight to a Tuesday night.





# Sheet Pan Pescado Tikin Xic

*tee-ken sheek*

If you grew up anywhere near a Mexican household, you know the smell of a banana leaf hitting a hot flame. It is sweet, grassy, and instantly signals a celebration. Tikin Xic is the culinary emblem of the Mayan coast, originally made by slathering a massive grouper in earthy red achiote and burying it in beach coals. You might be staring down a Tuesday night in the suburbs, but you can capture that exact magic with a standard sheet pan and thick white fish fillets. The real diaspora secret here is the acid: swapping impossible-to-find fresh bitter orange for a precise blend of citrus and vinegar. Served right out of the steaming banana leaf with fiery Xnipec salsa, it is a direct line back to the shores of the Yucatán.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/4 cup</b>	orange juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>1/4 cup</b>	grapefruit juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper
<b>1/4 cup</b>	lime juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground allspice
<b>1/4 cup</b>	white distilled vinegar	<b>2 tbsp</b>	olive oil <i>divided</i>
<b>1 1/2 med</b>	red onion <i>1 thinly sliced into half-moons, 1/2 sliced into thin rings</i>	<b>24 oz</b>	white fish fillets <i>cut into four equal 6 oz portions, such as halibut, cod, or snapper</i>
<b>2 small</b>	habanero peppers <i>seeds removed and very finely minced</i>	<b>1 large package</b>	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed and cut into two sheet-pan sized pieces</i>
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano <i>divided</i>	<b>1 med</b>	Roma tomato <i>sliced</i>
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt <i>divided</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	green bell pepper <i>sliced into rings</i>
<b>2 oz</b>	achiote paste <i>about half a standard block</i>	<b>1 med</b>	yellow wax pepper <i>sliced into rings</i>
<b>3 med cloves</b>	garlic <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	Mexican lager beer

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Mix the bitter orange substitute.

In a small bowl or measuring cup, combine the orange juice, grapefruit juice, lime juice, and white distilled vinegar. This replicates the chemical and flavor profile of Yucatan's iconic Naranja Agria.

### 2. Cure the Salsa Xnipec.

In a glass bowl, combine the half-moon sliced red onion, minced habaneros, 1/2 teaspoon of the oregano, 1/2 teaspoon of the salt, and exactly 1/3 cup of your bitter orange substitute. Toss to submerge the onions and let them sit at room temperature for at least 30 minutes to cook out the raw bite.

**1. Blend the recado rojo marinade.**

In a blender, combine the achiote paste, garlic, the remaining 1 teaspoon of oregano, cumin, black pepper, allspice, the remaining 1 teaspoon of salt, 1 tablespoon of olive oil, and 1/2 cup of the bitter orange substitute. Blend until it becomes a smooth, vibrant red sauce.

**2. Marinate the fish.**

Place the fillets in a bowl, pour the marinade over them, and toss gently to coat. Let them sit on the counter for exactly 15 minutes. Do not let them sit longer, or the high acid will turn the delicate fish to mush before it hits the oven.

**3. Temper the banana leaves.**

Preheat your oven to 400°F. Turn a gas stove burner to medium (or use a hot, dry skillet on electric). Carefully pass the cut banana leaves over the heat for 3 to 5 seconds per section. They will instantly transform from matte green to a glossy dark green, releasing their oils and becoming flexible so they won't tear.

**4. Assemble the sheet pan packet.**

Line your sheet pan with the softened banana leaves, letting the edges hang over the sides. Place the marinated fish in the center and pour any remaining red marinade from the bowl right over the top. Layer on the red onion rings, sliced tomatoes, green peppers, and yellow wax peppers. Drizzle with the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil and splash the beer over the whole pile.

**5. Wrap and bake.**

Fold the overhanging banana leaves over the top of the fish to create a sealed packet. If they won't stay put, lay a piece of aluminum foil over the top to pin them down and trap the steam. Bake in the oven for 15 minutes.

**6. Sear and serve.**

Remove the pan from the oven and carefully peel back the top leaves to expose the fish, watching out for the hot steam. Return to the oven for 3 to 5 more minutes so the excess liquid evaporates slightly and the vegetables caramelize. Serve immediately out of the pan with the fiery Salsa Xnipeç.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Salsa Xnipec translates to dog's nose.**

The traditional accompaniment gets its name because the heat of the habaneros is guaranteed to make your nose run like a wet dog snout. It's an indispensable, highly acidic counterpoint to the earthy achiote.



## Ceviche Yucateco de Pescado

The secret to true Yucatecan ceviche isn't a litany of complicated ingredients; it's the reverence with which you treat the simple ones. Down on the coast, they use sour orange to cure the morning's catch, imparting a slightly sweet, deeply floral tang that standard limes simply can't match. Since authentic naranja agria is a rare commodity in an Ohio winter, we fake it flawlessly by blending fresh lime with sweet navel orange juice. The real magic, though, is in the drain: pulling the fish from its acid bath before tossing it with fresh vegetables keeps the cilantro bright and the tomatoes crisp, while a final glug of olive oil tempers the habanero's wicked bite and makes every mouthful taste exactly like a beachside palapa in Progreso.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	firm white fish such as mahi-mahi, snapper, or halibut <i>cut into 1/2-inch cubes</i>	<b>1</b>	habanero peppers <i>halved, seeds and white ribs removed, minced as finely as possible</i>
<b>3/4 cup</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro leaves <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh sweet orange juice	<b>2 tbsp</b>	extra virgin olive oil
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>1 med</b>	red onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>1 large</b>	avocado <i>sliced or cubed</i>
<b>2 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>seeds gently scooped out and discarded, flesh finely diced</i>	<b>1 box</b>	tortilla chips or saltine crackers

## PREPARATION

- **Choose the right vessel.**

Always use a glass or ceramic bowl for the marination process. Metal bowls will react chemically with the high-acid citrus cure, imparting an awful metallic taste.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toss the cubed fish with the lime juice, orange juice, and salt in a non-reactive bowl.**

Ensure the liquid completely submerges the fish. The combination of sweet and tart citrus perfectly mimics the region's canonical sour oranges.

- 2. Cover the bowl and let it cure in the refrigerator for forty-five minutes.**

You want the fish to turn completely opaque and firm up to the touch, effectively "cooking" it without leaving it tough or chalky.

- 1. Drain almost all of the citrus juice from the bowl, leaving just a couple of tablespoons to keep things moist.**

This is the critical, often-missed step. If you leave the fish swimming in a massive pool of acid, the fresh vegetables will immediately wilt and turn your vibrant appetizer into a soggy, aggressively sour soup.

- 2. Gently fold in the diced red onion, seeded tomatoes, minced habanero, and cilantro.**

Take care not to break up the pieces of fish.

- 3. Drizzle with the olive oil, season with the black pepper, and toss one final time.**

The oil rounds out the sharp acidity and mellows the furious, fruity heat of the habanero. Taste the ceviche and add another pinch of salt if it needs it.

- 4. Serve immediately alongside tortilla chips or saltines, topping individual portions with the avocado.**

Never mix the avocado directly into the bowl, or it will disintegrate into mush.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the limes.**

When juicing, never squeeze your limes to the bitter end. Over-squeezing releases harsh essential oils from the rind that will leach into the juice and impart a distinctly unpleasant, astringent flavor to the fish.

- **Handle habaneros with care.**

Wear gloves when mincing. If you want the beautiful floral aroma of the Yucatán without the blistering heat, skip the mincing entirely: simply poke a whole, uncut habanero with a fork and let it float in the acid bath while the fish cures, discarding it before you add the vegetables.



# Pan de Cazón Suburbano

*pahn deh cah-ZOHN*

In the coastal state of Campeche, "Dogfish Bread" features no bread at all. Instead, it's a magnificent, savory tower built from golden corn tortillas, earthy black beans, flaked fish, and a fiercely smoky roasted tomato sauce called chiltomate. Born of necessity and Gulf Coast abundance, the traditional dish relies on local small sharks and fiery open coals. For those of us cooking in the American suburbs, thousands of miles from the warm waters of the Yucatán, swapping shark for sturdy white fish and harnessing the blistering heat of a standard oven broiler captures the precise soul of a Campechano Sunday afternoon. It is nostalgic, structurally impressive, and surprisingly fast to throw together on a weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>left whole</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>cut into one thick chunk</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>2 large cloves</b>	garlic <i>unpeeled</i>	<b>2 large cloves</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>
<b>1 med</b>	habanero pepper <i>left whole</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	dried epazote
<b>1 tbsp</b>	olive oil	<b>1 tbsp</b>	lime juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	salt	<b>1/2 tbsp</b>	orange juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>
<b>15 oz</b>	black beans <i>undrained</i>	<b>1/2 tbsp</b>	grapefruit juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	vegetable oil	<b>12 med</b>	corn tortillas
<b>1/4 cup</b>	water	<b>1/4 cup</b>	vegetable oil
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	mahi-mahi or Atlantic cod fillets	<b>1 med</b>	avocado <i>pitted, peeled, and sliced</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Char the chiltomate vegetables in the broiler.

Place the Roma tomatoes, thick chunk of white onion, unpeeled garlic, and whole habanero on a dry baking sheet. Broil on high for 8 to 12 minutes, turning once, until the skins are deeply blackened and blistered. Do not fear the char; it is the essence of the dish.

