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COOKING AT HOME



For great salsa, taste as you go. Put in an ingredient, give it a stir and taste. Repeat. CONTRIBUTED BY STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG

## Here's how to skip the jar and make a fresh salsa that's right for you

By **Becky Krystal**  
For the Washington Post

Standing in the salsa aisle at the grocery store can make your head hurt. Classic tomato? Or go rogue with corn or peach? Big jar? Small jar? Mild, medium or hot? How hot is hot?

Of course, you can't beat the convenience of grabbing whatever jar is closest to you. But homemade salsa can be a great way to make a satisfying dip that is exactly to your liking. You can put together a ton for a party to serve with tortilla chips or a little to top your fish or chicken dinner. Coming up with your own can also help you burn through extra produce you might have hanging around.

For simplicity's sake, as well as spur-of-the-moment creativity, I'm focusing on uncooked salsas (you might find tomato-based versions referred to as pico de gallo). Here are some tips to get you started:

■ "You don't have to stick to a recipe." So advises Anna Bran-Leis, owner of the DC Empanadas stand and food truck, and the restaurant Taqueria del Barrio. "You can make salsa out of pretty much anything," she says. "There's no real rule to it." Just follow your personal preferences, although you'll want to take into consideration some of her other advice.

■ Be sure your main ingredient is good. Lackluster tomatoes are a grocery store scourge, especially out of season. In winter or other lean tomato times, Bran-Leis suggests using grape or cherry tomatoes, which tend to be more reliable. Fruit salsa can be great, too. Unless you're trying for tart and crunchy, see that whatever you're using — pineapple, mango, peaches — is ripe. Ditto the avocados. If, however, your fruit is not ripe, try grilling it, which will caramelize it and help bring out the natural sweetness.

Salsa continued on D7

#AUSTIN360COOKS



Cemitas are a popular sandwich in Puebla, Mexico. They are often filled with refried beans and crusted chicken, as in this recipe from "Hugo Ortega's Street Food of Mexico." CONTRIBUTED BY PENNY DE LOS SANTOS

# Festive flavors

In honor of Cinco de Mayo, explore Pueblan cuisine with tinga, mole.

By **Claudia Alarcón**  
Special to the American-Statesman

Cinco de Mayo is a Mexican holiday worth celebrating, but not how the beer and tequila brands want us to.

Even though Cinco de Mayo has become the best-known of all Mexican holidays in the United States, many people wrongly believe it is the most important holiday in Mexico.

On this day, Mexicans commemorate the victory over the invading French army on May 5, 1862, at the Battle of Puebla. While there are no parades and no barbecues anywhere on-site, the significance of Cinco de Mayo in Mexican history should not be underestimated.

Mexicans don't spend the day drinking margaritas, singing with the mariachi and getting wasted while shouting "Viva Mexico!" If we're going to celebrate, we might have one of Puebla's famous dishes: mole poblano, tinga poblana and cemitas compuestas. In my home country, the occasion compares more closely to Presidents Day, without the mattress and car sales.

**Why we celebrate**

The French occupation of Mexico was largely possible due to the Mexican-American War of 1846 to 1848. During the 1850s, Mexico entered a period of national crisis after years of fighting the Americans. After conquering Mexico, the French were planning to aid Confederate forces in Texas against President Abraham Lincoln's Union armies during the American Civil War.



Dancers perform during a festival in Puebla, Mexico. CONTRIBUTED BY WALLY SKALIJ

Seeking help for his bankrupt nation, President Benito Juárez issued a moratorium on July 17, 1861, to suspend all foreign debt payments for a period of two years, promising to resume payments at the end of this time. However, England, Spain and France refused Juárez's request, and instead they decided to invade Mexico to get their money by any means necessary.

During the buildup of armed forces, it became apparent that collecting debts was only a disguise for the real intentions of the French, who were ready to wage a war of conquest. Unwilling to cooperate further, the Spanish and English forces withdrew from Mexico, but the French refused to leave, and Napoleon III began his attempt to create an empire in Mexico using the Archduke Maximilian of Austria as his puppet.

