

Oaxacan

Roots



Recipes with love from

The Robot Book Club

Oaxacan Roots

*Authentic Home Cooking and Heirloom Recipes from the
Heart of Mexico*

The Robot Book Club

Copyright © 2026 Edward Benson

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Published by The Robot Book Club

Table of Contents

Mañanas en la Cocina: Breakfasts & Morning Rhythms

Antojitos & The Masa Life: Street Food at Home

La Comida de Domingo: The Weekly Family Gathering

El Arte de los Moles: Demystifying the Sauces

Tamales en Hoja de Plátano: The Ritual of Wrapping

Preface

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

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

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

— Ted Benson

Prologue

It begins, as all true stories do, with an undeniable call. A memory of smoke, of chiles toasted just so, of masa pressed between warm hands. This is the flavor of Oaxaca, an ancestral whisper across borders and generations, a culinary DNA that clings stubbornly to the soul.

For those who grew up far from the central valleys, perhaps in a quiet Ohio suburb or a sunbaked Arizona town, that echo can be both a fierce comfort and a quiet ache. A yearning to recreate the *memelas* of a grandmother's morning, the bustling, communal symphony of a Sunday *comida*, the unctuous depth of a true *mole*. To taste home, truly, deeply, without compromise or apology for its complexity.

Forget the sanitized versions. This isn't that book. No "Mexican pizza," no generic "southwest" spice blends. Here, a *tlayuda* is a *tlayuda*, an *empanada de amarillo* is precisely what it is – a delicate, *hoja santa*-infused alchemy, honest and direct, not a watered-down translation for the uninitiated.

This is an homage to ingenuity. To the cooks who, for centuries, transformed heirloom corn, indigenous chiles, and regional herbs into a gastronomic universe that would eventually earn UNESCO recognition. And to those who, with unwavering resourcefulness, then adapted it: when the clay *comal* became cast iron, when the *metate* gave way to the steel blades of a food processor. The essential *asiento*,

rendered in a familiar kitchen. The elusive *chilhuacle negro*, approximated with passion and precision. The soul remains, unflinching and intact, even if the tools have shifted.

These pages hold the rhythms: the soft, insistent whisper of masa in the morning, shaped into *tetelas* or *memelas*; the vibrant, market-stall energy of street-side *antojitos* like *molotes* or *esquites con chapulines*; the patient, layered magic of a proper *mole* for Sunday dinner, from *negro* to *amarillo*. It's a practical roadmap back to the flavors etched into the collective memory, a working kitchen inheritance for those ready to claim it. No fuss. Just the food, the stories, and the roots.

This is Oaxacan Roots. Dig in.



Mañanas en la Cocina: Breakfasts & Morning Rhythms

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

Long before the sun demands your attention, the comal is already awake. There is a specific, unmistakable alchemy to a Oaxacan morning: the sharp, earthy scent of toasted masa hitting hot metal, the rich sputter of rendered asiento, the frantic wooden clatter of a molinillo coaxing foam from a clay pitcher. These are not the hurried,

dashboard breakfasts of the modern commute. These are rituals of sustenance, muscle memories passed down to the hands now pressing dough on a quiet Sunday morning.

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





Authentic Memelas con Asiento y Quesillo

meh-MEH-lahs kohn ah-SYEHN-toh ee keh-SEE-yoh

WALK THE LABYRINTHINE AISLES OF OAXACA'S CENTRAL DE Abastos market on any given morning, and the air hangs thick with the intoxicating smells of roasting corn and rendering pork fat. This is the domain of the memela, an ancient, elegant masa cake toasted on a dry griddle, lightly pinched around the edges, and painted with the most deeply savory ingredients imaginable. The secret to that undeniable, close-your-eyes-and-sigh Oaxacan flavor is asiento—the

KITCHEN ON A TUESDAY, WE EMPLOY AN ABUELA'S TRICK: blending pure lard with crushed chicharrón. Keep it simple. You press the masa, you toast it, you pinch it, you smear it.

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup	pork lard	1 cup	black refried beans
1/4 cup	pork cracklings <i>finely crushed into a powder</i>	1 1/2 cup	Quesillo or Oaxaca cheese <i>shredded</i>
2 cup	masa harina	1/2 cup	roasted red salsa
1 1/2 cup	warm water	1/2 med	white onion <i>finely diced</i>
1/2 tsp	fine sea salt	1/4 cup	cilantro <i>chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Create the cheat's asiento.**

Aggressively mix the pork lard with the crushed chicharrón dust in a small bowl until it forms a gritty, spreadable paste to recreate the rustic flavor of a traditional Oaxacan butcher shop.

- **Hydrate the masa.**

Combine the masa harina and salt in a large mixing bowl, then gradually stream in the warm water while kneading with your hands until the dough takes on the texture of fresh, soft play-dough.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 **Preheat the griddle.**

Place a large cast-iron skillet, flat griddle, or comal over medium-high heat until it is hot but not quite smoking.

1 Press the memelas.

Divide the masa into 8 to 10 golf-ball-sized spheres and gently press each one in a plastic-lined tortilla press into a disk about 5 inches across and nearly 1/4-inch thick.

2 Toast on the dry comal.

Peel the plastic away, gently lay the masa disk onto the hot griddle for 45 to 60 seconds until the bottom releases easily and shows light brown spots, then flip and toast the other side.

3 Pinch the edges.

Remove the hot memela to a cutting board and immediately use your thumb and index finger to quickly pinch a tiny lip around the very edge, adding a couple of small pinches in the center to create craters for the fat.

