

# SAVOR THE TASTES OF MEXICO

TIPS & RECIPES



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## **Tips and Recipes**

## Mexican vs. Tex-Mex: What is the Difference?

Have you ever wondered what the difference is between authentic Mexican and Tex-Mex food? If you look around online, you'll find plenty of debate over which style of cooking is better. Some "traditionalists" even question if Tex-Mex is a legitimate form of American cuisine.

No matter where the debate leads, Tex-Mex has earned its place on the American table. Still, that doesn't answer how Tex-Mex differs from authentic Mexican food.

The roots of Tex-Mex cuisine trace back to the Spanish. The Spanish missionaries brought their recipes to Texas, and when they left the area in the 1700s, the natives of the region had already assimilated portions of their cooking culture into their own.

Along with this influence, early colonization of Texas also included other cultures. For example, individuals from the Canary Islands brought a different flavor palate with them, which included cumin, garlic, and chili powder. These flavors now form the foundation for the Tex-Mex favorite, chili con carne.

This blending of outside cultures with Mexican farm food and Texas ranch food is evident in many other modern Tex-Mex dishes.

For instance, you will find a lot more beef in Tex-Mex recipes than in traditional Mexican dishes. Even though beef cattle could be found in Mexico, grasslands were overgrazed and herds were scarce. Pigs, turkeys, wild fowl, chicken, and seafood were more likely available to the average Mexican household. As a result, these ingredients were found in more Mexican dishes.

On the other hand, beef cattle have long been a staple in Texas, so it is only natural that beef plays a more predominate role Tex-Mex recipes.

Before trade and commerce exploded in Mexico, beans, corn, and rice formed the basis for many meals. As Mexican people moved north, these foods found their way onto the plates of many households in Texas. In return, Texans introduced Mexican cooks to more plentiful milk and cheese, in addition to beef. This blending of cultures and cuisine created excitement, especially during the 1940s and 1950s as the borders between the two countries became more open.

During this time, the term 'Tex-Mex' was coined and was proudly used to describe Mexican dishes adapted by Texan cooks. However, as decades passed, the recipes lost much of their heritage. By the 1970s, many wonderful Tex-Mex dishes were almost completely revamped into unrecognizable concoctions introduced at carnivals and fairs. Chimichangas, cheese-laden nachos, and soggy tortillas soon gave Tex-Mex cuisine a bad name.

Along with carnival and fair food, much of what we know as Tex-Mex today can be traced in part to the fast food franchise explosion which introduced "Mexican" food to most Americans. These menus typically featured pre-made taco shells which housed a variety of ingredients buried under piles of cheese and sauces. Although these restaurants gave a general nod to a "south of the border" flavor, their menus had little in common with authentic Mexican or Texan

cuisine.

What was once an exciting blending of cultures was given a less-than-honorable spin in order to appeal to the masses. Restaurants were popping up all over America claiming to serve only “authentic” Mexican food, when they were actually making a stab at Tex-Mex.

**Often, they missed the mark on both.**

This is a shame because it left many believing they don't like either Mexican or Tex-Mex food. If this applies to you, you may want to give both styles of cooking another chance now that you know more about it.

When it comes down to deciding which is best - authentic Mexican fare or Tex-Mex cuisine - there is no right or wrong answer.

All you can do is compare and decide for yourself which you prefer. Dive into the many cookbooks available for both Tex-Mex and Mexican cuisines to see what appeals to you. Then visit authentic local restaurants to try for yourself.

**In the end, you don't have to choose, because there's always room for both.**

## Tasty Tips To Make Mexican Food Lighter And Healthier

Join your friends at a typical Mexican restaurant and look around the table at all the delicious offerings. Aside from making your mouth water, what do all these dishes have in common?

Chances are they are not exactly what you would call "on the lighter side."

You might also notice the servings are huge. (No, you aren't imagining things... that plate of nachos you enjoyed a decade ago has now become an enormous platter). Over time, our appetites have become used to these larger portions of fatty, fried foods swimming in heavy sauces.

Fortunately, you can turn those bad eating habits into healthy ones - while still enjoying all the great Mexican flavors you love. Authentic Mexican food doesn't resemble those loaded plates of fat and calories. By simply returning to the roots of Mexican cooking - lean protein, beans, and fresh produce - you can lighten your plate and stop loosening your belt.

Here are a few healthier choices you can make and still enjoy all that wonderful Mexican food:

### **Lean Protein**

Skip the beef. Red meat was not a staple in the Mexican diet because beef cattle were not readily available to most of the people. Instead, turkey, chicken, and seafood were much more likely to be eaten by the average Mexican family.