On the morning of May 5, 1862, the French invaders collided with

a group of ill-equipped but determined fighters led by General Ignacio Zaragoza, who was born in what is now Goliad, Texas. This heavily outnumbered band of Mexicans and Zapotecs fought bravely all day until a French commander ordered a retreat to Orizaba, Veracruz, in the late afternoon. Although the French captured Mexico City the next summer, the delay at Puebla shortened their intervention in Mexico by inspiring patriots to rally around Juárez in defending their national honor and territory.

**The food of Puebla**

The city of Puebla, namesake capital of the state, was founded by the Spanish in 1531 to secure the trade route between Mexico City and the port of Veracruz, allowing Puebla to develop an extraordinary cuisine, crowned

Puebla continued on D7



The Texas Farmers' Market at Mueller will now host a Wednesday evening farmers market from 5 to 8 p.m. in the Browning Hangar. CONTRIBUTED BY TEXAS FARMERS' MARKET

## Weekday farmers market opens at Mueller

**Addie Broyles**  
Relish Austin

Less than a year after the Sustainable Food Center closed its weekly Wednesday farmers market at the Triangle, the Texas Farmers' Market announced that it will start a Wednesday evening market at Mueller.

"Due to high demand, Texas Farmers' Market is expanding to provide a convenient opportunity for those who live, work and play in East Austin to purchase a wide selection of local fare," the nonprofit said in a news release. Starting

May 2, the market will be held Wednesday evenings from 5 to 8 p.m. in Mueller's Browning Hangar, 4209 Airport Blvd.

There are several neighborhood farm stands that operate during the day and during the week, but this will be the only weeknight farmers market in Austin. This new Wednesday market comes a few months after Springdale Farm announced that it will close its Wednesday morning farm stand later this year.

More than 40 local vendors will be at the new market, and many of them will be familiar to people who already shop

Mueller continued on D3



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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Claudia Alarcón is an Austin-based writer and University of Texas graduate who loves soccer, travel and rosé. She presents lectures and workshops on topics related to the foodways of Mexico, both locally and internationally, and leads culinary tours of her hometown, Mexico City.

**TASTE OF MEXICO RETURNS FOR SECOND YEAR**

Texans know the difference between Tex-Mex and Mexican food, but do you know the difference between Oaxacan and Yucatecan food? Mexican food is as varied as American food, and you can explore some of that diversity at Mexic-Arte Museum's annual Taste of Mexico event on May 2. From 6 to 9 p.m. at Brazos Hall, 204 E. Fourth St., you'll find food from more than 40 Austin restaurants, food trucks and beverage purveyors. Organizers have asked participants to showcase indigenous ingredients and techniques found throughout Mexican cuisine.

Proceeds from the event benefit the museum's kid- and family-friendly art education programs, which benefit more than 10,000 participants in Austin. You can find tickets (\$50 for museum members; \$60 for general admission; \$75 for VIP) at mexic-artemuseumevents.org.

Food and beverage participants are ATX Cocina, Cruzteca, Cool Beans, Cornucopia Popcorn, Curra's Grill, Dai Due Taquería, Eldorado Cafe, El Norteño Jerky, Grizzeldas, El Nuevo Mexico, Hay Elotes, La Pera, Maudie's Tex-Mex, Mellizos Tacos, Pancho Bigotes Salsas, Pueblo Viejo, Sazón, Serranos, Tacos Guerrero, TNT Tacos and Tequila, T-Loc's Sonora Hot Dogs, Tamale Addiction, Vivo, H-E-B, La Mexican Bakery, Las Mangonadas, Parkside, Regia Bakery, SRSLY Chocolate, Sweet Tsopelik, Amorada Tequila, Alegria! Aguas Frescas, Bud Light, Caffè Del Fuego, Chango Loco Mezcal, Clase Azul Tequila, Cuvée Coffee, Dulce Vida Tequila, Estrella Jalisco, Herradura Tequila, Ruta Maya Coffee, Soley, Tequila Sheela, Third Coast Coffee and Topo Chico.