4 Layer the flavor on the heat.

Return the pinched memelas to the griddle over medium-low heat, immediately smearing a half teaspoon of the asiento paste across the surface, followed by a thin layer of black beans and a generous handful of shredded Quesillo.

5 Crisp and melt.

Let the memela sit on the heat for 1 to 2 minutes until the bottom gets incredibly crispy, the pork fat sizzles into the corn, and the cheese melts into a gooey blanket.

6 Garnish and serve.

Transfer the memelas to a plate, spoon over the smoky salsa, scatter with diced white onion and cilantro, and eat immediately while the masa is hot and crunchy.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Adjusting the masa hydration.**

Ambient humidity affects the flour. If the dough cracks easily when you press it, knead in a splash more water; if it sticks to your fingers, dust it with a little more dry masa harina.

- **Finding the right cheese substitute.**

If you cannot source real Quesillo, low-moisture mozzarella or unaged Monterey Jack are the best pragmatic alternatives to replicate that crucial, creamy, meltable texture.

- **The secret of the salsa.**

Doña Vale's famous market salsa is never boiled. To truly capture the spirit of Oaxaca, dry-roast your tomatoes and garlic on a hot cast iron until deeply blistered and blackened before blending.



Black Bean and Quesillo Tetelas

teh-TEH-lahs meesh-TEH-kahs reh-YEH-nahs deh free-HOLE ee keh-SEE-yoh

TO KNOW THE MORNING AIR OF OAXACA'S MIXTECA REGION, one only needs to smell toasting avocado leaves. Tetelas are brilliant, geometric pockets of masa engineered centuries ago to carry rich black beans and melted string cheese into the fields without leaking. The dish relies entirely on a few deeply traditional components: fresh masa, rich pork lard, and the irreplaceable anise aroma of the Mexican avocado leaf. By preparing the authentic bean paste over the weekend, forming these blistered, savory triangles becomes an effortless, soul-warming weeknight revelation.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp	pork lard	1/4 cup	chicken broth
1/4 cup	white onion <i>finely diced</i>	2 cup	premium masa harina
1 large clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
3 med	dried avocado leaves	1 3/4 cup	warm water
1 1/2 cup	cooked black beans <i>rinsed and drained if using canned</i>	1 1/2 cup	Quesillo or Oaxaca cheese <i>shredded</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1** **Toast the avocado leaves in a dry skillet over medium heat for a few seconds until highly fragrant.**

Remove them from the heat the moment they release their aroma and crumble them into a blender.

- 2** **Sauté the onion and garlic in melted lard until soft, then puree with the beans and toasted leaves.**

Melt the lard in the same skillet, cook the aromatics for about five minutes, then transfer to the blender with the black beans and a small splash of broth to blend until smooth.

- 3** **Fry the bean puree over medium-low heat until reduced to a thick, spreadable paste.**

Return the beans to the skillet and stir constantly until they are thick enough to spread like peanut butter; they must be completely cool before filling the masa.

- 1 Knead the masa harina, salt, and warm water together in a large bowl until a pliable dough forms.**

Mix with your hands until the dough feels like soft clay; if you press your thumb into a small ball and the edges crack deeply, work in another tablespoon of water.

- 2 Press a golf-ball-sized piece of dough between two sheets of plastic to form a six-inch circle.**

Use a heavy tortilla press to flatten the masa slightly thicker than a standard taco tortilla.

- 3 Spoon the cooled bean paste and a pinch of shredded cheese into the center of the masa.**

Remove the top layer of plastic but leave the bottom sheet, adding no more than a tablespoon and a half of beans to ensure the pocket can completely seal.

- 4 Fold the masa inward from three sides to create a sealed, equilateral triangle.**

Using the bottom plastic sheet to help lift the delicate dough, fold the left third inward over the filling, overlap with the right third, and fold the bottom flap upwards, gently patting the seams flat.

- 5 Dry-roast the tetelas on a hot cast-iron skillet or comal until the masa is toasted and opaque.**

Cook the pockets seam-side down first to lock the folds in place, allowing two to three minutes per side to develop rustic, charred spots.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing true Mexican avocado leaves is non-negotiable for authentic flavor.**

The unique estragole compounds in the dried leaves provide the signature anise-like aroma that defines Oaxacan cooking; substituting with garlic or cumin will fundamentally alter the dish.

- **Rely on pork lard for structurally sound, flavorful beans.**

Refrying the beans in manteca emulsifies the starches and drives off excess moisture, ensuring the paste won't steam and burst through the delicate masa on the skillet.



Antojitos & The Masa Life: Street Food at Home

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

There is a specific, urgent kind of hunger that only hits after the sun drops over Oaxaca, when the streetlamps hum and the air goes thick with the smell of toasted corn and rendering pork fat. It's a craving for the blistered edges of a tlayuda, the golden, oil-slicked crunch of a molote, the sharp, salty snap of chapulines hitting a steaming cup of esquites. You don't need a rusted street cart or a

plane ticket to chase that feeling down. You just need a decent neighborhood Latin market, a hot cast-iron pan, and the willingness to get your hands dusted in masa.