### 2. Blend the charred vegetables into a rustic salsa.

Peel the garlic. If you want traditional flavor without blistering heat, carefully scrape the seeds out of the habanero and only use half the flesh. Place the tomatoes, onion, garlic, habanero, olive oil, and salt into a blender and pulse until it forms a chunky sauce. Set aside.

**1. Purée the black beans and simmer them into a silky paste.**

In the same unwashed blender, pour in the entire can of black beans with their liquid and blend until completely smooth. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a saucepan over medium heat, carefully pour in the purée, add the water, and simmer for 5 minutes, stirring constantly until it reaches the consistency of thick frosting. Keep warm.

**2. Poach the fish fillets and shred them gently.**

Bring 4 cups of salted water to a gentle boil in a medium pot. Drop in the fish and poach for 6 to 8 minutes just until opaque. Move to a cutting board, let it cool for a minute, and use two forks to gently flake the meat.

**3. Sauté the fish with aromatics and your makeshift sour orange juice.**

Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a skillet over medium heat and sauté the chopped onion and minced garlic until translucent. Gently fold in the shredded fish and epazote. Remove from the heat and stir in the lime, orange, and grapefruit juices. Taste for salt.

**4. Briefly fry the tortillas to create a grease barrier.**

A raw tortilla will turn into soggy pudding under the weight of the sauce. Heat 1/4 cup of oil in a skillet over medium-high heat and pass each corn tortilla through the hot oil for just 10 to 15 seconds per side until pliable but sealed. Drain on paper towels.

**5. Build the multi-layered towers and drown them in hot salsa.**

For each serving, place a spoonful of salsa on a plate, top with a tortilla, smear generously with beans, and add a thick layer of fish. Spoon over a little salsa, and repeat for a second layer. Top with a third tortilla, a light smear of beans, and a generous ladle of the hot chiltomate salsa spilling over the sides. Crown with sliced avocado and serve immediately.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the oven char.**

The true magic trick of the Yucatán is the chiltomate. Tomatoes boiled in water taste entirely different from tomatoes blackened by fire. The Maillard reaction on the skin brings out a deep, ancient umami that serves as the backbone of the entire plate.

- **Seek out the epazote.**

This pungent herb is the background note that makes Mexican food taste incredibly real. It smells faintly of oregano, mint, and petroleum, and it neutralizes the heaviness of the beans. You can find it dried in small cellophane packets in the Hispanic aisle of standard supermarkets.



# Camarones al Mojo de Ajo Estilo Progreso

*kah-mah-ro-nes al mo-ho de ah-ho eh-stee-lo pro-greh-so*

Thirty minutes north of Mérida, locals sit at plastic tables in the sand to eat fresh catch as the sun dips into the Gulf. This is the authentic Progreso style of garlic shrimp, a beautiful rejection of the Asian chili paste concoctions invented in Florida and passed off as Yucatecan food. The secret to a genuine local mojo is sour orange cutting through the rich butter, which we replicate here with a bright blend of grapefruit, orange, and lime. We also drop a whole, uncut habanero into the pan to steep its floral, tropical aroma directly into the oil without unleashing its punishing heat. It is a perfect, unpretentious plate of food that begs for crusty bread to mop up the golden garlic butter left behind.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	raw large shrimp <i>peeled and deveined, tails left on</i>	<b>4 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>cut into cubes</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>10 large</b>	garlic cloves <i>very finely minced</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	paprika	<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh orange juice
<b>1 whole</b>	habanero pepper <i>left completely intact and uncut</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh grapefruit juice
<b>3 tbsp</b>	extra-virgin olive oil	<b>1 tbsp</b>	dry white wine
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>finely chopped</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Pat the shrimp completely dry with paper towels.**  
Toss them in a bowl with the kosher salt, black pepper, and paprika, then set aside. Drying the shrimp ensures they sear rather than steam in the pan.
- 2. Place a large skillet over medium heat and add the olive oil alongside the whole habanero pepper.**  
Let the pepper blister and roll around in the hot oil for two to three minutes. This steeps the oil with the habanero's authentic floral aroma without breaking the skin and releasing its devastating heat.
- 3. Lower the heat to medium-low and add the cubed butter to the infused oil.**  
As soon as the butter melts and foams, add the minced garlic. Stir continuously for 60 to 90 seconds until the garlic softens and smells incredibly fragrant. Do not let it turn brown, or it will instantly turn bitter and ruin the sauce.
- 4. Raise the heat slightly to medium and arrange the seasoned shrimp in the pan in a single layer.**  
Let them cook undisturbed for about two minutes until the bottoms turn bright pink, then flip them over.

**1. Immediately pour in the fresh lime, orange, and grapefruit juices along with the white wine.**

This liquid will sizzle and emulsify with the garlic butter to create a creamy sauce. Let it simmer for one more minute until the shrimp are just opaque and fully cooked.

**2. Turn off the heat and discard the whole habanero.**

Stir in the fresh cilantro and serve immediately directly from the skillet, ideally alongside white rice and plenty of crusty bread to soak up the phenomenal garlic-citrus butter.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **True Yucatecan cooking relies heavily on naranja agria, or sour orange.**

Because this fruit is exceedingly difficult to find fresh in standard American supermarkets, we use equal parts lime, orange, and grapefruit juice to perfectly mimic its bitter, floral tartness.

● **The dual-fat system is essential for temperature control.**

Butter provides the sweet, milky richness that defines this dish, but it burns easily. Cutting it with olive oil raises the smoke point, allowing the garlic to sweat slowly and extract its sweetness safely.



# Pulpo Frito con Castacán

## Rápido

*pool-poh free-toh kohn kahs-tah-kahn*

Walk into a beachside palapa in Progreso and the air smells of sea salt, woodsmoke, and rendering pork fat. Pulpo con Castacán is the ultimate Yucatecan surf and turf. Traditionally, this demands hours of slowly boiling native hairless pig and massaging raw octopus. Here is the secret for the American kitchen on a Tuesday night: buy pre-cooked octopus and standard skin-on pork belly. By simmering the pork in a splash of water first, you tenderize the meat before it fries in its own fat. Toss the octopus right into that glorious lard to crisp up. It's rich, fast, incredibly crunchy, and tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	skin-on pork belly <i>cut into 1-inch thick strips, skin and meat scored deeply</i>	<b>1 med</b>	habanero pepper <i>finely minced, seeds retained if you want the real heat</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	pre-cooked octopus tentacles <i>thawed, patted very dry, and sliced into 1-inch medallions</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>1/2 cup</b>	water	<b>1/4 cup</b>	orange juice
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 small bunch</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1 large</b>	red onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 large</b>	avocado <i>sliced</i>
		<b>12 small</b>	corn tortillas <i>warmed</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Make the pickled red onions.

In a small bowl, combine the sliced red onion, minced habanero, lime juice, orange juice, and a heavy pinch of salt. Toss well and set aside. Doing this first allows the onions to soften and turn a vibrant, beautiful pink while you cook the proteins.

### 2. Render the pork belly.

Place a wide, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium heat. Add the scored pork belly pieces, water, and salt. Let the pork simmer until the water completely evaporates, about 12 to 15 minutes. This gentle braise softens the tough connective tissues before the fat begins to fry.

### 3. Fry the castacón.

Once the water is gone, you will hear a sharp sizzle. Increase the heat to medium-high and stand back as the pork belly begins to fry in its own rendered lard. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes until the skin puffs into bubbly chicharrón and the meat is deep golden brown and crispy. Remove with a slotted spoon, chop into bite-sized chunks once cool enough to handle, and leave the hot fat in the skillet.

**1. Flash-fry the octopus.**

Ensure the rendered pork fat is shimmering hot. Carefully add the dry octopus medallions to the fat. Because the octopus is already cooked, we are only looking for texture. Fry quickly, stirring frequently, for just 2 to 3 minutes until the edges are deeply browned and crispy. Do not overcook, or the meat will turn rubbery.

**2. Assemble and serve.**

Return the chopped castacán to the skillet for 30 seconds just to heat everything through and marry the flavors. Transfer to a warm serving platter and serve immediately alongside the warm corn tortillas, sliced avocado, cilantro, and the bright, spicy pickled red onions.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The citrus hack.**

True naranja agria (sour orange) is the backbone of Yucatecan acidity, but it is notoriously difficult to find fresh in the States. The two-to-one ratio of lime to navel orange juice is a grandmother-approved diaspora substitution that perfectly mimics that floral tartness.



# Pescadillas de la Playa

This is the taste of a sunset in Progreso. Unlike the olive-laced fish tacos of the Pacific, the authentic Yucatecan pescadilla relies on the earthy punch of epazote and a fiery, smoky roasted chiltomate sauce. Originally built on local shark, this adaptation uses fresh cod or tilapia easily found in the American Midwest. The secret any coastal grandmother will loudly insist upon is the absolute eradication of moisture from the filling. A wet stew means an exploding taco in the hot oil. Pin them shut with a toothpick, fry them until they shatter, and drown them in chiltomate.

## INGREDIENTS

**4 med** Roma tomatoes  
*left whole*

**2 med** habanero peppers  
*left whole*

<b>1/4 med</b>	white onion <i>left whole</i>	<b>2 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>seeded and finely diced</i>
<b>2 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>unpeeled</i>	<b>1 large</b>	fresh epazote <i>sprig left whole</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 lb</b>	firm white fish fillets	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper
<b>1 tbsp</b>	olive oil	<b>12 med</b>	corn tortillas
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	vegetable oil
<b>2 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	<b>12 med</b>	wooden toothpicks

## PREPARATION

- **Separate your tomatoes.**

You will need two distinct batches of tomatoes for this recipe. Leave four whole for the roasted chiltomate sauce, and seed and dice the other two for the fish filling.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Char the sauce vegetables on a dry skillet.