—ADDIE BROYLES

**PUEBLA-STYLE PUMPKIN SEED SAUCE (PIPIÁN VERDE DE PUEBLA)**

This silky pipián from Roberto Santibañez is light enough to serve in the summer and can be made with chicken, pork or shrimp. Hoja santa is an herb widely used in central and southern Mexico that grows very well in Austin. Find starters at specialty nurseries like Natural Gardener or It's About Thyme, which is set to close in midsummer. The herb does well in pots or in the ground and adds a tropical touch to the landscape. With the current romaine lettuce warnings, be sure to check the product sourcing to make sure it's not from the affected area.

—CLAUDIA ALARCÓN

**6 ounces tomatillos (about 4), husked, rinsed and coarsely chopped**

**3 fresh serrano or jalapeño chilies, coarsely chopped including seeds**

**1 teaspoon fine salt, or 2 teaspoons kosher salt**

**5 to 6 cups chicken (or pork or shrimp) stock (recipe on D7), divided**

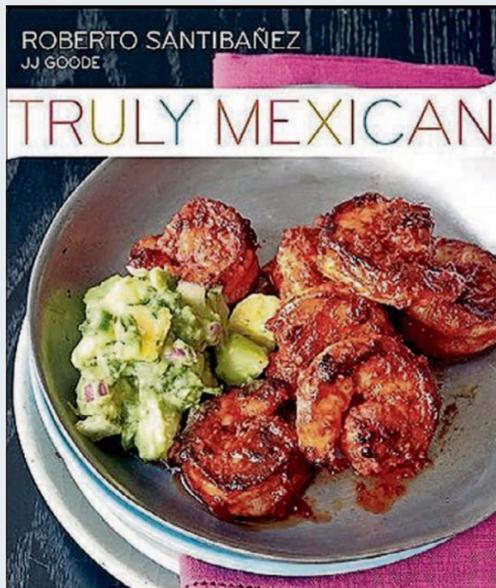
**6 ounces hulled raw (green) pumpkin seeds (1 ¼ cups)**

**2 ounces unhulled sesame seeds (rounded ⅓ cup)**

**2 tablespoons mild olive oil or vegetable oil**

**2 romaine lettuce leaves, torn**

**½ cup chopped cilantro**



"Truly Mexican" by Roberto Santibañez

**1 fresh hoja santa leaf, stem discarded**

**1 ½ pounds cooked chicken, pork or shrimp**

Put the tomatillos, chilies, salt and 2 cups of stock in the blender jar.

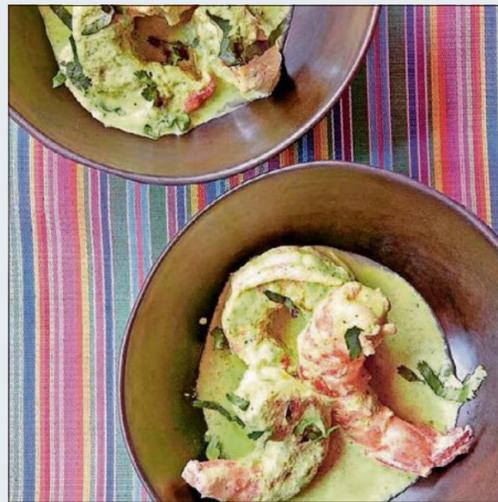
Heat a skillet over medium heat and toss the pumpkin seeds, stirring and tossing constantly, until they're puffed and just slightly browned, 5 to 8 minutes. Transfer the seeds to the blender.

Add the sesame seeds to the skillet and toast, stirring

and tossing constantly, until they're fragrant and a shade darker, 3 to 4 minutes.