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





Tlayudas de la Calle

tlah-YOO-dahs

A TRUE TLAYUDA ISN'T SOME GLORIFIED MEXICAN PIZZA. IT is a masterpiece of Oaxacan street culture built on unapologetic fat and deeply infused beans. The secret to making this taste exactly like a smoky night out in the Mercado 20 de Noviembre lies in two uncompromisable foundations: the deeply savory bite of roasted pork fat, known as asiento, and the anise-scented whisper of avocado leaves in the beans. Folded on a hot grill until the quesillo weeps and the massive tortilla blisters, this is street food undiluted and fiercely authentic, brought directly into your own kitchen on a Tuesday night.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp	lard or neutral oil	1 lb	tasajo or cooked Mexican chorizo <i>thinly sliced and seared</i>
1/2 med	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	2 cup	green cabbage <i>finely shredded</i>
2 small clove	garlic <i>smashed</i>	2 large	avocado <i>sliced</i>
2 15-oz can	canned whole black beans <i>undrained</i>	1 med	roma tomato <i>thinly sliced</i>
3 med	dried avocado leaves <i>lightly toasted in a dry skillet for 10 seconds</i>	4 med	radish <i>thinly sliced</i>
4 large	imported tlayuda shells	1/2 cup	fresh cilantro or chepiche <i>leaves picked</i>
1/4 cup	asiento	1/2 cup	salsa
1 lb	quesillo <i>pulled apart into thin strings</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Recreate the asiento.**

If authentic Oaxacan asiento is unavailable at your local *carnicería*, blend 3 tablespoons of high-quality lard with 1 tablespoon of finely crushed pork rinds and a pinch of salt to replicate the intense, roasted pork flavor.

- **Substitute the avocado leaves.**

If you cannot find dried Oaxacan avocado leaves, you can mimic their native anise-like aroma by adding 1/4 teaspoon of crushed anise seed and 1 dried bay leaf to the beans as they simmer.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 **Infuse and puree the black bean paste.**

Heat the lard in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Sauté the onion and garlic until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Pour in the undrained black beans and toasted avocado leaves, simmering for 10 minutes. Remove the leaves, puree the mixture until smooth with a blender, and cook over low heat until it thickens into a spreadable paste.

2 **Toast the tlayuda shell.**

Preheat an outdoor grill to medium-high or place the tlayuda shell directly on the middle rack of a 400°F oven. Let it heat just until it begins to toast and becomes slightly pliable before it hardens.

3 **Build the savory foundation.**

Working quickly while the shell is hot on the heat source, smear about 1 tablespoon of the asiento evenly across the entire surface, taking it all the way to the edges. Follow this with a generous, even layer of the warm black bean paste.

4 **Layer the fillings.**

Scatter a handful of the stringed quesillo evenly over the warm beans, followed by a handful of shredded cabbage and your hot seared tasajo or cooked chorizo.

5 **Fold and crisp the tlayuda.**

Once the cheese begins to soften and the bottom of the tlayuda is deeply toasted and fragrant, use tongs to fold it in half into a massive half-moon. Press down gently with a spatula, letting it sit for a minute per side to fully melt the cheese and marry the flavors.

1 Garnish and serve immediately.

Remove the folded tlayuda from the heat and gently open it just enough to stuff with fresh avocado slices, tomato, radishes, and cilantro. Serve piping hot with spicy salsa and lime wedges on the side.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The Street-Cart Fold.**

While open-faced tlayudas look beautiful and abundant for tourists, nocturnal street carts serve them folded (doblada). It is deeply favored by locals because it captures the heat perfectly to gratin the quesillo while keeping the massive, crispy tortilla manageable to eat by hand.



Empanadas de Amarillo con Pollo y Hoja Santa

FOR THOSE WHO GREW UP IN MEXICAN HOUSEHOLDS IN THE States, the scent of toasted corn masa on a hot comal is the definitive aroma of home. In Oaxaca, an empanada isn't a baked pastry pocket—it is a massive, hand-pressed corn tortilla cooked to a blistered crisp right on the griddle. Stuffed with tender shredded chicken, the complex anise notes of Hoja Santa, and a vibrant yellow mole thickened unapologetically with corn masa, this is a cornerstone of the masa life. It is engineered to ooze, caramelize on the cast iron, and transport you straight to the Central Valleys, perfectly adapted for a Wednesday night without losing an ounce of its soul.

INGREDIENTS

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

PREPARATION

- **Make the mole on a Sunday to save your sanity on a weeknight.**
The mole actually improves in flavor as it sits in the fridge, leaving only the masa mixing, pressing, and cooking for a Wednesday night.
- **Use a store-bought rotisserie chicken to drastically reduce your prep time.**
Shredding a high-quality cooked bird allows you to skip poaching and focus entirely on mastering the masa and the comal.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Roast the aromatics on a dry, hot cast-iron skillet.

Lay the tomatoes, tomatillos, onion wedges, and unpeeled garlic on the skillet until soft and blistered, peeling the garlic once cool enough to handle.

2 Toast the dried chiles and whole spices to wake up their essential oils.

Press the guajillo and ancho chiles flat in the skillet for 10 to 15 seconds per side until fragrant, then soak in hot water for 15 minutes; briefly toss the whole spices in the hot pan.

3 Blend the soaked chiles, roasted vegetables, and spices into a smooth puree.

Combine them in a blender with one cup of the chicken broth, processing on high until perfectly silky.

4 Fry the chile puree in hot lard to deepen its flavor and color.

Heat the lard in a pot over medium heat, pour in the puree to let it sizzle and fry for five minutes, then stir in the remaining two cups of chicken broth and bring to a simmer.

5 Whisk together the masa slurry and stir it into the simmering mole.

Whisk a quarter cup of masa harina with a half cup of warm broth until completely smooth, then slowly stream it into the mole to thicken it into a velvety gravy before simmering for 15 minutes.

- 1 Knead the remaining masa harina, salt, and warm water into a soft dough.**

Slowly mix the liquid into the masa, kneading for three to five minutes to activate the starches until the dough feels like soft Play-Doh, then divide into golf-ball-sized portions.