Go back to those simple diets and enjoy these leaner and healthier proteins instead of ground or shredded beef. You'll be eating much healthier - and the result will be more authentically Mexican.

### **Beans**

Beans are the ultimate lean protein enjoyed in many classic Mexican dishes. So, how did this super healthy food become so unhealthy?

Fat and sugar are often found in canned beans and most definitely in refried beans. You'll also find some restaurants take the term "refried beans" to mean throw the canned beans into a skillet and fry them twice in fat.

The term "refried beans" is actually a misnomer. The actual English translation from the Spanish term "frijoles refritos" means "beans well fried." You can do this in a healthy manner like authentic Mexican cooks. Just smash some cooked beans and fry them dry, meaning with no oil. Or just smash the beans and add them to your recipe without frying them to enjoy all their healthy goodness.

### **Guacamole and Salsa Fresca**

You can add lots of great flavor to your next Mexican meal with fresh guacamole and salsa. Any Mexican restaurant worth going to has its own freshly made versions of these two

classics. These dishes are also super easy to make at home, so there is no reason to succumb to any of the other not-so-healthy toppings that are offered.

Speaking of unhealthy toppings, there is one in particular that you may want to avoid: queso sauce. When you see the words "con queso"- just turn away. Loaded with fat, salt, and lots of calories, any queso sauce (cheese sauce) on the menu can be replaced with a fresh, healthy guacamole or salsa fresca.

## **Tortillas**

And now we come to that very popular vehicle for so many Mexican foods... the tortilla. Used to wrap other ingredients, the tortilla can be healthy - or not.

A basic flour tortilla, fried in a dry skillet until lightly browned, can be just fine. But somewhere along the way, restaurants started churning out tortilla monsters. Super huge chimichangas, burritos, and tacos now reign supreme.

Not only are these offerings huge, they are often deep fried, as well. Yes, that gigantic tortilla-wrapped bundle of cheese-laden ingredients gets lowered into a vat of hot fat and deep fried for your dining pleasure.

For a healthier choice, skip the deep-fried option. Then, choose fillings that feature leaner proteins, healthy vegetables and non-fried beans. .

As you can see, even standard Mexican restaurant fare can be made healthier by making simple substitutions. All the fresh, delicious flavors of Mexico can be enjoyed in new, healthier ways.

**All you have to do is look to the past and cook real food in traditional Mexican ways.**

### 3 Mexican Desserts to Satisfy Any Sweet Tooth

If you hear “Mexican food,” your thoughts may instantly turn to enchiladas, burritos, guacamole, pico de gallo and fajitas. But what comes after those savory, spicy delights?

Something sweet, of course!

The best way to wrap up a delicious Mexican meal is with a classic Mexican dessert. Sweet and decadent, the three tasty desserts listed below never go out of style. What’s even better is they are all easy to make once you know how!

Let’s take a look at these desserts and get busy planning your next adventure in Mexican cooking.

#### **Flan**

This ancient recipe can be traced all the way back to Rome where chickens were first known to be used just for their eggs. This custard dish was originally a savory meal, but was so versatile that it soon became flavored with other natural ingredients, like honey.

We can see an evolution of flan through the centuries and across borders. Because flan is such a simple dish to make, it became popular with many cultures, each adding their own local special touches. We can see the Spanish influence in the Mexican recipes which are traditionally sweetened with a glaze of caramelized sugar.

When Columbus journeyed to the Americas, he brought with him his love of flan and his recipes. Flan became a classic dessert in Mexican homes. Chickens – and their eggs - were plentiful, making this dessert affordable for all people of any economic status.

This wonderfully elegant, yet simple dessert remains virtually unchanged in Mexican cooking where it is a basic custard, molded, then turned over onto a plate. It may have a caramel coating or caramelized sugar coating, and is served either room temperature or cold.

#### **Tres Leches Cake**

Cake is good, but cake soaked in something delicious is better. Like flan, you can trace this type of cake way back to ancient times. There are soaked cakes on every continent with so many variations that it boggles the mind.

For instance, rum or sherry soaked cakes are very British, while fruit juice soaked cakes are a familiar dessert in tropical regions. Cakes soaked in wine are common in Italy and France. It seems that each version has reasons why the ingredients are what they are.

The Mexican version features a sweet spongy cake soaked in three kinds of milk.

This dessert, the Tres Leches Cake, translates to "3 milks" cake. The origin of that term and the recipe itself is still questionable. Some believe the recipe originated with the introduction of condensed and evaporated milk. The three milks included in most recipes for Tres Leches Cake are sweetened condensed milk, evaporated milk, and heavy cream.