Transfer the seeds to the blender and blend until smooth, about 3 minutes.

Heat the oil in a 6- or 7-quart heavy pot (this will give you enough room to add the meat later; if you are making just the sauce, a 3- or 4-quart pot is fine) over medium heat until it shimmers. Carefully pour the sauce into the oil (it may splatter) and let the sauce simmer, stirring often, until it has thickened slightly, 5



Pipián verde is a specialty in Puebla, Mexico, and some cooks serve it with shrimp, while others prefer to use chicken or pork. "Truly Mexican" by Roberto Santibañez has several recipes for this classic dish.

CONTRIBUTED BY ROMULO YANES

to 7 minutes (use a splatter screen so the sauce doesn't make a mess of the stove). Add 2 cups of stock and bring to a simmer.

Put 1 cup of the remaining stock in the blender along with the lettuce, cilantro and hoja santa and blend until smooth, about 1 minute.

Stir the herb mixture into the sauce and bring the mixture back to a simmer. As the sauce simmers, swish a little liquid around in the blender and into the pot. Add more stock if necessary to maintain a

velvety consistency that thickly coats a wooden spoon but isn't gloppy. Season to taste with additional salt. If the sauce appears broken (like scrambled eggs), blend it again, in batches, until smooth, transferring the blended sauce to another pot.

Add the chicken (or pork or shrimp) to the sauce, reduce the heat to low, and cook until heated through, 15 to 20 minutes. Serve with corn tortillas, rice, beans or any other side you like. This pipián tastes best the day it is made.



Puebla, Mexico, is the capital of the state of Puebla and where Mexican forces defeated the French in 1862. Mexicans don't celebrate Cinco de Mayo in the same way that Americans do, but it's a good excuse to cook Pueblan food no matter where you live.

CONTRIBUTED BY WALLY SKALIJI

**Puebla**

continued from D7

Of course, Puebla's gastronomic heritage also includes simple street foods, known as antojitos. Regional specialties such as cemitas compuestas, tlacoyos and tostadas de tinga can be found in daytime open-air markets and late-night stands that cater to partiers.

Cemitas compuestas are like tortas, made with a savory roll about 5 inches round called a cemita that has a crunchy top covered in sesame seeds. These are split in half, spread with refried beans, and piled high with roasted pork leg, beef milanesa, ham or even carnitas. All cemitas compuestas must include quesillo or Oaxaca cheese, chipotle and papalo or papaloquelite, a pungent herb of pre-Hispanic origin widely used in Central Mexico.

My heart skipped a beat when I saw them on the menu at Mi Tradición Bakery, and although they were not exactly like the ones I've had back home, they were tasty and brought happy memories. Within a few months, they were gone. Talking to owner Jesús "Chuy" Guevara, who hails from Puebla, revealed the reason they went off the menu.

"Most people didn't know what they were," he says. "And the bread, although made from just water, flour and salt, wasn't coming out right. The consistency wasn't right. There are probably 10

bakeries in the whole state of Puebla that have the old recipe, and they guard the secret. They pass it down through generations. I haven't had the time to perfect the recipe."

However, Guevara still serves tlacoyos, another street snack from Puebla. These are done exactly right, with organic blue corn masa filled with refried beans, topped with sautéed nopalitos, grated cheese and a touch of salsa. Just the way I eat them at the Sunday market in CDMX with my mom.

Among Puebla's many gifts to Mexican cuisine, tinga poblana is perhaps the most versatile and easy to make, served everywhere from street stalls to upper-class homes. You can use this simple, lightly spicy stew to fill quesadillas, fresh corn tortillas or warm bolillos or to serve on top of tostadas. "We always make it at home," says Sazón chef/owner Margarito Aranda. "The kids will sometime just say (to Maria Cecilia, his wife), 'Mom, we want tinga!' Or if I am making a chicken broth I always add the breast. It adds flavor to the broth, then I shred the meat and make tinga."