Place a dry skillet over medium-high heat and roast four whole tomatoes, the habaneros, the quartered onion, and unpeeled garlic until blackened and blistered, about 10 to 15 minutes. Remove the garlic and habanero early so they do not turn bitter.

### 2. Blend the rustic chiltomate.

Peel the garlic but leave the charred skins on the tomatoes and habaneros for authentic flavor. Pulse in a blender with a half teaspoon of salt until combined but still chunky, then set aside.

### 3. Poach and shred the fish.

Gently simmer the fish fillets in lightly salted water for 5 to 7 minutes until opaque. Drain on paper towels, let cool slightly, and use two forks to shred the meat entirely into fine flakes.

**1. Build the Yucatecan flavor base.**

Heat the olive oil in a skillet over medium heat, sautéing the diced onion until translucent, then add the minced garlic for 30 seconds. Stir in the diced tomatoes and the epazote sprig, cooking until the tomatoes break down into a paste.

**2. Cook the filling until completely dry.**

Add the shredded fish, the remaining half teaspoon of salt, and pepper to the skillet. Stir continuously until absolutely all liquid has evaporated; any remaining moisture will cause the tortillas to explode when fried.

**3. Warm and stuff the tortillas.**

Heat the corn tortillas in a microwave or dry skillet until steaming and pliable. Place two tablespoons of the dry fish filling on one half, fold it over into a half-moon, and weave a wooden toothpick through the open edges to pin it securely shut.

**4. Fry the pescadillas until crisp.**

Heat a half-inch of vegetable oil in a heavy-bottomed skillet to 350°F. Fry the pescadillas in small batches for 2 to 3 minutes per side until deeply golden, then drain them vertically on paper towels and discard the toothpicks before serving with the chiltomate.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Respect the dry filling.**

Moisture is the enemy of the pescadilla. Water rapidly converts to steam in hot oil, which will blow the side out of your tortilla and ruin the dish. Cook the fish hash down until it sizzles aggressively.

● **Warm your tortillas.**

Do not attempt to fold a cold store-bought tortilla. It will crack, oil will rush in, and the filling will rush out.

- **Sourcing the epazote.**

Do not substitute cilantro here. Epazote has a distinctly pungent, earthy aroma that defines the cuisine of the Yucatán. Check the produce or dried spice section of any local Latin market.



# Aguachile Maya Rápido

*ah-gwah-CHEE-leh MAH-yah*

True aguachile is an exercise in immediacy, born on the Pacific but painted here with the ancient, earthy colors of the Yucatán. The iconic sour orange is notoriously absent from American supermarkets, but a pragmatic blend of lime, sweet orange, and grapefruit resurrects that sharp, tropical ghost perfectly. Bathed in vibrant red achiote and the floral warmth of habanero, these butterflied shrimp don't need hours to cure. It is a rapid, twenty-minute masterclass in balancing acid and earth, delivering a blindingly bright plate of home to a landlocked weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	large raw shrimp <i>thawed, peeled, and deveined</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	achiote paste <i>crumbled</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	red onion <i>sliced paper-thin</i>	<b>1 small</b>	habanero pepper <i>seeds and veins removed</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	English cucumber <i>peeled, seeded, and cut into thin half-moons</i>	<b>1 small clove</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh pineapple <i>diced small</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1 tbsp</b>	olive oil
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh sweet orange juice	<b>1 med</b>	avocado <i>sliced</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh grapefruit juice	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro leaves
<b>1 tbsp</b>	white vinegar	<b>12 small</b>	corn tostadas

## PREPARATION

- **Butterfly the shrimp to maximize surface area.**  
Run a sharp knife halfway through the back of each peeled shrimp so they open like a book, allowing the citrus to penetrate and cure the flesh quickly.
- **Meticulously seed the habanero pepper.**  
Scrape away all the seeds and white ribs inside the pepper to retain its beautiful, floral aroma without injecting punishing heat into the dish.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Blend the achiote marinade until perfectly smooth.**  
Combine the lime, orange, and grapefruit juices with the vinegar, achiote paste, habanero, garlic, salt, and olive oil in a blender on high speed until the earthy paste dissolves entirely into a vibrant red liquid.

**1. Submerge the shrimp and onions in the bright cure.**

Lay the butterflied shrimp flat in a shallow, non-metallic dish, pour the marinade over the top, scatter the red onion slices, and toss gently to coat everything evenly.

**2. Rest the aguachile in the refrigerator for exactly ten minutes.**

Unlike a long-marinated ceviche, this is meant to be eaten rapidly while the center of the shrimp remains slightly translucent, plump, and profoundly sweet.

**3. Fold in the crisp garnishes and serve immediately.**

Gently toss the cucumber half-moons and diced pineapple into the bowl, then transfer to a platter layered with fresh avocado slices, cilantro, and a stack of crunchy tostadas.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Recreating the sour orange illusion is non-negotiable.**

The distinct bite of Yucatecan food relies on Naranja Agria, a bitter citrus that is nearly impossible to find fresh in the Midwest, but this precise ratio of lime, orange, and grapefruit nails the ancestral profile.

- **Frozen shrimp is actually your safest bet.**

High-quality frozen shrimp thawed rapidly under cold running water yields a significantly better, safer texture for raw preparations than the supposedly fresh shrimp sitting for days in the supermarket display case.

- **Break up the achiote block before blending.**

If your achiote paste feels rock hard straight from the package, mash it with a fork and a splash of warm water before dropping it into the blender to ensure it emulsifies seamlessly.



# Arroz a la Tumbada Estilo Yucateco

Born on the fishing boats of Alvarado and cross-pollinated with Yucatecan aromatics, this fiercely savory, soupy rice isn't a delicate paella—it's a messy, soul-warming bowl of coastal reality. The trick to pulling it off on a Midwestern Tuesday is a quick, hard-boiled shrimp shell stock and a heavy pinch of citrusy, native Mexican oregano that cuts right through the richness of the catch. Serve it straight from the pot, unpretentious and tasting exactly like the ocean.

## INGREDIENTS

**1 lb** raw shell on large shrimp  
*peeled, shells reserved for stock*

**4 cup** seafood stock

**2 cup** water

<b>3 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>12 small</b>	littleneck clams <i>scrubbed clean</i>
<b>1/2 large</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1/2 lb</b>	cleaned squid rings <i>thawed if frozen</i>
<b>3 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>smashed</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	Mexican oregano
<b>1 med</b>	jalapeno <i>stemmed</i>	<b>2 small</b>	fresh epazote <i>kept as whole sprigs</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	extra virgin olive oil	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	long grain white rice <i>rinsed well and dried completely</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt <i>plus more to taste</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	achiote paste	<b>2 med</b>	limes <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	white fish fillet <i>cut into 1 1/2 inch chunks</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Extract the ocean from the shrimp shells.**

Combine the reserved shrimp shells, seafood stock, and water in a medium saucepan, simmer for 10 minutes to fortify the broth, then strain the hot liquid into a bowl and discard the shells.

- **Blend the sofrito into a smooth puree.**

Combine the tomatoes, onion, garlic, and jalapeno in a blender and blitz until perfectly smooth, using a splash of your hot stock to get the blades moving if necessary.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the rice to seal the grains.**

Heat the olive oil in a heavy Dutch oven over medium-high heat, adding the dry rice and stirring constantly for 3 to 5 minutes until it turns chalky and golden, preventing it from disintegrating to mush in the soup.

**1. Fry the sofrito directly into the hot rice.**

Pour the blended tomato mixture into the pot where it will violently sputter and steam, stirring for 4 to 5 minutes until the sauce deepens in color and cooks out the raw onion flavor.

**2. Build the brick-red sea.**

Whisk the achiote paste into a ladle of the hot broth until dissolved, pour it all into the pot alongside a heavy pinch of salt, and simmer covered on medium-low for 10 minutes.

**3. Stagger the harder seafood so it cooks evenly.**

Uncover and nestle the clams into the soupy rice to cook for 5 minutes, then fold in the chunks of white fish and cover for another 3 minutes.

**4. Poach the delicate catch off the heat.**

Stir in the peeled shrimp, squid rings, crushed oregano, epazote, and cilantro, then immediately turn off the heat and let the covered pot rest for 5 minutes so the residual heat gently cooks the seafood to tender perfection.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Respect the oregano.**

Do not substitute Italian oregano; you need the citrusy, floral punch of Mexican verbena-family oregano to properly cut the richness of the seafood broth.

● **Don't sweat the fresh epazote.**

If you cannot find fresh epazote at your local Latin market, just leave it out entirely, as dried epazote tastes like dusty nothing.





# Grandma's Pantry: Everyday Recados, Salsas, and Hacks

*The foundational building blocks of Yucatecan flavor architecture, adapted for the everyday kitchen.*

The soul of Yucatecan cooking doesn't reveal itself in the pan; it's forged in the pantry. It is an ancient architecture built on sour, charred, and fiercely spiced foundations. These aren't the sanitized, watered-down sauces slung at the all-inclusive resorts. These are the brooding recados and searing habanero salsas that have stained the fingertips of Yucatecan grandmothers for generations.