- 2 Press the masa into an oval and lightly cook one side on the hot comal.**

Using a plastic-lined tortilla press, flatten a masa ball into a thin six-inch oval, lay it on a preheated cast-iron skillet, and flip it after exactly 30 seconds when the edges begin to dry.

- 3 Fill the empanada with the mole, chicken, and herbs directly on the skillet.**

Spread a spoonful of the thick yellow mole on one half of the tortilla, top with shredded chicken and a torn piece of Hoja Santa or cilantro, then fold the empty half over and press the edges to seal.

- 4 Cook the folded empanada until the masa is fully cooked and charred in spots.**

Let it crisp on the skillet for four to five minutes per side, allowing the mole to slightly breach the seal and caramelize beautifully on the cast iron.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The masa slurry is the crucial abuela secret to a proper yellow mole.** Thickening the mole with corn masa transforms it into a rich gravy that stays trapped inside the empanada without making the dough soggy.

- **Do not use dried Hoja Santa under any circumstances.**

Dried leaves taste like dust and lose all their volatile oils; if you cannot find fresh Hoja Santa, a generous handful of fresh cilantro is completely authentic and widely used in Oaxaca.



La Comida de Domingo: The Weekly Family Gathering

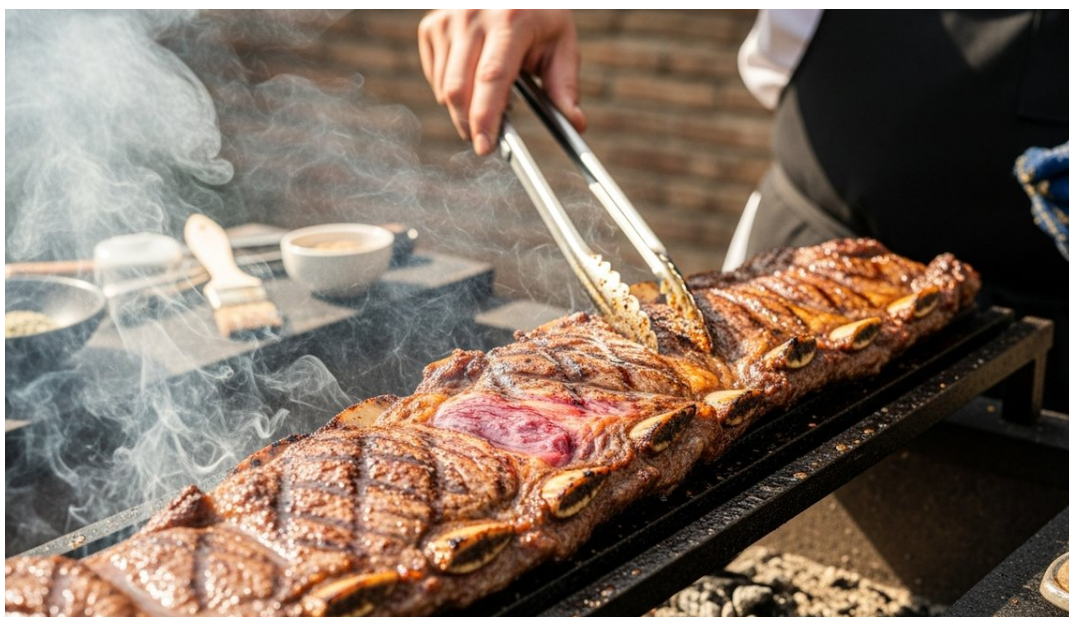
Hearty proteins, grilled meats, and vibrant sides recreating the magic of the traditional Sunday feast and the Pasillo de Humo.

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

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

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





El Asado

IF YOU'VE EVER WALKED INTO MERCADO 20 DE NOVIEMBRE IN Oaxaca, you know the smell before you see the smoke. The Pasillo de Humo is a loud, chaotic, and beautiful gauntlet of butchers grilling thin, salted beef and vibrant adobo-marinated pork over open charcoal pits. It is arguably the greatest meat-eater's experience on earth. Recreating this thousands of miles away isn't about building an indoor fire pit; it's about respecting the foundation. We use the fridge to replicate the dry, curing winds of Oaxaca for the salted beef, and we lean into a canonical, unpretentious guajillo adobo for the pork. Keep the sides simple: grilled spring onions, a blistered salsa, and hot tortillas. This is what home tastes like.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	thinly sliced beef <i>pounded to 1/8-inch thickness</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt
1 1/2 tbsp	coarse kosher salt	4 med	Anaheim peppers
1 lb	thinly sliced pork leg or loin <i>pounded to 1/8-inch thickness</i>	1 small	serrano pepper
6 med	dried guajillo chiles <i>wiped clean, stems and seeds removed</i>	3 med	Roma tomatoes
3 small	garlic <i>peeled</i>	1 thick slice	white onion
3 tbsp	apple cider vinegar	1 large	garlic <i>unpeeled</i>
1/2 tsp	dried Mexican oregano	1 bunch	scallions <i>roots trimmed</i>
1/4 tsp	ground cumin	1/2 lb	Mexican chorizo
2 small	whole cloves	12 med	corn tortillas
1/2 inch	Mexican cinnamon stick	2 med	limes <i>halved</i>
3 small	whole black peppercorns	4 med	radishes <i>sliced</i>

PREPARATION

- **Cure the tasajo.**

Lay the thin slices of beef on a cutting board and sprinkle both sides evenly with the coarse kosher salt. Place a wire cooling rack over a baking sheet, lay the salted beef flat in a single layer, and refrigerate uncovered for 12 to 24 hours. The circulating air simulates the Oaxacan air-drying process.