Aranda fries thinly sliced onions with some tomato hearts — at the restaurant he dices the tomato flesh for ceviche and other dishes, and saves the insides for other uses, like this one — garlic, chipotle in adobo and black pepper. "I love serving it on tostadas, topped with shred-

**Puebla** continued on D9

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## POLLO EN MOLE POBLANO

If there is one dish that could be considered Mexican haute cuisine, then mole poblano is surely it. There are no shortcuts to making a true mole poblano: it takes time and patience to develop the layers of flavor that make this sauce fit for royalty. Miguel adapted the restaurant's recipe from one he learned from Diana Kennedy. At Fonda, this mole is served with chicken and rice and as a sauce for enchiladas. It is also wonderful on roasted turkey and pork. For easy serving, chunks of boneless, skinless chicken can be used.

**4 pounds chicken, skin on**  
**Sea salt and ground black pepper, to taste**  
**9 mulato chilies, seeds reserved**  
**7 pasilla chilies, seeds reserved**  
**6 ancho chilies, seeds reserved**  
**1 cup plus 9 tablespoons vegetable oil or lard, plus more as needed**  
**4 or 5 tomatillos, husked and cooked until soft**  
**5 whole cloves**  
**20 whole black peppercorns**  
**1-inch piece of Mexican cinnamon stick**  
**½ teaspoon anise seeds, toasted**  
**¼ teaspoon coriander**

**seeds, toasted**  
**8 tablespoons sesame seeds, toasted**  
**4 garlic cloves, roasted**  
**3 tablespoons raisins**  
**20 whole almonds, blanched**  
**¼ cup pumpkin seeds**  
**2 corn tortillas, torn into pieces**  
**3 stale French rolls, cut into 1-inch slices**  
**2 tablespoons sesame seeds, toasted, for garnish**  
**Cooked white rice, for serving**

In a large stock pot, parboil the chicken in water seasoned with salt and pepper, to taste. Drain, reserving cooking broth, and refrigerate until ready to assemble the dish.

Prepare the mole poblano. Clean the chilies by removing stems, veins and seeds, but reserve 1 tablespoon of the seeds. Heat ½ cup of the oil in a heavy skillet until it shimmers. Fry the chilies until crisp, about 10 to 15 seconds, turning once; make sure they do not burn. Drain on paper towels.

Put the chilies in a nonreactive bowl, cover with hot water and set aside for 30 minutes. Drain the chilies, reserving the soaking water. Puree the chilies in a blender



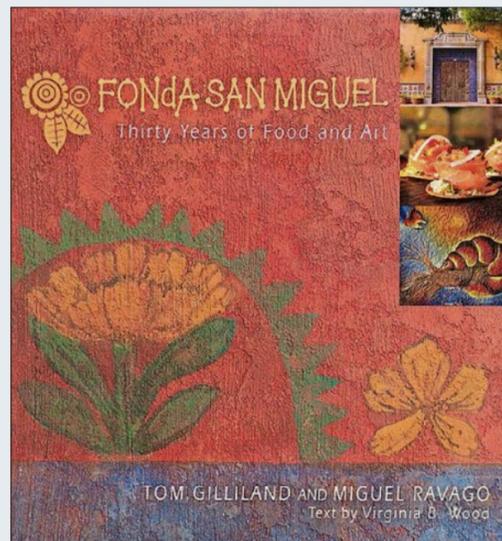
Fonda San Miguel serves mole poblano, a recipe that is lengthy to recreate but worth the effort, especially for a special occasion. CONTRIBUTED BY FONDA SAN MIGUEL

with enough of the soaking water to make a smooth paste. In a heavy Dutch oven, heat an additional ½ cup oil over medium heat and add the chili puree — be careful, it will splatter. Cook for about 15 minutes, stirring often. Remove from heat and set aside.

