



PIRATAS

In Spanish, the word Pirata means pirate, and I had never heard of one in the food sense until I found them at a *puesto* in Monterrey that sold nothing else! It turned out to be a thing of beauty: a burrito-size flour tortilla filled with a thin layer of refried beans topped with mesquite-smoked fajitas, caramelized onions, and grated asadero cheese. Instead of being wrapped and served like a burrito, it was folded in half like a giant taco and then crisped to a golden brown on a hot griddle with a light film of oil. It was then served with a dollop of guacamole. As luck would have it, I found another place serving them the next day, and over the years one or two more. What brought them to mind is that I recently saw them advertised by the small Taco Palenque chain, the only place I've ever found them in the U.S. There, they are served in small taco-sized flour tortillas without the final crisping (but they're still very good!

To show just how rare they are, I could find no mention of them in the great Mexican chef, Ricardo Muñoz's seminal *Diccionario Enciclopédico de Gastronomía Mexicana*. In all these years, it's the first item that was not included!

Because of its scarcity and relative obscurity, I decided that I would relate the name to the form: a large flour tortilla filled and browned, no matter what the filling, except that it really should have cheese. This makes it a versatile item that is quick and easy to prepare. It also makes it difficult to write a one-size-fits-all recipe.

Bearing the above in mind, I suggest you first decide how much you want to eat, which will go a long way in determining what size tortilla you use. One of my favorites is to use the wafer-thin uncooked flour tortillas made by Guerrero called *Fresqui-ricas* that are usually found in the bread department with cooked tortillas. They are about 8 inches in diameter, and for a fresh and delicious result all you have to do is cook them on a hot surface for about 1 minute or less on each side. I then remove them to a work surface and spread a thin layer of refried beans on $\frac{1}{2}$ the tortilla, sprinkle on cheese (Oaxaca, Chihuahua, Mozzarella, or Monterey Jack are good choices), and top with whatever filling I want, such as grilled beef, pork, or chicken, or one of the *picadillos*. Add a little salsa or *pico de gallo*, and maybe some caramelized onion, and fold it in half. I then drizzle a few drops of oil into a large Teflon pan over medium heat and place the formed *piratas* on it. After about 1 minute on each side, they become a crispy golden brown. Feel free to leave out or add as many items as you wish. I'm not sure, but think it will still be a *pirata*, and without any doubt it will be delicious!