- **Blend the adobo paste.**

Heat a dry cast-iron skillet over medium heat. Lightly toast the guajillo chiles for about 10 seconds per side until fragrant. Transfer to a bowl, cover with boiling water, and soak for 15 minutes. Drain and blend the chiles with the peeled garlic, vinegar, oregano, cumin, cloves, cinnamon, peppercorns, and 1 tsp kosher salt until you achieve a thick, smooth paste.

- **Marinate the cecina.**

Coat the thin slices of pork entirely in the adobo paste. Layer them in a glass container, cover, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, or ideally overnight.

- **Blister the salsa.**

Heat a dry skillet over medium-high heat. Char the Anaheim peppers, serrano, whole tomatoes, onion slice, and unpeeled garlic until blackened in spots and soft. Peel the garlic, then grind everything in a molcajete or pulse briefly in a food processor with coarse salt into a rustic, slightly chunky salsa.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 **Fire up the skillet.**

Open your windows. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over high heat until smoking lightly, then add a minimal brush of high-heat oil.

- 2 **Char the sides.**

Blister the scallions in the skillet until charred and soft, then set aside. In the same pan, cook the chorizo links until cooked through, then remove and slice.

1 Sear the tasajo.

Remove the beef from the fridge. Sear it in the smoking hot skillet for exactly 60 to 90 seconds per side. It is so thin it will cook almost instantly. Remove to a cutting board.

2 Sear the cecina.

Sear the adobo-coated pork in the hot skillet. The sugars in the chiles will char quickly, giving you authentic blackened edges. Cook for about 2 minutes per side.

3 Assemble the platter.

Slice the tasajo and cecina into wide strips. Arrange them on a massive board alongside the sliced chorizo and charred scallions. Serve immediately with hot tortillas, the blistered salsa, radishes, and lime.

CHEF'S NOTES

• **The right cuts of meat make all the difference.**

Ask your local Latin butcher for 'milanesa' cut beef and pork. If you're shopping at a standard American supermarket, ask for thinly sliced sirloin tip and thin pork chops, then pound them down to 1/8-inch thickness at home.

• **Substituting the elusive chile de agua.**

True Oaxacan chile de agua is virtually impossible to source fresh in the States. The Anaheim pepper is the closest botanical and flavor substitute—roasting it alongside a serrano perfectly mimics the tang, fleshiness, and necessary heat of the original.



Chiles de Agua Rellenos de Picadillo

IN THE BUSTLING MARKETS OF OAXACA, ABUELAS BLISTER slender chiles de agua over open flames, stuffing them with a luxurious, sweet-and-savory picadillo for the canonical Sunday family meal. Unless you live next to a specialty grower, you won't find fresh chiles de agua in the States, but the Anaheim pepper steps in perfectly to mimic their shape, flesh, and heat. This is a dish of love, blending caramelized plantains, raisins, and warm spices with savory meat, all wrapped in a cloud-like egg batter. Make the filling days in advance, so when Sunday rolls around, all you have to do is stuff, batter, and fry.

INGREDIENTS

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

PREPARATION

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

The filling tastes exponentially better the next day as the complex spices and fruits meld. Prepare it up to three days in advance and keep it in the fridge.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Caramelize the plantains.**
Heat two tablespoons of oil in a large skillet over medium heat, adding the diced plantains and frying until deeply golden to release their essential sugars.

1 Build the picadillo base.

Add the onion and garlic, sautéing until translucent, then increase the heat and brown the ground meat.

2 Simmer the sweet and savory filling.

Stir in the tomatoes, raisins, almonds, olives, oregano, cinnamon, and cloves, simmering for 15 to 20 minutes until the juices evaporate and the filling is thick.

3 Let the picadillo cool completely.

Hot filling will make the peppers soggy and ruin the fry, so let the mixture cool entirely before moving forward.

4 Blister the peppers over an open flame.

Place the Anaheim peppers directly over a gas burner or under a broiler, rotating until the waxy skin is completely blackened without overcooking the flesh.

5 Sweat and peel the peppers.

Transfer the blackened peppers to a sealed plastic bag for 10 minutes, then gently scrape off the skin with your fingers—never rinse them, or you'll wash away the smoky flavor.

6 Seed and stuff the chiles.

Make a single lengthwise slit down each pepper, carefully scrape out the seeds and veins while leaving the stem intact, and pack plumply with the cooled picadillo.

7 Dredge the stuffed chiles in flour.

Pat the peppers completely dry with a paper towel, then roll them in flour, shaking off the excess so the egg batter has a dry surface to cling to.

1 Whip the capeado batter.

Beat the egg whites with a pinch of salt until they hold stiff peaks, then gently fold in the yolks one at a time just until the batter is uniformly pale yellow.

2 Fry until deeply golden.

Heat 1 1/2 inches of oil in a deep skillet to 350°F, dunk each floured pepper into the batter to seal the slit, and fry for 1 to 2 minutes per side.

CHEF'S NOTES

• **The naked weeknight hack.**

Love the taste but lack the time to whip egg whites on a Tuesday? Skip the flour and batter entirely. Place the stuffed peppers in a baking dish, bury them in shredded Oaxaca or mozzarella cheese, and bake at 400°F for 15 minutes.