Puree the tomatillos in a blender. In a coffee or spice grinder, grind the cloves, peppercorns, cinnamon and toasted seeds, including the reserved chili seeds. Add the seed mixture and the garlic to the pureed tomatillos

and blend until smooth. Set aside.

Heat 6 tablespoons of the oil in a heavy frying pan. Fry each of the following ingredients and then remove with a slotted spoon: the raisins until they puff up; the almonds to a golden brown; the pumpkin seeds until they pop. If necessary, add enough oil to make 4 tablespoons and fry the tortilla pieces and bread slices until golden brown, about 15 seconds per side. Remove from skillet with a slotted spoon.



"Fonda San Miguel: Thirty Years of Food and Art"

Add raisins, almonds, pumpkin seeds, tortillas and bread pieces to the tomatillo puree and blend, using 1 to 2 cups of the reserved chicken broth, as needed, to make a smooth sauce. This may have to be done in batches.

In a heavy Dutch oven, heat 3 tablespoons of the oil over medium heat. Add the chili puree, the tomatillo puree and the Mexican chocolate. Cook over medium heat for about 15 minutes, stirring often. Add the remaining 5 cups of

chicken broth and cook over low heat for an additional 45 minutes, stirring often enough to prevent the mixture from scorching on the bottom.

During the last 15 minutes of cooking time, add the parboiled chicken and heat through. Garnish with toasted sesame seeds and serve with white rice. Serves 8.

— From "Fonda San Miguel: Thirty Years of Food and Art" by Tom Gilliland, Miguel Ravago and Virginia B. Wood (Shearer Pub, \$35)

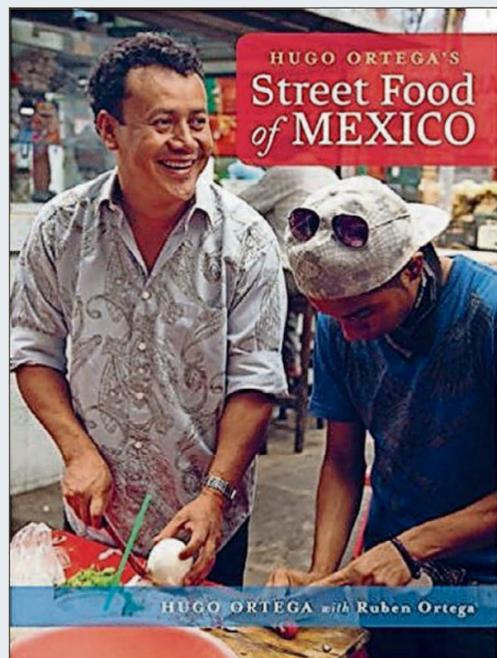
## CEMITAS POBLANAS

Authentic cemitas poblanas are distinguished by three factors: the bread, a pungent herb called papalo and the delicious, freshly made cheese strings of quesoillo. Cemitas, or the sesame seed buns, are stuffed with a chicken milanesa, a chicken breast pounded extremely thin, breaded and pan-fried until crispy. The herb papalo is a wild herb that grows in this region and is used frequently in kitchens throughout Puebla. It is available in Mexican farmers markets or specialty gourmet grocery stores. Cilantro can be used as an alternative. The flavor of cilantro is not the same as papalo but will add the necessary freshness as well as complement the other ingredients in the torta.

— HUGO ORTEGA

**For milanesas:**  
**6 chicken breasts, pounded to ¼-inch thick**  
**Salt and pepper, to taste**  
**¾ cup all-purpose flour**  
**2 eggs, lightly beaten**  
**¾ cup panko breadcrumbs**  
**½ cup corn oil**

**To assemble:**  
**6 cemitas (or sesame-**



Houston chef Hugo Ortega wrote about cemitas in his book "Hugo Ortega's Street Food of Mexico." CONTRIBUTED BY PENNY DE LOS SANTOS

**seed or brioche buns), split open**  
**6 tablespoons mayonnaise**  
**¾ cup refried beans**  
**6 cups quesoillo (queso Oaxaca)**  
**2 avocados, peeled,**

**pitted, sliced**  
**1 medium white onion, thinly sliced**  
**6 canned chipotle peppers in adobo, seeded, sliced**  
**½ bunch papalo or cilantro, leaves only**

To make the milanesas: Working one at a time, season each side of milanesas with salt and pepper. Pass each milanesa through the flour, beaten eggs and finally through the panko breadcrumbs, shaking off excess each time. Place breaded milanesas on a sheet pan until ready to pan-fry.