You don't need a jungle backyard or a stone hearth to pull this off—you just need to respect the mechanics. Here are the non-negotiable building blocks for the modern kitchen: the elusive bitter orange hacked from everyday citrus, the

bright snap of pickled red onions, and the dense spice pastes that turn a cheap cut of meat into something profound. Master these, and the rest is just heat and time.





# Bistec Rápido con Recado de Toda Clase

In the Yucatán, recados are the lifeblood of the kitchen—flavor bombs deployed on busy weeknights to instantly recall the aromas of a Mérida home. When time doesn't allow for a slow-roasted pig, grandmothers turn to Recado de Toda Clase. It's an intensely peppery, citrus-spiked spice paste rubbed into thin steaks, quickly seared, and layered with tomatoes, onions, and potatoes. Covered and left to steam into a rich, savory gravy, it is an unapologetically authentic masterclass in weeknight comfort food.

## INGREDIENTS

**1 1/2 tsp** whole black peppercorns

**1/2 tsp** whole allspice berries

<b>3</b>	whole cloves	<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	thin-sliced beef steak <i>pounded to 1/4-inch thickness if needed</i>
<b>1/2 inch</b>	Mexican cinnamon stick	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil or pork lard
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	cumin seeds	<b>1 large</b>	white onion <i>sliced into half-moons</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	Mexican oregano	<b>1 large</b>	green bell pepper <i>cored, seeded, and sliced into strips</i>
<b>4 large cloves</b>	garlic <i>peeled and roughly chopped</i>	<b>4 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>sliced into thick rounds</i>
<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 med</b>	Yukon Gold or Russet potatoes <i>peeled and sliced into 1/4-inch rounds</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken broth
<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh orange juice	<b>3 sprigs</b>	fresh mint or cilantro
<b>1 tsp</b>	white vinegar		

## PREPARATION

- **Chop your vegetables while the meat marinates.**

To keep this an efficient weeknight meal, use the 15-minute window while the beef is absorbing the recado to slice your onions, peppers, tomatoes, and potatoes.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast and grind the dry spices.**

In a dry skillet over medium heat, briefly toast the peppercorns, allspice, cloves, cinnamon, cumin, and oregano for about 60 seconds until highly fragrant, then transfer to a spice grinder or molcajete and grind into a fine powder.

- 2. Blend the recado paste and marinate the beef.**

In a blender or mortar, combine the freshly ground spices, chopped garlic, salt, lime juice, orange juice, and vinegar to form a coarse paste. Pour it over the beef, massage it into every crevice of the meat, and let it sit at room temperature for at least 15 minutes.

**1. Quickly sear the marinated beef.**

Heat the oil or lard in a large, wide skillet or heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat. Working in batches if necessary, lay the steaks flat and sear for just 1 to 2 minutes per side to lock the spices onto the meat and build a dark crust on the pan. The meat does not need to be fully cooked yet.

**2. Layer the raw vegetables over the beef.**

Turn the heat down to medium-low and leave all the beef sitting flat at the bottom of the skillet. Directly on top, arrange an even layer of the sliced onions, followed by the bell peppers, tomatoes, and finally fan the potato slices evenly over everything.

**3. Steam and simmer the cazuela.**

Pour the chicken broth gently down the side of the pan so you don't wash the spices off the meat, and place the herb sprigs right on top of the potatoes. Cover the skillet tightly with a lid and let it simmer undisturbed for 15 to 20 minutes.

**4. Serve the skillet hot.**

The dish is ready when the potatoes are fork-tender and the tomatoes have melted down into a rich sauce. Remove the herb sprigs and serve immediately with warm tortillas, white rice, and refried black beans, ensuring everyone gets a generous ladle of the peppery pan juices.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The citrus hack perfectly replicates hard-to-find bitter orange.**

Authentic Yucatecan cooking relies on naranja agria (bitter orange). If your local market doesn't carry it, this specific ratio of lime juice, orange juice, and white vinegar perfectly mimics its complex astringency. Never use straight sweet orange juice.

● **You can batch-prepare the recado dust.**

To make weeknights even faster, toast and grind a large batch of the dry spices and store the powder in an airtight jar for up to six months. When you're ready to cook, just mash one tablespoon of the dust with the garlic and citrus.

- **Do not be tempted to add more broth.**

It may look like there isn't enough liquid when you cover the pan, but the onions and tomatoes will release their own water as they steam. Adding too much broth will result in a boiled soup rather than the thick, savory gravy you're looking for.



## Huevos Rotos al Comal con Chile Kut

In the Yucatan, chile kut isn't a garnish; it's an institution. It's a primal, fiery paste of blackened habaneros and sour orange, pounded in a molcajete and kept on the table at all times. Here, it meets the ultimate expression of rural comfort: eggs cooked straight on a blisteringly hot, dry cast-iron comal. No oil, no butter. Just a barrier of coarse salt to keep the egg from sticking, and a gently broken yolk meant for scooping up with fresh corn tortillas. It is fast, unpretentious, and aggressively delicious.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>5 med</b>	fresh habanero peppers <i>stems removed</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh orange juice
<b>1 large</b>	garlic clove <i>unpeeled</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	white vinegar
<b>1 tsp</b>	coarse kosher salt <i>divided</i>	<b>4 large</b>	eggs
<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>4 med</b>	corn tortillas <i>warmed</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Blister the habaneros and garlic.

Turn on your exhaust fan—roasting habaneros indoors vaporizes potent oils. Heat a dry cast-iron skillet over medium heat until it sizzles a drop of water instantly. Roast the whole habaneros and unpeeled garlic clove directly on the dry metal, turning occasionally, until heavily blistered and blackened, about 8 to 10 minutes. Remove and let cool slightly, leaving the skillet on the stove.

### 2. Mash the chile kut.

Carefully peel and discard the charred skin from the garlic. In a molcajete or a sturdy bowl using a heavy fork, aggressively mash the peeled garlic, roasted habaneros, and 1/2 teaspoon of coarse salt into a rustic, chunky paste. Stir in the lime juice, orange juice, and vinegar. Taste cautiously and adjust salt if necessary.

### 3. Prepare the dry comal.

Lower the heat under your skillet to medium-low. To prevent sticking without using a drop of oil, sprinkle a few pinches of the remaining coarse kosher salt directly onto the dry surface of the skillet, creating a physical barrier.

### 4. Cook the broken eggs.

Crack the eggs directly onto the salted areas of the skillet and let sit untouched for 30 seconds. Using the edge of a spatula, gently break the yolks and drag them slightly through the whites so they marble and cook evenly. Cook for about 2 minutes for a soft center, or flip briefly if you prefer them hard.

**1. Serve immediately.**

Slide the hot eggs off the skillet and onto warm corn tortillas. Drizzle sparingly with the fiercely hot chile kut.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

- **The Tortilla Hack**

If your cast-iron isn't perfectly seasoned and you fear sticking, place a warm corn tortilla on the skillet, crack the egg directly onto the tortilla, break the yolk, and let it cook. The egg binds to the tortilla, creating a built-in taco.

- **Sour Orange Substitution**

If you can find fresh Naranja Agria (Seville oranges) at a Latin market, replace the lime, sweet orange, and vinegar entirely with 1/4 cup of sour orange juice.

- **Scaling the Heat**

Chile kut is unapologetically spicy. To cut the heat by 50% while preserving the smoky flavor, remove the seeds and membranes from the roasted habaneros before mashing.



# Molletes Yucatecos con Cebolla Morada Encurtida

*mo-YEH-tehs yoo-cah-TEH-cohs*

Molletes are the ultimate Mexican fast food—toasted bolillos slathered in refried beans and blanketed under a bubbling layer of cheese. In the Yucatán, they elevate this humble canvas by crowning it with earthy, citrus-braised cochinita pibil and a sharp, neon-pink tangle of cold-cured pickled red onions. Forget boiling vinegar and sugar; true Yucatecan onions rely on the enzymatic acidity of bitter orange to chemically cook the raw bite away while preserving a crucial crunch. We replicate that acidic sweet spot using a precise blend of citrus and

white vinegar you can find at any Midwest supermarket. Assemble these on a busy Wednesday night using Sunday's leftover pork, and your kitchen will instantly smell like a back-alley cantina in Mérida.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 large</b>	red onion <i>halved and very thinly sliced into half-moons</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 med</b>	habanero pepper <i>very thinly sliced</i>	<b>4 med</b>	bolillos <i>sliced in half lengthwise</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh grapefruit juice	<b>3 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>softened to room temp</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh orange juice	<b>15 oz</b>	canned black beans <i>undrained</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1 tbsp</b>	bacon fat
<b>1/4 cup</b>	white distilled vinegar	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	cochinita pibil <i>warmed</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	Mexican oregano <i>crushed between your palms</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	Edam cheese <i>freshly shredded</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Cure the onions at least an hour ahead.**

Combine the sliced red onion and habanero in a glass jar. Whisk the grapefruit juice, orange juice, lime juice, vinegar, oregano, and salt together, then pour the mixture over the onions. Press them down to submerge, shake vigorously, and let sit at room temperature for 1 to 2 hours to chemically soften.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Fry the black bean paste.

To replicate velvety Yucatecan frijoles colados without tedious straining, pour the undrained canned black beans into a high-speed blender and puree until completely smooth. Heat the bacon fat in a skillet over medium heat, add the bean puree, and fry for 5 minutes, stirring constantly until it forms a thick, spreadable paste.