El Arte de los Moles: Demystifying the Sauces

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

Mole isn't just a sauce; it's an architecture. For too long, it's been sold as some mystical, impenetrable alchemy requiring a dizzying roster of ingredients and three days of your life. And sure, a proper, midnight-dark Mole Negro demands respect and a free weekend. But the working matriarchs of Oaxaca are nothing if not

practical, and cooking in the diaspora requires adaptation. This isn't about cutting corners or whitewashing the heat. It's about understanding the foundation well enough to make it work for you.

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





Enmoladas de Pollo Oaxaqueñas

en-mo-lah-das de po-yo wa-ha-ken-yas

MOLE IS THE UNDISPUTED KING OF OAXACAN CUISINE—A beautiful, complex beast of a sauce that usually demands days of roasting and grinding to perfect. But let's be brutally honest about how a working mother gets dinner on the table on a Tuesday. She doesn't grind thirty ingredients on a metate; she goes to the market, buys a kilo of fresh mole paste, and works her magic to wake it up. By aggressively frying a commercial paste, thinning it with real broth, and melting in a wedge of Mexican chocolate, you can hack your way to profoundly authentic flavor in twenty minutes. Paired with a store-

BOUGHT ROTISSERIE CHICKEN AND A QUICK, MANDATORY OIL bath for the tortillas, this is uncompromising, honest-to-god homeland comfort food on a weeknight schedule.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp	neutral oil or pork lard	3 cup	cooked chicken <i>shredded and warmed</i>
8 1/4 oz	mole paste	1/2 cup	Queso Fresco <i>crumbled</i>
3 cup	chicken broth <i>warmed</i>	1/4 cup	Crema Mexicana
15 g	Mexican table chocolate	1/2 small	white or red onion <i>sliced into very thin rings</i>
1 tbsp	smooth peanut butter	2 tbsp	sesame seeds <i>lightly toasted</i>
12 med	white or yellow corn tortillas		
1/3 cup	neutral oil		

PREPARATION

- **Source a quality mole paste.**

Mole Negro Mayordomo is the gold standard if you have a local Latin market. If not, the ubiquitous Doña María jars found in standard grocery store international aisles will work just fine once doctored with the chocolate and peanut butter.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Fry the mole paste in hot oil to wake up the dormant spices.**
Heat a spoonful of oil or lard in a heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. Drop in that sticky commercial paste and aggressively press it into the hot fat with a wooden spoon for 2 to 3 minutes. This cooks off the flat, preservative jar taste.

1 Gradually hydrate the paste with warm chicken broth.

Slowly pour in one cup of the broth, whisking constantly to dissolve the dense paste. Once it's smooth, whisk in the remaining two cups of broth, the wedge of Mexican chocolate, and the peanut butter to restore the nutty depth the factory processed out.

2 Simmer the mole until it reaches the consistency of heavy cream.

Lower the heat and let the sauce gently bubble for 5 to 7 minutes until the chocolate melts and it coats the back of a spoon. Keep it warm over the lowest heat setting.

3 Briefly pass the corn tortillas through hot oil.

This is non-negotiable. Heat the third of a cup of neutral oil in a separate skillet over medium-high. Fry each tortilla for just 5 to 8 seconds per side. You want them pliable, not crispy. This lipid barrier stops them from disintegrating into mush when they hit the wet mole.

4 Dip the softened tortillas in the hot mole and assemble.

Working quickly, completely submerge a softened tortilla in the warm mole sauce. Move it to a plate, add a handful of warm shredded chicken slightly off-center, and fold it in half like a taco. Repeat until your plate is full.

5 Garnish heavily and serve immediately.

Ladle an extra spoonful of hot mole over the assembled tortillas. Drizzle with Crema Mexicana, scatter the Queso Fresco, and throw on the raw onion rings and toasted sesame seeds. Enmoladas wait for no one—eat them right now.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the tortilla's oil bath.**

Dropping a raw, cold corn tortilla into a wet, simmering sauce guarantees instant mush. Frying it for a few seconds creates a structural barrier and is the difference between a sad casserole and a true enmolada.

- **Rotisserie chicken is a perfectly authentic weeknight hack.**

In Mexico, cooks frequently buy pre-poached, shredded chicken at the market specifically for these kinds of dishes. Save your time and energy for doctoring the sauce.



Chicken in Mole Coloradito with Runner Beans

poy-yo en mo-leh co-lo-ra-dee-to con ah-yo-co-tes

COLORADITO TRANSLATES TO 'A LITTLE SHADE OF RED.' DOWN in Oaxaca, this is the mole that hooks you. It is a flawless balancing act: sweet plantains, toasted seeds, and a gentle chili heat, all grounded by a hit of Mexican chocolate. If you think making an authentic mole on a weeknight is a myth, you are wrong. The secret to that deep, maternal flavor isn't spending three days staring at a simmering pot. It is the ruthless, violent frying of your blended mole

PASTE IN HOT FAT BEFORE YOU ADD THE BROTH. DO IT RIGHT, serve it over poached chicken and meaty runner beans, and it tastes exactly like a family table in the Valles Centrales.

INGREDIENTS

2 lb	chicken thighs <i>bone-in, skinless</i>	1/4 cup	raisins
1/2 med	white onion	1/2 tsp	dried Mexican oregano
3 small clove	garlic <i>peeled</i>	1/2 tsp	dried thyme
1 tsp	kosher salt	1 small	Mexican canela stick
6 med	dried guajillo chiles <i>wiped clean, stemmed, and seeded</i>	4 small	whole cloves
4 med	dried ancho chiles <i>wiped clean, stemmed, and seeded</i>	6 small	black peppercorns
3 med	roma tomatoes	1/2 med	very ripe plantain <i>peeled and sliced into 1-inch rounds</i>
1/2 large	white onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	1 large slice	challah or brioche bread
4 small clove	garlic <i>peeled</i>	3 tbsp	pork lard or neutral oil <i>divided</i>
1/4 cup	almonds	3 oz	Mexican drinking chocolate <i>roughly chopped</i>
1/4 cup	sesame seeds	2 cup	ayocote or large kidney beans <i>cooked</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1

Poach the chicken to yield a quick and rich broth.