No matter what the origin of the recipe is, the combination of these three rich milks makes one delightful dessert.

You can serve your Tres Leches Cake with a layer of whipped cream sprinkled with cinnamon, topped with fruit, or plain. It's a nice treat any way you choose.

## **Empanadas**

When you think of an empanada, you could be thinking of many types of foods. As a matter of fact, the word simply means a pastry. That leaves a lot to the imagination, but the basic design is the same for any recipe.

The pastry itself is simple, much like a pie pastry. You form a circle or a square, spoon in the filling, fold, seal and bake or fry. The filling is what makes the dish. In this case, we are making a Mexican dessert so we are going to stick to a sweet filling.

In Mexico, a dessert empanada could contain many fruits and other fillings, but what comes to mind, of course, is bananas along with another Mexican favorite, chocolate. Nuts would add a lot of flavor and texture to this dessert. As with many authentic Mexican recipes, keeping the empanada pastry plain and simple is traditional. If you want to get a little more creative, try using puff pastry instead.

If you are not a fan of making homemade pastry, go ahead and use pre-made pie crusts, frozen empanada discs or other pastry dough. As long as it's flaky, hot, and sweet, your Mexican empanada dessert will be perfect.

Try your hand at these three desserts the next time you want to treat your family to something deliciously sweet after dinner. These classic Mexican desserts will become family favorites in no time!



## Let's Talk Tequila!

When the topic of Mexican food comes up, there may be a vast array of flavors and ingredients discussed. But mention Mexican beverages and all discussion turns to one drink - tequila.

Mexico and tequila are inseparable, both culturally and legally. Just as a bottle of Champagne can only be labeled "Champagne" if it originates from the Champagne region of France, tequila can only be labeled "Tequila" if it is produced in specific Mexican states.

This process starts with the harvesting of 'agave tequilana weber azul' from the region, then is carefully fermented and distilled using the same ancient methods the common Mexican people used.

One of the oldest tequila companies started marketing their product back in the 1750s and by the late 1800s, its appeal had spread across all economic and physical borders.

### Harvest and Production

The harvest of the 'blue agave' is simple, but hard work. These large, heavy plants are dug up and trimmed by workers called jimadores. Wielding a big stick with a razor sharp blade, the jimadores slice off the leaves, then they split open the plant exposing the pina, or core.

The pinas are cooked for several days to convert their complex starches into a simple sugar that is then fermented using yeast. The fermented juice is then put through the distillation process, after which it is stored in oak barrels and aged.

But, that's just one tequila-making process. After centuries of perfecting this process, the Mexican tequila producers couldn't stop there. There are now so many varieties of tequila available, it's hard to know where to start.

*Here's a quick look at some basic facts:*

### Beyond the Barrel

There are two categories of tequila: 100% Blue Agave Tequila and Mixed Tequila. Only tequila made from 100% blue agave can be labeled "Tequila 100% de Agave." Any tequilas made with added cane sugar, caramel color, or other syrups and flavorings are labeled simply "Tequila."

If you decide you only want 100% blue agave tequila, you still have some choices within that category. Some of these may include tequila which has been left in the distilling process longer or aged in barrels longer for a smoother finish. Choose a high-quality Tequila Blanco and you will enjoy a very pure product which has a slightly smoky taste with fruity undertones.

The mixed tequila, or tequila mixto, has additives to produce some differences in the taste, color, and finish. Tequila reposado is "rested" and aged in wood barrels for several months. The blend of these woody flavors with the agave makes this type of tequila very desirable for

sipping, which is a nice way to enjoy the aftertastes of vanilla and cherry.

For the highest quality sipping tequila, though, you'll want to try one of the extra aged or ultra aged varieties, or tequila anejo, which gives this tequila its richer, deeper flavor. The tequila anejo products may be aged for one year to ten years, or even longer, which explains the extreme range of finishes.

## **How to Choose**

The easiest way to choose the “right” tequila is to consider the drink or food you’ll pair with it.

If you're making margaritas, for instance, you want to match the flavor intensity of the tequila you choose with the orange liqueur you use. Strong-flavored tequilas will overpower wimpy orange flavors and vice versa. Balance these two flavors properly and suddenly you’ve got nirvana in a glass.

When you start to feel adventurous enough to cook with tequila, just remember the two rules for cooking with wine - only use what you would drink and match the wine palate to the food palate. A little bit of tequila blanco is perfect in a light citrus-based shrimp marinade. Darker tequilas work well in recipes that are a bit heavier and smoky.