### 2. Hollow and butter the bread.

Preheat your oven's broiler to high. Using your fingers, pull out a little bit of the soft white crumb from the center of each bolillo half to create a shallow boat. Spread a thin layer of softened butter across the cut sides to create a waterproof barrier against the wet beans.

### 3. Toast the bolillos.

Place the buttered bread halves cut-side up on a baking sheet. Broil for 2 to 3 minutes, just until golden and toasted.

### 4. Layer the foundation.

Remove the bread from the oven and spread a thick layer of the hot black bean paste all the way to the crusty edges to prevent the bread from burning. Pile a generous mound of warm cochinita pibil directly on top of the beans.

### 5. Melt the cheese.

Blanket the pork entirely with the shredded Edam cheese. Return the baking sheet to the broiler for 3 to 5 minutes, watching closely, until the cheese is bubbling, melted, and developing brown spots.

### 6. Crown with the pink onions.

Pull the molten molletes from the oven and immediately top each one with a hefty pinch of the cold, crisp pickled onions. Serve immediately.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The citrus hack.**

Boiling vinegar destroys the fresh floral notes of citrus. We use a cold, raw cure. If you happen to have access to authentic Naranja Agria (bitter orange), replace the grapefruit, orange, lime, and vinegar entirely with 1 cup of fresh bitter orange juice.

- **Why Dutch cheese in Mexico?**

Edam (Queso de Bola) arrived in the Yucatán peninsula via 19th-century maritime trade routes from Europe and the Caribbean. It melts beautifully and provides a salty, sharp counterpoint to the sweet earthiness of theachiote pork. If you can't find it, a mild Gouda or Monterrey Jack is a fine substitute.



## **Pechugas a la Plancha con el Hack de Naranja Agria**

If you grew up in a Yucatecan household, the smell of recado rojo hitting a scorching iron plancha is the ultimate trigger for nostalgia. It smells like Sunday family gatherings, but we're going to make it work for a busy Tuesday in Ohio. The secret here isn't flying in a mythical sour orange from the homeland; it's a resourceful, grandmother-approved hack combining standard citrus and vinegar to mimic that aggressive, chemical bite. It's fast, unapologetically authentic, and when that chicken hits the hot pan, you'll swear you're standing right in her kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh orange juice	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground cumin
<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 tbsp</b>	white distilled vinegar	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	freshly ground black pepper
<b>1 oz</b>	achiote paste	<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	boneless skinless chicken breasts
<b>3 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>finely minced or grated</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>1 tsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano		

## PREPARATION

- **Butterfly and pound the chicken.**

Thick breasts won't cook evenly on a griddle. Slice each breast in half horizontally to create four thin cutlets, then pound them gently under plastic wrap to an even half-inch thickness before marinating.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the sour orange hack and activate the recado.**

In a medium bowl, combine the orange juice, lime juice, and vinegar. Drop in the achiote paste and mash it with a fork until it dissolves into a vibrant, reddish-orange sauce. Stir in the minced garlic, oregano, cumin, salt, and pepper.

- 2. Marinate the chicken for exactly thirty minutes.**

Toss the chicken cutlets in the bowl until heavily coated. Let sit at room temperature for half an hour. Do not leave this overnight—the powerful acid in the citrus hack will turn the meat to mush if you push it.

**1. Sear the chicken on a blistering hot plancha.**

Heat a cast-iron skillet or heavy griddle over medium-high heat. Swirl in the oil. Shake the excess marinade off the chicken and lay it in the pan. Let it sizzle undisturbed for four to five minutes to build a charred, caramelized crust, then flip and cook for another three to four minutes until cooked through.

**2. Rest the meat and serve immediately.**

Transfer the cutlets to a cutting board and let them rest for three minutes. Serve hot with warm corn tortillas, a side of black beans, and pickled red onions.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Demystifying Achiote.**

Achiote (annatto seed) is the natural coloring agent and flavor base of the Mayan world. Buying it in a commercial block is perfectly authentic; even in Mexico, busy home cooks rely on trusted pre-made recados.

● **The Chemistry of the Hack.**

Sweet orange lacks the bitter flavonoids of the Seville orange. Adding lime and white vinegar provides the missing sharp acetic acid profile, creating a perfect replica of traditional Naranja Agria.

● **The Grapefruit Variation.**

If you happen to have a grapefruit on hand, swap two tablespoons of the orange juice for grapefruit juice to introduce an even deeper layer of authentic bitterness.



# Chilaquiles Rápidos de Recado Negro

*chee-lah-KEE-lehs RAH-pee-dohs de reh-KAH-doh NEH-groh*

If you want to understand Yucatecan comfort food, you have to embrace the dark. Recado negro is an ancient, deeply complex paste born from charred chilies—a process that traditionally takes twenty-four hours of burning and soaking. But the grandmothers of Mérida aren't standing over open flames on a Tuesday night; they buy the paste at the market. The real secret to these jet-black chilaquiles lies in the k'ool, an indigenous Mayan technique of using masa to thicken the broth into a velvety gravy that actually clings to the chips. Top it with a

fried egg and the sharp bite of pickled red onions, and you have an unapologetically authentic, smoky masterpiece executed in under twenty minutes.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken broth	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>2 oz</b>	commercial recado negro paste <i>crumbled</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	cooked chicken <i>shredded</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	masa harina	<b>4 large</b>	eggs <i>fried sunny-side up</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	cold water	<b>1/2 cup</b>	cebollas curtidas
<b>1 sprig</b>	fresh epazote	<b>1/3 cup</b>	queso cotija <i>crumbled</i>
<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/4 cup</b>	crema Mexicana
<b>12 oz</b>	thick-cut yellow corn tortilla chips	<b>1 med</b>	avocado <i>sliced</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Make the quick-pickled red onions ahead of time.**

Thinly slice a red onion and soak it in the sour orange substitute described in the notes, along with a heavy pinch of dried oregano. Let it sit for at least thirty minutes before serving.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the recado negro paste into the hot chicken broth.**

In a medium saucepan heat the chicken broth over medium heat. Crumble the recado negro into the broth and whisk vigorously until the dense paste completely dissolves. Drop in the epazote sprig and bring to a gentle simmer.

- 1. Whisk the masa harina and cold water together to form a smooth slurry.**  
Do this in a small bowl to ensure there are absolutely no lumps, which prevents the masa from clumping when it hits the hot broth.
- 2. Pour the masa slurry into the simmering black broth while whisking continuously.**  
Within a few minutes, the broth will transform from a watery soup into a glossy, velvety gravy. This ancient thickening technique is known as k'ool. Reduce the heat to low and taste for salt.
- 3. Briefly toss the tortilla chips in a little oil over medium heat.**  
Heat the neutral oil in a large, wide skillet. Toss the chips for just thirty seconds to warm them up and bring out their roasted corn flavor.
- 4. Pour the thickened salsa negra over the chips and fold in the shredded chicken.**  
Use a wide spatula to gently fold the mixture until every single chip is coated in the black sauce. Cook for just one to two minutes—you want the chips coated and hot, but still retaining a bit of crunch in the center.
- 5. Divide among warm bowls and top with fried eggs, avocado, crema, cotija, and pickled red onions.**  
Do not skip the pickled onions. Their sharp acidity is the essential counterbalance to the profound, earthy smoke of the recado negro.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Hacking the sour orange.**  
Authentic Yucatecan cebollas curtidas (pickled onions) rely on the region's native sour orange. You can mimic its exact pH and flavor profile in an American kitchen by mixing equal parts fresh orange juice and lime juice with a splash of white vinegar.



# Tacos Rústicos de Setas con Recado Blanco

*tah-kohs roos-tee-kohs deh seh-tahs kohn reh-kah-doh blahn-koh*

In the Yucatán, the secret to deep, complex flavor on a random Tuesday isn't hours of simmering—it's the recado. These intense spice pastes are the working kitchen's instant flavor bombs, and Recado Blanco is the most comforting of the bunch. Relying on warm roasted garlic, oregano, and cinnamon rather than fiery chilies, it usually marinates pork or poultry. Here, it turns shredded oyster mushrooms into a deeply savory, remarkably meaty taco filling in twenty minutes flat. The real grandmother's hack is making a batch of the dry spice blend to keep in your pantry. When you're ready to cook, just add roasted garlic and a splash of citrus, and you're eating real food.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 head</b>	garlic <i>cloves separated but unpeeled</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>1 tbsp</b>	whole black peppercorns	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	fresh orange juice
<b>1 tsp</b>	cumin seeds	<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	oyster mushrooms <i>gently wiped clean</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	coriander seeds	<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>4 small</b>	whole cloves	<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>finely slivered</i>
<b>1 small</b>	Mexican cinnamon stick	<b>8 med</b>	corn tortillas <i>warmed</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	dried Mexican oregano	<b>1/2 cup</b>	pickled red onions
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt		

## PREPARATION

- **Shred the oyster mushrooms by hand.**

Use your fingers to pull the mushrooms apart lengthwise into thick shreds so they mimic the texture of pulled pork or chicken.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Roast the garlic in a dry skillet.**

Place a dry cast-iron skillet over medium heat and toast the unpeeled garlic cloves, turning occasionally, until the skins are blackened in spots and the flesh softens, about 10 minutes. Set aside to cool, then peel.

