

RECIPES

Tex-Mex Tamales

While there are probably more than a thousand different tamales in Mexico, only one type is commonly served in Tex-Mex restaurants. Not surprisingly its origins are in northern Mexico, across the border from Texas in the state of Nuevo León. The biggest problem with these Tex-Mex tamales is that too often they are hard and greasy--a far cry from the light and spongy versions served in Mexico. Here you will find the real thing! If you would like a more in-depth understanding of how to make these tasty morsels please go to [my tamale blog](#).

Recipe information

First prepare the filling, which can be done several days before you make the tamales. Just remember to save the 3 tablespoons chile sauce to put into the dough. Also, if you use commercially made salted chicken broth to make the *masa*, remember to adjust the quantity of salt downward.

Filling ingredients

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
3/4 pound boneless pork, cut into 1/3 inch pieces
2 *ancho* chiles, stemmed and seeded
3/4 teaspoon powdered cumin
1 teaspoon oregano
2 cloves garlic
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon salt, or to taste

Filling directions

1. Brown and cook the meat and make the broth. Heat the oil in a large pot over medium high to high heat, add the pork and cook, stirring often until it is just browned. Add 4 cups water, bring to a boil, and simmer, covered, for about 40 minutes, or until the pork is very tender. Remove the pot from the heat, and reserve separately both the cooking liquid and the pork.

2. Make the sauce. Cover the chiles with hot water, and allow them to soak for 20 minutes. Discard the soaking water and place the chiles in a blender with the cumin, oregano, garlic, pepper, salt, and 1/2 cup of the reserved pork broth. Blend the mixture for 1 minute, add an additional 1 1/4 cups pork broth and blend another minute.

3. Complete the filling. Remove 3 tablespoons of this chile sauce to use later in the *masa*, and pour the rest of the sauce over the reserved pork in a saucepan. Simmer the sauce and pork until the sauce is very thick, about 10 to 15 minutes. Refrigerate the pork mixture for at least 3 hours, or up to three days.

Masa ingredients

1 3/4 cups MaSeca *instant corn masa flour for tamales* (see above)– 9 ounces
1 1/2 cups plus 1 tablespoon chicken broth or water
3 tablespoons reserved chile sauce
1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

10 tablespoons lard at room temperature— 5 ounces

Masa directions

1. Rehydrate the corn flour. Place the dry corn flour in a bowl, add the broth or water and reserved chile sauce. Mix with a wooden spoon, then knead briefly with your hands to make sure all the liquid is incorporated and there are no dry bits of flour at the bottom of the dish. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a damp towel and allow the corn flour to re-hydrate for 30 minutes.

2. Complete the *masa*. Place the fat in the bowl of a stand mixer and, with the whisk attachment, beat it at medium to medium high speed until it is light and creamy, scraping down the bowl as necessary, about 2 minutes. Add the baking powder and salt, and beat for another minute. Add the re-hydrated *masa* and, beginning at low speed and gradually increasing it to medium, beat for 1 minute. Turn the speed to medium high and continue beating for 10 minutes, stopping to scrape down the sides of the bowl 2 or 3 times, or as necessary. Test the *masa* by taking a ½ inch piece and placing it carefully in a glass of cold water. It should float. If it does not, continue beating for another 2 minutes. If it still does not float the measurements are probably off and a little more room temperature fat should be added, a tablespoon at a time, until the dough floats.

Tamale ingredients

12 dried corn husks

The reserved filling

The *masa*

Kitchen string or strips torn from additional softened corn husks to tie the tamales

A steamer

Tamale directions

1. Rehydrate the corn husk wraps. Before using the dried husks you must first rehydrate them to make them pliable. To do this, place them in a large pot or bowl, cover them with hot water, and allow them to soak for at least 2 hours. You may have to place something heavy on them to keep them submerged. When they are pliable, remove them from the water and towel off the excess moisture.

2. Fill and wrap the tamales. Spread about 3 to 4 tablespoons of the *masa* into a square of about 3 ½ to 4 inches, beginning about 2 inches down from the flat end of the husks, and about an inch from the left side. Place about 1 ½ to 2 tablespoons of the filling down the center of the *masa*, then fold the sides over it and roll it into a cylinder. Twist the flat top end and tie it with either kitchen twine or a strip of corn husk, just above where the *masa* ends, then either twist and tie the other end, or fold it up and over the joint, and tie it around the circumference of the tamale.

3. Steam the tamales. To steam the tamales, bring about 3 inches of water to a boil in the bottom of a steamer, place the tamales in a perforated container, lined with a layer of husks, well above the water, cover and steam for 1 hour. (Many cooks place a penny in the bottom of the steamer, so its rattling will alert them if too much of the water evaporates. Some also put a towel between the lid and the pot to create a better seal. If you try the latter be sure and fold the towel over the top of the lid, or otherwise ensure that it does not come close enough to the stove's burner to catch fire). After an hour, turn off the

heat and allow the tamales to remain covered for 15 minutes. Remove the cover and open one of the tamales. If it does not stick to the husk they are done. If it sticks, steam an additional 10 to 15 minutes.

The recipe makes 10 - 12 tamales of about 1/4 cup *masa* each, and quantities can be increased proportionately.