

Tamale Recipe

This tamale recipe is from my mother. This is how she taught me to make tamales, with my own twist. There is no one way that is the correct to make tamales. Everyone has his or her own family recipe. My mother was from northern Mexico near Monterrey. I can remember her making tamales my whole life. I did not get interested in making tamales until I was in my 20s. I figured I had better learn before my sweet mom was not around to teach me.

So let us begin:

First the ingredients you will need are:

1 bag of Cornhusks: you can find these at Kroger or any of the Mexican or international grocery stores

1 to 2 small bags of Chili ancho: I use dried chili ancho. You can use fresh or other types of chili depending on your taste. You can find these at any Mexican or international grocery store

Salt

Adobo: seasoning found at Kroger or any of the Mexican or international grocery stores. This is a mix of garlic, salt and pepper

Ground Cumin

1 large garlic bulb or minced garlic in a jar

1 large Onion

Butter, instead of lard or olive oil

Chicken, pork, beef or vegetable broth or bullion

2- 3 lbs. of meat of your choice: chicken or pork. You can make a vegetarian version with beans, vegetables and cheese.

One bag or more of masa depending on how many tamales you want to make. One bag should be fine for your first time.

Steamer pot

Prepping:

Making tamales is an intensive day of prepping your ingredients before you even begin to make your tamales. I usually cook the meat and make the chili ancho paste the day before.

Meat prep

I cook my chicken or pork in a crock-pot to keep meat from getting too dry. Plus, I use the meat stock to add to the chili ancho paste and masa for flavor. I add half the large onion, 3-4 garlic cloves or 1-2 teaspoons of minced garlic, and 1 teaspoon of Adobo to the meat. Once meat is cooked shred and set aside. Save the broth.

Chili Ancho prep

I start with hydrating my dried chili ancho. I put about 8-10 of the chili anchoes into a 3 or 4 quart saucepan with water. I put enough water to cover the chilies. Bring water to a boil and then let simmer for 20-25 min. Remove from stove and let sit for 10 minutes. Open and remove seeds from chilies. I run water through chilies as I remove the seeds with a strainer underneath to catch the seeds.

I then add the chilies to a blender with other half of onion, ½ tsp Adobo, ½ tsp salt, ½ tsp cumin and 1 c of broth. Puree until the thickness of a shake.

In a large sauté pan heat up ¼ cup of olive oil and then add pureed chili ancho and cook for about 5-8 minutes. Stir the paste to keep it from bubbling too much. Once you are done set it aside. Refrigerate it until we are ready to use it.

Seasoning Meat

Now that the meat and chili ancho sauce is completed, we can season the meat. In a large sauté pan, add ¼ cup of olive oil and heat. Add your meat and add about 1 tsp. of cumin, ½ tsp Adobo and salt to taste, stir this up. Now you can add in chili ancho paste, 3-4 Tablespoons. Stir and simmer for about 5-8 min. Once you are done set the meat aside.

Cornhusks

Soak your cornhusks in a large bowl of hot to warm water for at least an hour before starting to make your tamales.

Prepping the masa

I follow the directions on the bag of maseca. However, I use butter instead of lard or shortening. I also use the broth from the meat I cooked earlier along with store bought broth or bullion if needed. Here are the directions for the masa:

Measure out 4 cups of maseca

Add 1 tsp. baking powder and salt and mix dry ingredients

Add 1 cup butter, cut up in pieces

Add 3 cups of warm broth

Add chili ancho paste, about 2 big spoons

Mix with mixer or hands

You want to mix the masa flour so it doesn't stick to your hands.

Putting the tamales together

Now that we have all the components for the tamales, we are ready to put them together.

Setup your table with the following:

Small bowl of warm water and big spoon to spread masa with

A bowl of the prepared meat

A bowl of the prepared masa

A plate of the pre-soaked cornhusks—Make sure you use the soft side of the husk, not the ridged side.

We start with the cornhusk. You want to use the soft side of the cornhusk to add the masa to it. Place a ball about the size of a 3-inch diameter on the husk and then use the spoon or your hands to spread the masa evenly. If you use the spoon, dip it in the warm water so the masa does not stick to it. It's like spreading plaster with the backside of the spoon.

Once you have the masa on the husk you can take spoonful of the meat, place it on the masa, and then roll the husk closed. When you have enough to fill you steamer pot you can tie 3 to 4 together so they stand up in the steamer. Steam for one hour and 15 min to an hour and a half.

The tamales are done when you can pull the cornhusk off without the masa sticking to it.

Serve with your best salsa!

If you have any questions, you can email me at lzapata@indiana.edu.