Place the chicken thighs, the unchopped onion half, 3 peeled garlic cloves, and salt into a pot with 4 to 5 cups of water. Bring to a boil, then cover and gently simmer for 25 minutes. Reserve exactly 3 cups of the strained broth.

1 Toast and hydrate the dried chiles to awaken their flavor.

Briefly toast the cleaned guajillo and ancho chiles in a dry skillet over medium heat for 10 to 15 seconds per side until pliable. Submerge them in boiling water, weighed down with a plate, for 20 minutes until soft.

2 Toast the spices and dry-roast the aromatics.

In the same dry skillet, toast the sesame seeds, almonds, canela, cloves, and peppercorns until fragrant, removing them to a bowl. Next, dry-roast the tomatoes, chopped onion, and remaining garlic until charred and softened.

3 Fry the sweet plantain and bread to build the thickener.

Heat 1 tablespoon of the lard or oil in a pan over medium heat. Fry the plantain slices until deeply caramelized, then fry the bread until golden and crisp. This adds crucial sweetness and body to the final sauce.

4 Purée the aromatics, chiles, and thickeners into a smooth paste.

Drain the chiles completely, discarding the bitter soaking liquid. Blend them with the roasted vegetables, toasted spices, fried plantain, fried bread, raisins, oregano, thyme, and 1 cup of the warm reserved chicken broth on high speed until incredibly smooth.

5 Fry the mole paste in hot fat to deeply caramelize the sugars and mellow the chiles.

This is the abuela secret. Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of lard in a heavy pot over medium-high until shimmering. Carefully pour in the splashing paste and stir constantly for 10 minutes until it darkens and reduces to a thick, rich consistency.

- 1 Simmer the mole with broth and chocolate to finish the sauce.**
Slowly whisk in the remaining 2 cups of chicken broth and the chopped Mexican chocolate. Simmer gently over low heat for 15 minutes until it coats the back of a spoon, then adjust the salt to taste.

- 2 Fold the chicken and runner beans into the mole to serve.**
Bathe the poached chicken and warmed beans in the simmering sauce. Serve hot in shallow bowls, garnished with a sprinkle of toasted sesame seeds, alongside warm tortillas.



Tamales en Hoja de Plátano: The Ritual of Wrapping

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

Making tamales is never a solitary pursuit. It is an orchestrated, multi-generational assembly line of beautiful, necessary chaos. In Oaxacan-American kitchens from Los Angeles to Chicago, the tamalada is a ritual of endurance. It's about the hypnotic rhythm

of wiping down softened banana leaves, spreading the masa just right, and folding them into tight, sturdy packages that smell faintly of earth and green tea.

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





Tamales de Mole Negro con Pollo Deshebrado

WHEN YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES AND IMAGINE THE ULTIMATE Oaxacan tamal, this is it. Impossibly soft masa gives way to the dark, complex depth of mole negro and tender chicken, all steamed inside a glossy banana leaf. Making proper mole from scratch takes three days, a stone metate, and an ancestral fire. You don't have that on a Tuesday night in Ohio, and you don't need it. The real secret modern Mexican cooks know is to buy a jar of the highest quality artisanal mole paste you can find and bring it back to life with rich chicken broth. Combine

THAT WITH PROPERLY WHIPPED MASA AND THE THERMAL magic of the banana leaf, and you will produce a tamal that tastes exactly like the motherland.

INGREDIENTS

1 package	frozen banana leaves <i>thawed, cut into 10-by-12-inch rectangles, and wiped clean</i>	1 1/4 cup	pork lard <i>softened to room temp</i>
1 cup	artisanal Oaxacan mole negro paste	1 tbsp	baking powder
1 1/2 cup	chicken broth	1 1/4 tsp	fine sea salt
2 cup	rotisserie chicken meat <i>shredded</i>	4 cup	coarse corn masa flour for tamales
		2 3/4 cup	chicken broth <i>warmed</i>

PREPARATION

- **Prepare your steamer pot.**

Fill the bottom of your vaporera or large steamer pot with water up to the fill line and drop a clean copper penny into the water before inserting the steamer basket.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Awaken the banana leaves over an open flame.**
Pass each cleaned banana leaf rectangle directly over a medium gas flame or a hot, dry skillet. Within seconds, the dull leaf will turn a glossy, pliable emerald green; remove it immediately before it burns or turns brittle.

1 Resurrect the mole negro paste.

Whisk the mole paste and the 1 1/2 cups of room-temperature chicken broth together in a saucepan over medium heat. Simmer for 15 to 20 minutes until the sauce thickens to coat the back of a spoon, then fold in the shredded chicken and remove from the heat.

2 Whip the lard into a cloud.

Using a stand mixer or hand mixer, beat the room-temperature lard on medium-high speed for 3 to 5 minutes until it transforms from a dense solid into a pristine, fluffy white cream.

3 Hydrate the masa carefully.

Turn the mixer to low, blend in the baking powder and salt, then alternate adding the coarse masa flour and the 2 3/4 cups of warm chicken broth. The broth must be warm; if it is cold, the lard will seize, breaking the emulsion and ruining your tamales.

