



## Marvelous Mexican Steaks

Most people in the U.S. are unaware of the extent to which Mexican cooks have applied their skill and creativity to the preparation of steaks. Our familiarity usually ends with the versions most often served in Mexican-American restaurants: *carne asada*, fajitas, and steak *tampiqueña*. *Carne asada* literally means “broiled meat” and refers generically to a variety of cuts, often sliced thin and usually grilled in familiar ways. Fajitas, often called *arracheras* in Mexico, properly refers to grilled skirt steak, served whole or sliced into bite-size strips. However, the term fajitas is often used to describe just about any food, from chicken to eggplant, that is cut into small pieces, grilled, and served with tortillas, salsa, and guacamole. The steak

*tampiqueña* is an outstanding combination plate invented by restaurateur José Inez Loredó and first served at his Tampico Club in Mexico City. It is properly made with a thin-cut tenderloin (cut from the sides and literally unrolled), that is served with various antojitos, such as *quesadillas*, and tacos, as well as rice, refried beans and the sautéed strips of onion and chiles called *rajas*.

For some, the above options are enough, but for more adventurous cooks Mexico has numerous other, even more interesting indulgences. One of the most unique is the *sábana*, which means “sheet.” And that is an accurate description of the dish, which is made by pounding a tenderloin steak of about 6 ounces to a nearly sheet-thin circle (about 1/8 inch or even thinner) and up to nine or ten inches in diameter. The steak is then quickly seared on both sides and served either as is or folded over a filling such as sautéed mushrooms and melted cheese—or just about anything else the chef fancies. *Sábanas* are often served on or topped with tomatillo sauce.

Mexican chefs discovered that steak goes beautifully with cheese and corn tortillas, and steak and enchiladas make a terrific combination. But there are other ways of using cheese and tortillas with steak. One of my favorites is called [Steak with Pasilla Shitaki Sauce](#). It consists of a tenderloin or rib eye served on top of a corn tortilla sautéed in oil until barely medium crisp. The meat is topped with smoky provolone cheese and a sauce of broiled tomatoes, pasilla chiles, mushrooms, and brandy. Although I think it is much better, the dish resembles an Italian steak pizzaiola. It is relatively low in fat and calories and is made with healthful ingredients. The tortilla-cheese combination also goes very well with the [Three Chiles Steak](#) that is topped with a sauce of *pasilla*, *ancho* and chipotle chiles blended with beef broth and reduced to sauce consistency. It is very much like a French steak in brown sauce and I often serve it to Europeans to rave reviews.

As noted above, Mexican steaks are frequently cut thin, often ½ inch or less as compared with our normal ¾ to well over an inch cuts. Among other advantages, thin cuts provide a fine steak experience at a lower cost in both calories and money. The only downside is that most gas grills do not get hot enough to brown the outsides of slender cuts before they are well done. I use either an infrared gas grill that produces at least 900 degrees of heat or a very hot charcoal or wood fire. If those are not feasible, a ridged iron skillet works well, or you can sauté the meat on a griddle or skillet with just a little oil.

That south-of-the-border chefs have devised delicious and unique ways to prepare steaks is amply demonstrated by the accompanying recipes. I hope you will try them and begin your own explorations!