When you’re ready to head to your friendly neighborhood liquor store, be sure to write down all your questions and give the proprietor a chance to help you choose the very best tequila your money can buy. Whether you're mixing drinks, cooking or just sipping, a good bottle of tequila is always a pleasure!

# Mexican Recipes

## *Authentic Mexican Rice*



The secret to getting making and fluffy Mexican rice that doesn't stick together is to thoroughly rinse the uncooked rice under cold water for a couple minutes to remove the excess starch.

### Ingredients:

3 or 4 medium ripe tomatoes, seeded and roughly chopped

1 medium onion, roughly chopped

3 or 4 cloves garlic, peeled

2 jalapeno peppers, seeded

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

2 cups long-grain white rice, thoroughly rinsed

2 cups chicken broth

Fresh cilantro, stems removed and finely chopped

Salt and pepper, to taste

2 limes, cut into wedges

### ***Directions:***

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Roughly chop tomatoes, onion, garlic and jalapenos and add to blender or food processor. Process thoroughly until mixture is smooth.

In a large oven-safe skillet with a tight-fitting lid, heat olive oil over medium heat. Once hot, add rinsed rice and stir constantly with wooden spoon for 5 or 6 minutes or until it starts to turn brown.



Add broth and pureed tomato mixture to pan. Stir until thoroughly combined with rice. Bring to a boil while stirring occasionally, and then remove from heat.





Cover skillet with lid and place in pre-heated oven on middle shelf.



After 15 minutes, remove lid and carefully stir contents of pan. Cook another 15 minutes or until all excess moisture in pan has been absorbed.

Remove from oven and stir in fresh cilantro. Season with salt and pepper, to taste. Serve with wedges of fresh lime to help “brighten” the taste.



## Chunky Homemade Guacamole



### Ingredients:

2 ripe Haas Avocados

1 ripe fresh tomato, seeded and diced

1 large clove fresh garlic, finely minced

1 fresh lime, juiced

1 tablespoon (+ extra for garnish) fresh cilantro leaves, stems removed and finely chopped

Salt and pepper, to taste

### Directions:

With a sharp knife, slice the avocado from top to bottom, cutting all the way around the fruit. Place the avocado in the palm of your non-dominant hand and gently the top half clockwise until it easily separates into two pieces.

To remove the seed, “whack” the seed with your sharp knife so the blade sticks into it. Gently turn the knife until the seed pops out.

To dice, score the avocado while still in its skin but cutting equally sized slices from top to bottom. Then, rotate 90 degrees and do the same thing going side to side. This combination of horizontal and vertical cuts will give you equal sized chunks of diced avocado.





To remove from skin, take a spoon and gently scrape all on the bottom of the flesh (where it meets the skin) until all your diced chunks are removed.

Place diced avocado in bowl.



Add diced tomato, garlic, lime juice and fresh cilantro to bowl and combine with a fork. Season with salt, pepper and additional lime juice, if desired.



Serve with favorite Mexican entrees or on its own with crunchy tortilla chips.



## Classic Margaritas on the Rocks



The key to making a classic margarita is striking the right balance between your tequila of choice and the orange-flavored liqueur you pair with it. A strong flavored tequila needs a strong-flavored orange liqueur to stand up to it.

As a result, the following is a more of a formula than a true recipe. Use your favorite tequila and orange- flavored liqueur, such as Cointreau or Grand Marnier.

### Ingredients:

1.5 oz. tequila

1.5 oz. orange-flavored liqueur

1.25 oz. freshly squeeze lime juice

### Optional:

1-2 tablespoons simple syrup

(To make, heat 1 part white sugar with 1 part water until sugar is thoroughly dissolved).

### Directions:

Fill a cocktail shaker full of ice and add the tequila, orange liqueur and lime juice. Shake vigorously to combine and pour into salt-rimmed margarita glasses filled with ice. Serve with a wedge of lime, if desired.



Note: this is a strong drink when first poured. The flavors will mellow a bit as the ice melts. If you prefer a little sweeter drink, add 1 or 2 tablespoons of simple syrup to the cocktail shaker before mixing.



## Easy Chicken Quesadillas



### Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 small or ½ medium onion, finely minced
- 2 cloves fresh garlic, finely minced
- ½ cup chicken broth or water
- 2 tablespoons homemade taco seasoning mix\*
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 8 10" flour tortillas
- 2 cups pre-cooked chicken, shredded (rotisserie works great)
- 2 cup shredded white cheese (Monterey Jack or Pepper Jack)
- 1 bunch fresh cilantro, stems removed and finely chopped.
- 2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and diced – optional



Makes 4 Quesadillas

**Directions:**

Add extra virgin olive oil and onion to large cold skillet. Heat over medium-high heat until onion becomes translucent, about 6 - 8 minutes. Add garlic and stir for 1 - 2 minutes or until it starts to turn brown.