Place cast-iron skillet over medium heat, add corn oil to skillet and preheat to bubbling, about 3 to 4 minutes. Working one at a time, place each milanesa in the hot oil and fry until golden brown, 3 minutes per side. Place milanesas on paper towels to drain. Place in warm oven until ready to assemble.

To assemble: Spread 1 tablespoon mayonnaise on the bottom slice of each cemita and 2 tablespoons refried beans on the top slices. Place 1 milanesa for each serving, followed by a generous handful of quesoillo, 4 to 5 avocado slices, 2 to 3 onion slices and 1 chipotle pepper. Top each cemita with 8 to 10 papalos or cilantro leaves. Place on a warm plate and serve.

— From "Hugo Ortega's Street Food of Mexico" by Hugo Ortega (Bright Sky Press, \$34.95)



Tinga is a popular sauce in Puebla, Mexico, home of the original battle that inspired Cinco de Mayo. You can make it with chicken or pork and serve on tacos, with rice or on tostadas. ADDIE BROYLES / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

## TINGA POBLANA

This super easy stew is made with pork or chicken and is traditionally served in Puebla over crunchy tostadas. This is my go-to recipe, which I adapted from Diana Kennedy's. Top the tostadas with avocado, crema or shredded lettuce and radishes, which is what Sazón's Margarito Aranda prefers. For a spicier tinga, chop up the chipotles before adding to the pan.

— CLAUDIA ALARCÓN

**1 pound boneless stewing pork, in 1-inch cubes**  
**1 teaspoon salt, or to taste**  
**8 ounces fresh chorizo**  
**2 cloves garlic, finely chopped**  
**½ cup white onion, thinly sliced**  
**1 pound tomatoes, finely chopped**  
**3 sprigs fresh thyme (½ teaspoon dried thyme)**  
**½ teaspoon oregano**  
**2 bay leaves**  
**3 chipotles in adobo, plus**

**2 tablespoons of the sauce from the can**

Cover the pork with water, add salt and bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer until tender, about 40 minutes. Let the pork cool in the broth for a while, then drain, reserving the broth. Shred the meat finely.

Crumble the chorizo into a skillet and cook over low heat until the fat has rendered out. Remove the chorizo from the pan and set aside. Take out all but 2 tablespoons of fat from the pan. Add the garlic, onions and tomato and fry over medium-high heat for about 5 minutes, stirring and scraping the bottom of the pan. Add the pork, fried chorizo, thyme, oregano, bay leaves, chipotles and liquid from the can, and add ½ cup of the reserved broth. Let it cook for about 10 minutes, checking seasoning to taste. It should be moist but not too juicy.

— CLAUDIA ALARCÓN

## Puebla

continued from D8

ded lettuce, thinly sliced radishes and roasted tomatillo salsa." Talk about the perfect party food. So perfect that Aranda chose it as his dish for the Taste of Mexico festival happening at MexicArte on May 2 at Brazos Hall.

From the misty forests of its sierras to its agricultural valleys and its colonial gem

of a capital, Puebla's gastronomy is arguably one of the most important in a country rich in culinary heritage and one worthy of celebration this Cinco de Mayo.

Margarito Aranda of Sazon, who is seen here holding a plate of cochinita pibil in his restaurant, often enjoys tinga with his family at home. JAY JANNER / AMERICAN-STATESMAN



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