4 Perform the float test.

Drop a half-teaspoon of the whipped masa into a glass of cold water. If it floats to the surface, you have trapped enough air; if it sinks, beat the masa for two more minutes and test again.

5 Assemble the carterita.

Lay a roasted banana leaf shiny side down on the counter. Spread a 5-inch square of masa in the center, top with two tablespoons of the mole chicken, then fold the left and right sides over the filling and tuck the top and bottom edges underneath to form a sealed, rectangular wallet.

1 Stack horizontally and steam.

Line the steamer basket with leftover banana leaf scraps and stack the tamales flat in a crisscross pattern so the rich mole doesn't leak out. Cover the top layer with more leaves, seal the pot with a lid, and steam over medium heat for an hour to an hour and a half.

2 Let the tamales rest.

Remove the pot from the heat and let the tamales rest undisturbed for 10 minutes. This allows the starches to set so the masa peels cleanly away from the banana leaf.

CHEF'S NOTES

• **Listen to the penny.**

As the water boils, the penny at the bottom of the steamer will rattle. If the rattling stops, your pot has boiled dry; add hot water immediately to avoid burning the tamales.

• **Sourcing the right masa is non-negotiable.**

Standard tortilla masa will yield dense tamales. You must use coarse-ground corn masa flour specifically labeled for tamales.

• **Respect the lard.**

Vegetable shortening will technically work if you have dietary restrictions, but you will completely sacrifice the deep, savory ancestral flavor of an authentic Oaxacan kitchen.



Chepil Tamales with Pasilla Mixe Salsa

tah-MAH-les deh cheh-PEEL kohn SAHL-sah deh pah-SEE-yah MEE-heh

THIS IS THE TAMAL OF THE OAXACAN EVENING, SMELLING OF damp earth after a heavy rain. Unlike the dense, meat-stuffed bricks you might be used to, the tamal de chepil is an exercise in herbal elegance—just masa, rich whipped lard, and a handful of native chepil leaves steamed inside a fragrant banana leaf. Because the tamal is mild and soothing, it demands a salsa of fierce intensity; dark, smoky, and biting. With frozen chepil—often labeled chipilín—easily found in the

FREEZER AISLE OF YOUR LOCAL LATIN MARKET, THIS IS A weeknight miracle. No meats to braise, no complex fillings to stew, just the honest ritual of dough, leaf, and steam.

INGREDIENTS

4 cup	fine-grind Masa Harina	5 med	tomatillos <i>husked and rinsed</i>
3 1/2 cup	warm chicken broth	2 large	garlic
8 oz	pork lard <i>softened to room temp</i>	cloves	<i>unpeeled</i>
6 oz	frozen chipilín <i>thawed, drained, and patted dry</i>	1/4 med	white onion
2 tsp	fine sea salt	1 med	dried Ancho chile <i>stemmed and seeded</i>
1	frozen banana leaves	2 med	dried Chipotle Meco chiles <i>stemmed and seeded</i>
package	<i>thawed and wiped clean</i>	1/4 cup	water or chicken broth

PREPARATION

- **Prepare the banana leaves.**

Cut the thawed leaves into 10-by-10-inch rectangles, using kitchen shears to remove the tough central fibrous rib.

- **Toast the leaves.**

Pass each leaf rectangle slowly over a medium open flame until its matte surface turns a glossy, vibrant green and becomes pliable.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Aerate the lard.**

In a large bowl, beat the room-temperature lard on medium-high speed for 10 to 15 minutes until it transforms from dense and yellowish to bright white and airy.

1 Hydrate the masa.

Whisk the masa harina with the salt, then gradually knead in the warm chicken broth until it forms a soft dough.

2 Combine the masa and fat.

Pinch off handfuls of the masa and beat them into the whipped lard on low speed until the mixture resembles a soft buttercream, splashing in a little more broth if it feels stiff.

3 Fold in the identity.

Gently fold the thawed chipilín into the masa with a spatula, ensuring even distribution without over-mixing so the dough doesn't turn entirely green.

4 Wrap the tamales.

Spoon about 1/3 cup of the masa onto the center of a prepared banana leaf, fold the top and bottom edges over the center to form a tube, then tuck the sides underneath to seal tightly.

5 Steam the tamales.

Arrange the tamales horizontally in a crisscross pattern in a prepared steamer, cover with excess leaves and a damp towel, and steam on medium heat for 60 to 75 minutes.

6 Char the salsa aromatics.

Place the tomatillos, unpeeled garlic, and onion wedge in a dry skillet over medium-high heat, turning occasionally until blackened and blistered on all sides, about 10 minutes.

1 Toast and hydrate the chiles.

In the same skillet, toast the dried Ancho and Chipotle chiles for 15 to 30 seconds per side until fragrant, then submerge them in a bowl of boiling water for 15 minutes to soften.

2 Blend the salsa.

Peel the roasted garlic and transfer to a blender with the tomatillos, onion, softened chiles, 1/4 cup of soaking liquid or broth, and a generous pinch of salt, blending until exceptionally smooth.

CHEF'S NOTES

• **Test the masa.**

Drop a tiny dollop of the whipped lard into a glass of cold water; if it floats, it has trapped enough air to make a light, tender tamal, but if it sinks, keep beating.

• **Substituting the chiles.**

True Pasilla Mixe is incredibly rare outside Oaxaca, but blending Ancho for sweetness and Chipotle Meco for smoke perfectly mimics the fiery, leathery profile of the original.

• **Testing for doneness.**

A tamal is ready when you pull it from the steamer, let it sit for five minutes, and the banana leaf peels away cleanly without sticking to the masa.