Add chicken broth, taco seasoning, salt and pepper to pan. Stir until dry ingredients are completely dissolved.



Add shredded chicken to the pan and toss to coat in the seasonings. Turn heat to medium-low and simmer until any excess moisture is absorbed.



Remove from heat and keep warm.

Place butter in a clean skillet and heat over medium-high heat until melted. Swirl until bottom of pan is thoroughly covered.



Place one tortilla in pan.





Top with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup seasoned shredded chicken mixture and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup shredded cheese. Add fresh cilantro and diced jalapeno peppers, if desired.





Distribute ingredients evenly and place second tortilla on top. Carefully flip once the bottom tortilla turns golden brown.



Once both sides are browned and cheese is melted, remove from heat and slice into 8 wedges. Serve immediate with fresh salsa, guacamole, sour cream or pico de gallo.





\*Homemade Taco Seasoning recipe included in this ebook.



## ***Homemade Tomato Salsa***



The best time to make this recipe is at the height of summer when there are plenty of fresh tomatoes available. This recipe tastes even better the following day after the flavors have a chance to meld together.

### **Ingredients:**

4 medium ripe tomatoes, cored and seeded

2 - 3 cloves garlic, peeled

Juice from 1 fresh lime (about ¼ cup)

1 – 2 tablespoons fresh cilantro, stems removed and finely chopped salt and pepper, to taste

### **Directions:**

Cut 3 of the tomatoes into quarters and place in blender or food processor. Add garlic cloves and half the lime juice. Pulse until thoroughly combined.



Dice remaining tomato into evenly sized small pieces. Stir into tomato garlic mixture to create a chunkier texture. Stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons of fresh cilantro (adjust according to personal preference).

Add remaining lime and season with salt and pepper, to taste. Serve with your favorite Mexican entrée or by itself with crispy tortilla chips.





## Slow Cooker Chili Colorado



This authentic Chili Colorado recipe is very mild and pairs well with spicy Mexican rice. However, you can easily add more heat by replacing the green chilies with hotter pepper varieties.

### Ingredients:

2 cans green chilies

3 pounds boneless beef chuck roast

¼ cup all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons chili powder

1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

2 teaspoons salt

2 teaspoons black pepper

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

3 cups beef broth

1 medium yellow onion, chopped

3 tablespoons fresh cilantro, stems removed and finely chopped

**Optional:** (to add more heat): 2 – 3 jalapeno peppers, seeded and chopped

## Directions:

Add green chilies to blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Set aside.



Trim off excess fat from chuck roast and cut into equal size chunks. The meat will become very tender and easy to pull apart while in the slow cooker - so larger chunks are fine.



In a small bowl, combine flour, chili powder, crushed red pepper, salt and pepper.





Sprinkle seasoned flour over beef chunks and toss to coat lightly.



Heat olive oil in large 12" skillet over medium-high heat. With tongs, lift individual floured beef chunks and shake off excess flour. Place beef in hot skillet and brown on all sides. Work in batches to prevent overlapping or overcrowding pieces.



Remove browned beef from pan and add to slow cooker. Repeat browning process with remaining floured beef slices.



Add pureed green chilies, beef stock, chopped onion and jalapeno peppers (if desired) to slow cooker. Cook on high for 4 hours or low for 8. When done cooking, transfer to serving bowl and stir in fresh cilantro, reserving some for garnish.







Serve with soft flour tortillas, refried beans, and Mexican rice, if desired.





## ***Banana-Chocolate Empanadas***

Empanadas can be filled with many types of fillings ranging from sweet to savory.

There are many types of dough that can be used to make empanadas. You can use a traditional empanada dough recipe or you can purchase the pre-made frozen empanada discs now found in many larger or specialty grocery stores. In a pinch, frozen pie dough or your own favorite pie dough recipe will also work.

This variation uses light and flaky puff pastry, which is a perfect complement for the sweet interior. Although this is not a “traditional” dough used to make empanadas, it is incredibly delicious.

### **Ingredients:**

8 sheets of frozen puff pastry, defrosted

4 tablespoons melted butter

3 ripe bananas, peeled and mashed

1 tablespoon white sugar

2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

8 oz. semi-sweet mini chocolate chips

1 tablespoon powdered sugar

1 tablespoon cinnamon

### **Directions:**

Preheat oven to 400°

Place mashed bananas in a glass bowl. Add sugar and lemon juice and stir to combine. Gently stir in chocolate chips with rubber baking spatula.