- 2. Toast the whole spices until smoking.**

In the same dry skillet, add the peppercorns, cumin, coriander, cloves, and cinnamon. Toast for 1 to 2 minutes, shaking constantly, until they release a highly fragrant smoke. Toss in the oregano for 5 seconds off the heat, then immediately remove from the pan.

**1. Grind and blend the recado blanco.**

Grind the toasted dry spices and salt into a fine powder using a spice grinder. Transfer to a blender with the peeled roasted garlic and the citrus juices, blending until you have a thick, slightly coarse, grayish-green paste.

**2. Dry-sear the shredded mushrooms.**

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the shredded mushrooms to the dry pan without oil and cook for 4 to 5 minutes. Letting them release their water and brown concentrates their flavor and gives them a firm, meaty bite.

**3. Fry the paste and finish the filling.**

Reduce heat to medium, add the oil and slivered onion, and sauté until soft. Stir in the recado paste, coating the mushrooms evenly, and cook for 3 to 4 minutes to fry the spices in the fat. If it looks too dry, add a splash of water to glaze the mushrooms.

**4. Assemble the tacos and serve immediately.**

Pile the mushroom filling onto hot corn tortillas and top generously with pickled red onions.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Embrace the color of the paste.**

Recado Blanco translates to white recado, but thanks to the black pepper and roasted garlic, the finished paste will look grayish-brown. This is exactly what it is supposed to look like.

● **Master the make-ahead spice hack.**

Multiply the dry spices by four, toast, grind, and keep them in a jar. On a busy weeknight, just scoop out two tablespoons, mash it with roasted garlic and citrus, and you have instant recado.

● **Source true Mexican cinnamon if possible.**

Look for soft, crumbly Mexican Ceylon cinnamon at Latin markets. If you only have standard US Cassia cinnamon, use half the amount, as it is far more aggressive.



## Fideos de la Abuela con Salsa Tamulada

In the Yucatán, a massive pot of plain black beans is the rhythm of the week. By Wednesday, when the beans are running low, grandmothers perform a simple kind of magic. They toast handfuls of thin pasta in hot oil until it smells like roasted nuts, then simmer it in the dark, starchy leftover broth. It is cheap, fast, and profoundly comforting. But this dish demands duality. To cut the earthy warmth, it is served alongside salsa tamulada—a fiercely acidic, deeply charred habanero paste pounded in a mortar. You don't dump it in the bowl; you

carefully dab a microscopic amount onto your spoon. It is a masterclass in flavor contrast, utilizing basic supermarket staples on a standard weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>5 med</b>	fresh habanero peppers	<b>2 med</b>	Roma tomatoes <i>quartered</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	coarse sea salt	<b>2 cloves</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1/2 med</b>	green bell pepper <i>chopped</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh sweet orange juice	<b>30 oz</b>	canned whole black beans <i>undrained</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	white or apple cider vinegar	<b>2 cup</b>	chicken or vegetable broth
<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil	<b>to taste</b>	salt
<b>7 oz</b>	fideos or angel hair pasta <i>broken into 2-inch pieces if using angel hair</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Cotija or Queso Fresco <i>crumbled</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Prep the recaudo vegetables before you start cooking.**

The fideos will toast very quickly and require your undivided attention. Having your onion, tomatoes, garlic, and bell pepper chopped and ready for the blender will save you from burning the pasta.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Blister the habaneros in a dry skillet.**

Heat a dry cast-iron skillet or comal over medium-high heat and roast the whole habaneros, turning occasionally, until the skins are deeply blistered and softened, about 8 to 10 minutes. Turn on your exhaust fan—this is a fragrant, cough-inducing rite of passage.

**1. Pound the salsa tamulada.**

Remove the stems from the charred habaneros and place the peppers in a molcajete with the coarse salt. Pound them against the stone until you have a rustic, chunky paste, then stir in the lime juice, sweet orange juice, and vinegar.

**2. Toast the fideos.**

Heat the oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-low heat. Add the dry pasta and stir constantly for 3 to 5 minutes until it turns deep golden-brown and smells like toasted nuts, then immediately transfer the noodles to a paper towel-lined plate, leaving the remaining oil in the pot.

**3. Blend and fry the recaudo.**

In a blender, purée the onion, tomatoes, garlic, bell pepper, and a half cup of the broth until smooth. Return the pot to medium-high heat and carefully pour the blended mixture into the hot, leftover oil, frying and stirring frequently until it deepens in color and thickens slightly, about 5 minutes.

**4. Build the dark bean broth.**

Pour the undrained black beans and the remaining 1 1/2 cups of broth into the pot with the tomato base, bring the mixture to a gentle boil, and season generously with salt.

**5. Simmer the noodles.**

Gently stir the toasted fideos into the boiling broth, reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 8 to 10 minutes, or until the noodles are tender and have absorbed some of the dark liquid.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Serving the soup.**

Ladle the hot soup into deep bowls and top generously with crumbled cheese. Place the salsa tamulada in the center of the table; the secret is to scoop up a spoonful of the mild soup and let a microscopic drop of the fiery salsa fall onto the spoon before eating.

- **The sour orange hack.**

Authentic Yucatecan sour orange provides a specific floral bite that straight lime juice lacks. Mixing lime, sweet orange, and vinegar perfectly replicates the pH and flavor profile of the motherland.

- **The green bell pepper substitution.**

Yucatecan recipes rely on 'chile dulce,' a mild regional pepper with a distinct sweet-vegetal note. Since it is nearly impossible to find stateside, a standard green bell pepper is the most accurate flavor analogue.



## Late-Night Plaza Sweets: Dulces y Sobremesa

*Inspired by the evening paseo around the town square, these desserts bring the magic of a warm Mérida night to the Midwest.*

When the brutal heat of the Yucatecan sun finally breaks, the plazas come alive. Families spill out onto the pavement for the evening paseo, drawn by the hum of conversation and the unmistakable crackle of batter hitting a hot iron. This is the hour of the marquesita—that miraculous street cart collision of crispy crepe, sweet hazelnut, and the sharp, salty punch of Dutch Edam cheese. It’s a flavor profile born of old Caribbean trade routes, one that also demands reverence at the holiday table in the form of a proper Queso Relleno.

Whether it's a skillet-hacked street snack or papaya simmering slowly in sugar, these are the plates you linger over. They are the reward for making it through the day, meant to be eaten late, outside, and unapologetically.





# Caballeros Pobres de la Abuela

*cah-bah-yeh-ros poh-bres*

It is a testament to the magic of grandmothers everywhere that the humblest of ingredients can be resurrected into a dessert fit for royalty. Born out of necessity, this Yucatecan classic transforms day-old baguettes into a chilled, pudding-like marvel. Bathed in sweet milk, shielded by a cloud-like egg batter, and submerged in a cinnamon and clove-laced syrup, it is a masterclass in texture and technique. Do not be tempted to eat them warm like generic French toast; patience rewards those who chill them overnight, yielding an intensely rich, spoonable sweet that begs for late-night coffee and honest conversation.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 cup</b>	water	<b>14 oz</b>	sweetened condensed milk
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	white granulated sugar	<b>1 tsp</b>	pure vanilla extract
<b>2 med</b>	Ceylon cinnamon sticks	<b>6 large</b>	large eggs <i>separated cleanly into whites and yolks</i>
<b>4 small</b>	whole cloves	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	vegetable oil
<b>1/2 cup</b>	raisins	<b>1/2 cup</b>	sliced almonds
<b>1 large</b>	day-old French baguette <i>cut diagonally into 1-inch slices</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	dry sherry
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	whole milk		

## PREPARATION

- **Stale the bread.**

A fresh baguette will disintegrate in the soak. Buy your bread a day or two ahead, or slice it and leave it out on the counter overnight to harden.

- **Clean the mixing bowl.**

Any trace of fat or yolk will completely inhibit the egg whites from foaming into the essential capeado.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Brew the spiced syrup.**

In a medium saucepan, bring the water, sugar, cinnamon sticks, and cloves to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce to a simmer and cook undisturbed for 20 to 25 minutes until slightly thickened into a light syrup, stirring in the raisins during the final 5 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in the sherry, and discard the spices.

- 2. Prepare the sweet milk soak.**

In a wide, shallow bowl, whisk together the whole milk, sweetened condensed milk, and vanilla extract until completely smooth.

**1. Hydrate the stale bread.**

Dip each slice of baguette into the milk mixture, flipping once so both sides are moistened but not falling apart. Immediately transfer to a wire rack set over a baking sheet to let any excess liquid drip off.

**2. Whip the capeado.**

In an impeccably clean bowl, beat the egg whites on medium-high speed until stiff, glossy peaks form. Lower the mixer speed to its lowest setting and add the yolks one at a time, mixing just until the batter is a uniform pale yellow. Stop mixing immediately to avoid deflating your foam.

**3. Fry the battered bread.**

Heat an inch of vegetable oil in a large, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium heat to 350°F. Gently enrobe each milk-soaked slice completely in the fluffy egg batter and lay it into the hot oil, frying for 1 to 1 1/2 minutes per side until the capeado is puffed and deeply golden brown. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate.