On a lightly floured surface, take one sheet of puff pastry and fold it in half, length-wise, to form a long rectangle shape.

With a pastry brush, brush melted butter on exposed portion of pastry sheet.

Spoon 1/8 of chocolate-banana mixture toward the top of the puff pastry. (Position the filling so you can fold a corner “flap” of the puff pastry over it to form a triangle). Continue folding the dough in a triangle shape (like you were folding a flag) until all the dough is wrapped around the filling in a neat triangular shape.

Place on a lightly greased cookie sheet and repeat process with remaining sheets of puff

pastry and filling. Brush top of each triangle with additional melted butter. Dust the folded empanadas with powdered sugar and cinnamon and bake in 400° oven for 12 – 15 minutes, or until the pastries are golden brown. Remove from oven and serve hot with either cinnamon ice cream or homemade whipped cream.

## ***Black Bean Burritos***

### **Ingredients:**

4 10" flour tortillas  
3 tablespoons olive oil  
1 medium onion, diced  
1 red bell pepper, chopped  
3 cloves garlic, peeled and finely minced  
2 (15 oz.) cans black beans, drained and rinsed  
2 cans diced green chilies  
2 plum tomatoes, seeded and chopped  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1 teaspoon chili powder  
12 oz. of cream cheese  
Salt and pepper, to taste  
Small bunch fresh cilantro, stems removed and chopped  
Optional: shredded cheddar cheese

### **Directions:**

Heat oven to 350°

Wrap tortillas in aluminum foil or place in a tortilla warmer and put in pre-heated oven for 15 minutes.

Heat olive oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add diced onion and sauté 5 – 6 minutes. Add red peppers and garlic and cook an additional 2 minutes.

Add beans, green chilies and diced tomato to skillet. Season with cumin and chili powder and cook for 2 – 3 minutes.

Chop cream cheese into 1" cubes and add to pan. Heat for 2 minutes, stirring occasionally until cheese is melted and mixture is thoroughly combined.

Remove pan from heat and stir in chopped cilantro. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

To serve, spoon bean mixture down the center of warmed tortillas. Roll and serve with shredded cheese, if desired.

## ***Homemade Taco Seasoning Mix***

This recipe only takes a couple minutes to put together and costs less than buying pre-packaged taco seasoning. It also has less salt and no artificial additives or preservatives.

### **Ingredients:**

2 tablespoons chili powder

1 tablespoon ground cumin

1 teaspoon ground coriander

2 teaspoons garlic powder

1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

1 teaspoon smoked paprika

1 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoons black pepper

### **Directions:**

Combine all ingredients in an airtight container and shake well to combine. Use 2 - 3 tablespoons per pound of ground beef (use more or less according to individual taste preferences).

This recipe can also be made in larger batches. Store unused amounts in an air tight container for up to 6 months.

## ***Chicken Tortilla Soup***

This recipe calls for pre-cooked, shredded chicken breast. Leftover roasted chicken and store-bought rotisserie chicken are great options. If you don't have any pre-cooked chicken lying around, you can roast a couple boneless, skinless breasts drizzled in olive oil in a 375° oven for 25 – 30 minutes, then shred it with a fork.

### **Ingredients:**

#### **Soup:**

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 medium onion, finely chopped

3 cloves garlic, finely minced

1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely diced

4 cups chicken broth

1 cup water

2 cups shredded cooked chicken breasts

1 teaspoon chili powder

1 teaspoon cumin

1 (15-oz.) can diced tomatoes with green chilies, undrained\*

1 tablespoon tomato paste

1 cup frozen corn, thawed

1 (15 oz.) can black beans, drained and rinsed

Salt and pepper, to taste

#### **Baked Tortilla Chips:**

3 (10") flour tortillas

¼ cup olive oil salt, to taste

#### **Serve With:**

Shredded Monterey Jack cheese

1 fresh, ripe avocado, seed removed and diced

Fresh cilantro, stems removed and finely minced

\*If you can't find the tomatoes with green chilies combination, use a small 4 oz. can of green chilies with a regular can of diced tomatoes.

## **Directions:**

### **For Baked Tortilla Strips:**

Preheat oven to 400°

Brush both sides of each tortilla with olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Stack tortillas into a pile and slice into thin strips.

Arrange tortilla slices in a single layer on cookie sheets and sprinkle with more salt, if desired.

Bake for 6 – 8 minutes, and then rotate baking sheets so the chips brown uniformly. Total cooking time will be about 15 – 18 minutes. When tortilla strips are golden brown, remove from oven and cool on wire racks.

### **For the Soup:**

In a large, deep saucepan with a heavy bottom, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Add onion and sauté until translucent, about 6 – 8 minutes. Add garlic and jalapeno peppers and cook another 1 - 2 minutes, stirring occasionally.

When garlic turns golden brown, add the remaining ingredients except the chicken and bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low. Simmer for 45 minutes to 1 hour to give flavors a chance to meld.

Right before soup is ready, cover chicken and warm in microwave for 30 – 45 seconds (or put back in hot oven for a couple minutes).

Taste soup and season with additional salt and pepper, if desired.

Divide chicken amongst the bowls and ladle steaming hot soup over it. Top with baked tortilla chips and serve with diced avocado, fresh cilantro and shredded cheese.



## ***Homemade Flour Tortillas***

### **Ingredients:**

4 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoons baking powder

3 tablespoons shortening or lard

1.5 cups hot water

### **Directions:**

In a large bowl, combine dry ingredients. With a sharp knife, cut shortening or lard into small pieces. Add pieces to dry ingredients and thoroughly combine with your fingers until a uniform consistency is achieved.

Add hot water and lightly work into dough.

Place dough on a lightly floured surface and continue kneading until a smooth ball is formed. Divide dough into 16 equal sized portions and allow to rest under damp (not wet) cloth for 10-15 minutes.

Place each small dough portion onto a lightly floured surface. With a floured rolling pin, roll the dough into a thin, round shape.

**Tip:** Turn the dough 90 degrees every so often to create a uniform round shape.

Preheat a large dry skillet (preferably cast iron) over medium-high heat. Add one rolled out dough circle and heat until golden brown, then flip and cook until golden brown on other side.

Repeat with remaining dough pieces. Place each finished tortilla in tortilla warmer or wrap in aluminum foil to keep warm. Serve immediately with your favorite fillings.

## ***Pico de Gallo***

This recipe is perfect for those hot summer days when your garden is overflowing with delicious, juicy tomatoes. For best results, make in advance and allow flavors to meld together for several hours or overnight.

### **Ingredients:**

8 fresh ripe tomatoes, seeded and diced

½ large red onion, minced

3 cloves garlic

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1 large bunch fresh cilantro, stems removed and finely minced

Juice from 1 fresh lime salt and pepper, to taste

Optional, for more heat: 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely minced

### **Directions:**

**Note:** To soften the intensity of the red onion, soak them in cold water for 15 minutes before adding them to the recipe.

Place diced tomatoes, red onion, garlic and cumin in a glass bowl and stir to combine. Stir in ½ of the cilantro and lime juice and taste. If desired, add remaining cilantro and lime juice. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

Serve as a side with your favorite Mexican entrée or by itself with crispy tortilla chips.

## ***Watermelon Aqua Fresca***

Light and refreshing, this popular drink is perfect for hot summer afternoons. It can be made with any number of fresh fruits, but melons are the most popular.

While this version is non-alcoholic, rum or tequila and triple sec can be added to create a delicious adults-only beverage.

### **Ingredients:**

6 cups watermelon, seeded

1¼ cup water

1½ limes, juiced

4 tablespoons honey

½ lime, sliced Fresh mint leaves ice

### **Directions:**

Add watermelon, water and lime juice to blender or food processor and blend until smooth. If any seeds or large chunks remain, strain through a sieve to remove.

Pour into a pitcher and stir in honey until blended. Crush mint leaves with your fingers and put in the bottom of each glass. Fill glasses with ice and top with watermelon mixture.

Garnish each glass with a slice of lime or fresh mint leaves, if desired.

## ***Tutorial: How to Make Mexican Tamales***

Mexican tamales are a traditional dish made by filling a starchy dough with sweet or savory ingredients and then steaming the whole thing in a leaf wrapper.

Most often you see tamales filled with seasoned beef, chicken or pork, but you'll also find them made with vegetables, cheese and fruit. Tamales are sometimes served with a red mole or salsa, but that can take away from the delicious flavor of the tamale.

This tutorial uses a very flavorful and classic Mexican taste combination: cilantro-lime chicken. This basic chicken recipe makes a great main dish on its own or it can be incorporated into other recipes like it is here.

If you've never made tamales before, you are in for a treat. Although they may sound difficult or complicated to make, nothing can be further from the truth.