**4. Assemble and chill the dessert.**

Arrange the fried slices in a single layer in a deep ceramic casserole dish. Pour the warm spiced syrup and plump raisins entirely over the bread, then scatter the sliced almonds over the top. Cover and refrigerate for at least an hour, or overnight, to allow the bread to absorb the syrup.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Serve it cold.**

While highly edible warm, the authentic Yucatecan method is to eat these chilled straight from the fridge. The temperature drop transforms the texture from breakfast toast into a dense, luxurious pudding.

● **The sherry is optional but traditional.**

A splash of dry sherry added to the syrup off the heat provides an adult, complex flair typical of classic Yucatecan preparations.



# Dulce de Papaya Rápido con Queso de Bola

*dool-seh deh pah-pah-yah rah-pee-doh kon keh-soh deh boh-lah*

Real-deal Yucatecan grandmothers soak green papaya in caustic lime for a full day to coax out a magical, candied crunch. But if you're chasing that nostalgic bite on a Tuesday night after work, baking soda pulls off the exact same trick in thirty minutes. This dish is the ultimate cultural collision on a plate: ancient Mayan fruit, Spanish sugar syrup, and salty Dutch Edam cheese brought over on seventeenth-century trade ships. It sounds strange until you taste it—the sharp, funky saltiness of the cheese cuts right through the sweet, cinnamon-laced syrup like a knife.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 med</b>	green unripe papaya <i>about 2 1/2 to 3 lb, rock hard and entirely green</i>	<b>1 med</b>	Ceylon cinnamon stick
<b>2 tbsp</b>	baking soda	<b>5 small</b>	whole cloves
<b>8 oz</b>	piloncillo cone <i>or tightly packed dark brown sugar</i>	<b>2 tsp</b>	Mexican vanilla extract
<b>1 cup</b>	white sugar	<b>2 med</b>	fresh fig leaves <i>optional, or substitute 1 tsp orange blossom water</i>
<b>4 cup</b>	water <i>plus extra for soaking the fruit</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	Edam cheese <i>wax removed, cut into small cubes or coarsely grated, room temperature</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Bleed the papaya sap.**

Using a sharp knife, make a few shallow lengthwise slits down the green skin of the papaya and let it sit for 15 minutes. Milky white sap will bead up; wipe it away. This removes the bitter latex that can ruin the dessert.

- **Cut the fruit.**

Peel the papaya completely with a vegetable peeler. Cut it in half, scoop out the white seeds and inner membranes, and cut the flesh into 2-inch wide strips. Cut those strips into 2x3-inch triangles for the traditional Yucatecan shape.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Soak the papaya in an alkaline bath.**

Place the papaya triangles in a large bowl and dissolve the baking soda in enough water to completely submerge the fruit. Let it soak for 30 to 45 minutes to strengthen the pectin and ensure a crisp exterior.

- 2. Rinse the fruit thoroughly.**

Drain the papaya and rinse vigorously under cold running water for a full minute to remove any trace of the baking soda.

**1. Build the spiced syrup.**

In a heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, combine the piloncillo, white sugar, 4 cups of water, cinnamon stick, cloves, vanilla, and the fig leaves. Bring to a gentle boil over medium-high heat until the sugars dissolve.

**2. Simmer the papaya low and slow.**

Carefully add the rinsed papaya pieces to the boiling syrup. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover partially, and let it simmer for 90 minutes. Do not stir, or you risk breaking the fruit. It is ready when the pieces look translucent and glassy, and the liquid is a thick, honey-like syrup.

**3. Cool the fruit in its own syrup.**

Remove the pot from the heat. Let the papaya cool down entirely to room temperature in the syrup so it absorbs maximum flavor and crystallizes properly. Transfer to a glass jar and refrigerate until fully chilled.

**4. Serve with the cheese.**

Ladle the cold candied papaya into small bowls with plenty of spiced syrup. Garnish generously with the room-temperature Edam cheese.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Keep it passive.**

While a 90-minute simmer sounds long for a weeknight, it requires zero attention. Let it bubble on the stove while you eat dinner.

● **Sourcing the cheese.**

Gallo Azul is the gold standard brand in the Yucatán, but any red-wax Edam from an American supermarket deli will deliver the necessary salty punch to contrast the sweet syrup.



# Cremitas de Coco Bicolor

*kreh-MEE-tahs deh KOH-koh bee-koh-LOHR*

If you've ever walked the coastal plazas of Progreso on a humid summer night, you know the comforting weight of a cold cremita de coco sold from a vendor's cooler. It's a dense, cool relief against the suffocating Yucatán heat. Look online and you'll find too many knock-offs mistaking this velvety street sweet for a baked coconut bar or a cloying fudge. But a proper cremita is a patient, stovetop custard. This version skips the back-breaking labor of cracking whole coconuts by using canned milk, but it demands your absolute, undivided attention at the stove until the sweet pudding bubbles like glossy lava.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	unsweetened shredded coconut <i>rinsed under cold water for 30 seconds and squeezed dry</i>	<b>1 large</b>	Mexican cinnamon stick
<b>13 1/2 oz</b>	full-fat coconut milk <i>well shaken</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	coconut extract
<b>2 1/2 cup</b>	whole milk	<b>3/4 cup</b>	cornstarch
<b>1 cup</b>	refined white sugar	<b>1/2 cup</b>	cold water
		<b>3 drops</b>	pink gel food coloring
		<b>1 tbsp</b>	ground cinnamon <i>for dusting</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Wash the shredded coconut.**

Commercially packaged coconut contains anti-caking starches that will make the custard chalky and lumpy. Rinse it thoroughly in a fine-mesh sieve under cold water for 30 seconds and squeeze out the excess water before using.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Infuse the milk and coconut base.**

In a heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, combine the washed shredded coconut, coconut milk, whole milk, white sugar, and cinnamon stick until it reaches a gentle simmer, then let steep for 5 minutes.

- 2. Remove the cinnamon stick before it ruins the color.**

Use a slotted spoon to fish out and discard the cinnamon stick; leaving it in will quickly tint your pristine white milk a muddy brown.

- 3. Prepare the cornstarch slurry.**

In a small bowl, whisk the cornstarch into the cold water until completely smooth and entirely free of lumps.

**1. Incorporate the slurry and stir relentlessly.**

Lower the heat slightly and pour the slurry into the hot milk in a thin stream, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon or balloon whisk.

**2. Cook until the mixture hits the lava point.**

Do not walk away; keep scraping the bottom of the pot for 10 to 15 minutes until the whisk leaves visible trails and large, thick bubbles violently pop at the surface like hot lava.

**3. Pour the white layer and let it skin over.**

Pour two-thirds of the hot pudding into a lightly greased 8x8-inch glass dish or individual cups, tapping gently to level, and let sit at room temperature for 5 minutes.

**4. Tint the remaining pudding pink.**

Add the pink gel coloring to the pudding left in the pot, stirring vigorously until the color is a vibrant, solid pink without any streaks.

**5. Add the top layer and chill.**

Gently pour the hot pink mixture directly over the slightly-set white layer, cool on the counter for 30 minutes, then refrigerate for at least two hours before dusting heavily with ground cinnamon.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Refined sugar is non-negotiable.**

Raw or brown sugar will taint the stark white aesthetic of the bottom layer, which is the visual hallmark of a true cremita.

● **Use gel coloring, not liquid.**

Liquid food coloring introduces excess water that can thin out the final layer and compromise the dense, velvety set of the custard.



# Zapotitos de Pepita

*sah-poh-tee-tohs deh peh-pee-tah*

If you have ever walked the bustling plazas of Mérida during the weeks leading up to the Day of the Dead, you know the hypnotic pull of zapotitos. Centuries ago, Spanish nuns in the New World couldn't source the imported almonds needed for their traditional marzipan. They looked to the native Maya fields instead, using abundant squash seeds to create an earthy, melt-in-the-mouth confection that frankly eclipses its European ancestor. The old ways required soaking whole seeds in wood ash and drying them under the blinding sun for days. For the modern diaspora cook, reproducing this exact flavor in an American suburb relies on three non-negotiable rules: buy raw seeds,

pulse them carefully so they don't turn to butter, and be incredibly stingy with the water in your syrup. It is a brilliant, humble candy that instantly transports you to a warm evening in the Yucatán.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	raw unsalted hulled pumpkin seeds	<b>1 1/4 cup</b>	water
		<b>1 tsp</b>	pure vanilla extract
<b>3 1/2 cup</b>	granulated white sugar	<b>1/4 cup</b>	ground cinnamon

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare your cooling station before boiling the sugar.**

Sugar work waits for no one. Have a sheet of parchment paper and a slightly damp paper towel ready on the counter so you can immediately turn out the hot dough.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Grind the seeds into a fine powder without turning them to butter.**

Working in three small batches, pulse the raw seeds in a food processor in two-second bursts. Do not let the machine run continuously, or the natural oils will release and ruin the texture. Pass the powder through a fine-mesh sieve, returning any large pieces to the processor to pulse again.

- 2. Hydrate the sugar with absolute exactness.**

In a heavy saucepan, add the sugar and pour the water over it very slowly. Stop the moment the water barely covers the sugar line—too much water yields a runny mess that will never hold its shape. Stir in the vanilla and place over medium-low heat until completely dissolved.

**1. Boil the syrup to the soft-ball stage.**

Raise the heat to medium and let the syrup boil without stirring for 10 to 15 minutes. You are looking for the consistency of warm honey, where the syrup falls from a spoon in a thick, slow thread. If using a candy thermometer, look for exactly 235°F.

**2. Vigorously integrate the seed powder.**

Drop the heat to its absolute lowest setting. Add all the sifted pumpkin seed powder at once and stir vigorously with a heavy wooden spoon. Keep beating until the mixture thickens into a heavy paste and cleanly pulls away from the bottom and sides of the pot.

**3. Cool and knead the dough.**

Scrape the dangerously hot dough onto a piece of parchment paper. Cover it lightly with a damp paper towel so it doesn't dry out and form a hard crust. Once it cools enough to handle but remains wonderfully warm, lightly grease your hands with neutral oil and knead until it feels like smooth, pliable clay.

**4. Shape and coat the zapotitos.**

Pinch off pieces of the warm dough and roll them between your palms into balls the size of a walnut. While still slightly warm and tacky, roll them generously in the ground cinnamon until fully coated.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Never use roasted or salted pumpkin seeds.**

Roasting alters the lipid structure of the seed, imparting a savory flavor that clashes violently with the delicate sweetness of the marzipan. Look for raw "pepita verde cruda" at local Latin markets or in bulk bins.

● **The miniature fruit variation.**

If you want to recreate the colorful altar offerings of Tekax, skip the cinnamon. Divide the kneaded dough, tint with a drop of gel food coloring, and sculpt into tiny apples, pears, or carrots, using a whole clove pushed into the top to look like a realistic fruit stem.



# Atropellado Rápido de Camote y Coco

*ah-tro-peh-YAH-doh deh kah-MOH-teh ee KOH-koh*

If you've ever wandered the humid evening air of Mérida's Plaza Grande, you know the intoxicating aroma of the sweets carts. Between the sizzling marquesitas lies atropellado—a humble, intensely comforting paste born of indigenous sweet potatoes and coastal coconut, violently mashed into sweet surrender. In the homeland, making this is an afternoon-long affair of boiling whole potatoes and scraping fresh coconut shells, but grandmas are practical women. This weeknight adaptation cuts the time by a fraction without losing an

ounce of soul. It trades heavy labor for accessible pantry staples while delivering the exact same sticky, floral sweetness that demands to be eaten with a tiny spoon alongside black coffee.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	white-fleshed or purple sweet potatoes <i>peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	coconut milk
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	granulated white sugar
<b>1 med</b>	cinnamon stick	<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 cup</b>	unsweetened shredded coconut	<b>1 pinch</b>	ground cinnamon

## PREPARATION

- **Tenderize the coconut.**

In a small bowl, combine the shredded coconut and the coconut milk, letting it sit to restore the chewy, rich texture of fresh grated coconut without the hassle of cracking a shell.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the sweet potatoes until perfectly tender.**

Place the cubed sweet potatoes and cinnamon stick in a medium saucepan, add just enough water to barely cover, and boil covered over medium-high heat for 10 to 12 minutes until effortlessly pierced with a fork.

- 2. Drain and aggressively mash the sweet potatoes.**

Discard the water, leaving the cinnamon stick in the pot for now. Return the potatoes to the warm pot and mash them violently with a potato masher until no large lumps remain.

**1. Reduce the paste over medium-low heat.**

Remove the cinnamon stick, turn the heat to medium-low, and fold in the rehydrated coconut, sugar, and salt. Cook for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the mixture thickens, turns glossy, and pulls away cleanly from the bottom and sides of the pot.

**2. Chill slightly and serve with a dusting of cinnamon.**

Transfer to a serving bowl or individual ramekins, dust lightly with ground cinnamon, and serve warm or at room temperature.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Use the right sweet potato.**

Seek out white-fleshed (boniato) or purple sweet potatoes at your local Latin or Asian market; they possess a denser, starchier texture and a more floral sweetness than the watery orange ones found at standard American supermarkets.

● **Form into bites for later.**

If you want to impress the kids, let the paste cool completely in the fridge, then roll it between your palms to form bite-sized bolitas de coco y camote.



# Arroz con Leche Yucateco

*ah-ROHS kohn LEH-cheh yoo-kah-TEH-koh*

When the damp winter chill—what locals call 'la heladez'—creeps across the Yucatán peninsula, families huddle around steaming bowls of this. Forget the generic stuff; the grandmother's secret here is a sharp, fragrant infusion of local sour orange leaves. To get that exact, haunting aroma from a standard American supermarket run, we strip the zest from a navel orange and a lemon. Factor in the mid-century pantry staple of canned milks, and you've got a luxuriously creamy, deeply nostalgic bowl of comfort that doesn't require standing over a hot stove for three hours.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 cup</b>	medium-grain white rice <i>rinsed well until water runs clear</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>3 cup</b>	water	<b>12 oz</b>	evaporated milk
<b>1 large</b>	Ceylon cinnamon stick	<b>14 oz</b>	sweetened condensed milk
<b>1 med</b>	navel orange <i>zest cut into a 2-inch wide strip, pith removed</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	whole milk
<b>1 med</b>	lemon <i>zest cut into a 2-inch wide strip, pith removed</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	pure vanilla extract
		<b>1 tbsp</b>	ground cinnamon <i>for dusting</i>
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	raisins

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Wash the rice thoroughly.

You want this pudding creamy, not gummy. Rinsing away the excess surface starch is non-negotiable.

### 2. Simmer the aromatics to soften the grains.

In a heavy pot, combine the rinsed rice, water, cinnamon stick, citrus strips, and salt. Bring to a boil, cover, and simmer low for 15 to 20 minutes until the water is absorbed. Cooking the rice in water first ensures the grains soften; boiling it in milk and sugar from the start leaves you with a crunchy, ruined core.

### 3. Stir in the tres leches blend.

Once the rice is swollen and soft, pour in the evaporated, condensed, and whole milks. Scrape the bottom of the pot to free any stuck grains, and toss in the raisins if you are using them.

### 4. Reduce the pudding gently.

Simmer uncovered over medium-low for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring frequently so the milk doesn't scorch. Pull the pot off the heat while it still looks a little too loose—it will thicken drastically as it cools.

**1. Finish with a hit of vanilla.**

Fish out and discard the cinnamon stick and citrus strips, then stir in the vanilla extract off the heat to preserve its volatile aromatics.

**2. Rest and serve warm or chilled.**

Let the pot sit for at least 15 minutes. Serve straight away with a heavy dusting of ground cinnamon, or stash it in the fridge to eat cold on a hot night.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Adjusting leftover consistency.**

As the pudding chills in the fridge, it will solidify into a dense block. Simply stir a splash of cold whole milk into your leftover bowl to restore its luxurious, creamy texture.



# Pastas de Guayaba de Sartén

*pahs-tahs deh gwah-yah-bah deh sahr-tehn*

Growing up, the smell of boiling guavas was the universal bat-signal that grandma was in the kitchen and something incredible was about to happen. In the plazas of Mérida, wandering vendors sell these glowing ruby jewels, but at home, they are an act of love. Yes, you have to stand at the stove and stir. Yes, the molten fruit will try to splatter you. But the reward is a dense, floral, unapologetically sweet paste that commercial brands can never replicate. By ditching the traditional massive copper pot for a wide non-stick skillet, evaporation time is cut in half, turning an arduous weekend project into a weeknight miracle.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	fresh guavas <i>washed, stems trimmed, and unpeeled</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>3 cup</b>	water	<b>8 oz</b>	Edam cheese <i>sliced, for serving</i>
<b>2 cup</b>	granulated sugar		

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare your mold.**

Line a shallow rectangular dish or small baking sheet with wax paper or plastic wrap so the sticky paste can be easily lifted out once set.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the whole guavas.**

Place the unpeeled guavas in a large pot, cover with the water, and bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce and simmer until completely tender, about 20 to 30 minutes.

- 2. Pulse gently, do not puree.**

Transfer the softened guavas to a blender with a splash of the cooking water and pulse just enough to separate the flesh from the rock-hard seeds without pulverizing them into gritty sand.

- 3. Aggressively strain the pulp.**

Pass the mixture through a fine-mesh strainer into a bowl, using a silicone spatula to force the pectin-rich pulp through while leaving the seeds behind to discard; measure out about 2 cups of puree.

- 4. Combine and cook in a skillet.**

Pour the puree and an equal measure of sugar into a wide, heavy-bottomed non-stick skillet over medium-low heat, stirring until dissolved, then add the lime juice once it bubbles.

**1. Stir the molten lava.**

Cook the mixture, stirring constantly with a long-handled wooden spoon to prevent burning and avoid splatters, for 30 to 45 minutes until it darkens to a deep ruby-amber.

**2. Look for the bottom of the pan.**

You will know it is done when dragging your spoon across the bottom of the skillet leaves a clear, dry path that does not immediately fill back in.

**3. Set and chill.**

Pour the hot paste into your lined dish, spreading it into an even 1-inch layer, and allow it to cool completely before refrigerating overnight to set up fully.

**4. Serve the sobremesa.**

Lift the firm paste out, slice it into thick strips, and serve immediately alongside slices of salty Edam cheese.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not peel the guavas.**

The natural pectin lives almost entirely in the skin; skipping this means your paste will never set properly without artificial help.

● **The skillet hack.**

A wide skillet exponentially increases surface area compared to a deep pot, accelerating water evaporation and turning a multi-hour chore into a 45-minute process.

● **The mandatory cheese pairing.**

Yucatecan sweets rely on contrasting flavors; eating this intensely sweet, floral paste without the salty, nutty bite of Queso de Bola (Edam) misses the point entirely.