So, let's get started by gathering the right ingredients:

### **Ingredients:**

#### ***Cilantro-Lime Chicken Filling:***

2 cups homemade salsa\* or 16 oz. jar

3 tablespoons homemade taco seasoning\*\* or 1 package of premade seasoning

2 limes, juiced

3 tablespoons fresh cilantro, stems removed and finely chopped

½ cup water

3 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts

#### ***Tamale Dough:***

2 cups masa harina flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

¾ teaspoon salt

⅓ cup lard or shortening

2¼ cup chicken broth

1 (8 oz.) package dried cornhusks

### **Directions:**



To cook the chicken, you can either use a slow cooker or you can roast the breasts by drizzling them with olive oil and placing in a 375° oven for 25 – 30 minutes. Whichever method you choose, the object is to ensure the meat is done and can easily be shredded.

### **For Slow Cooker method:**

Add the salsa, cilantro, lime juice and taco seasoning. Stir until thoroughly combined. Then, add the chicken and just enough water to partially cover the breasts. Turn the chicken once to make sure they are coated.

Cover and set on high for 4 hours or low for 8. Once it is done, remove the chicken breasts, shred the meat and then return it to the juice in the slow cooker.

### **For Oven-Roasted Method:**

Remove chicken breasts from oven when done. Allow to cool enough to handle, then “shred” by using a fork in each hand to pull the meat apart.

In a large glass bowl, combine the salsa, cilantro, lime juice and taco seasoning. Add chicken to bowl and toss to coat. Cover and store in refrigerator for several hours for the flavors to meld together.

### **Make Tamale Dough**

While waiting for the chicken, add all of the dry tamale dough ingredients to a large bowl. Cut the lard or shortening into small chunks (the smaller, the better) and use your fingers to thoroughly work it into the dry ingredients until a uniform consistency is achieved.

Add the chicken broth a little at a time and combine until a “spongy” dough is formed. You may need to add a little more or less liquid to get the desired consistency.

### **Assemble the Tamales:**

To prepare the cornhusks, simply soak them in warm water until pliable.

Take one cornhusk and spread a 1/3” thick layer of the dough in the center. Don’t spread it clear to the bottom edge, as it will be folded over.

Add one or two large spoonfuls of seasoned chicken filling to the center of the dough. Wrap the dough around the filling and seal the edges with your fingers. Then, fold one side of the husk into the center and then fold in the other side. Finally, fold up the bottom end.

Repeat for remaining tamales.

Place tamales in a steamer. If you don’t have a steamer, use a large stockpot with a steamer basket. In a pinch, you can even use a strainer as long as it will hold the tamales above the boiling water.

**Tip:** Place your steam basket or container on its side and stack the tamales in so that the

folded bottom edge of the tamale is at the bottom of the steam basket. This will force the tamales to stand upright as they cook and will help them cook more evenly.

Add enough water to your steamer or stockpot to create steam, but don't fill it so high that it touches the steam basket bottom. Bring water to a boil, then cover with a lid and steam for 1 hour.

After about 30 minutes, check that your water level is still ok. Add more water, if necessary.

**\* and \*\* - recipes included**

# Healthy Mexican Meals CookBooks

## Healthy Mexican Cooking: Authentic Low-Fat Recipes

~ Velda de la Garza ~

You'll find a collection of over 150 authentic Mexican dishes that are easy to make with only a few ingredients each, while keeping calories and fat low without sacrificing taste. Yes, it's possible to put healthy Mexican food on your family's table!

## Paleo Mexican Recipes - Preparing the Simple Tex-Mex Paleo Cuisines At Home

~ Dana Cruze ~

Burritos and tacos swimming in cheese, salsa, and sour cream may be what you associate with the words "Mexican cuisine." However, authentic Mexican foods are far from this American fast-food standard. If you follow a Paleo diet, especially, you will be eating closer to the way the Mexican people did centuries ago... and some still today.

Gone are the over-processed plates of food most of us have encountered at a typical Mexican restaurant.

Enter the freshest, most natural ingredients when you enjoy Mexican cooking Paleo style. This book guides you through the process of planning and cooking meals that allow you to enjoy both the flavors of Mexico and stay on your Paleo diet.

## Mexican Light: Healthy Cuisine for Today's Cook

~ Kris Rudolph ~

Authentic Mexican cuisine is low in fat and high in fiber and other nutrients. With a diet of corn, squash, tomatoes, beans, and lean proteins, you might think you are reading recommendations from a modern day healthy eating report. But, this diet formed the basis for the Mexican people of ancient times. When the Aztecs ate their meals, they didn't know they would be helping people today create healthier eating habits!

You'll find 50 recipes to help you design a healthy eating program that includes dishes like Shrimp Ceviche, Roasted Garlic Soup With Spinach, Chicken Poblano, and even desserts like Mango Mousse. This book is also bilingual, so whether you speak English or Spanish, you'll be able to enjoy these delicious, nutritious dishes.

## 24 Gluten-Free Mexican Recipes

~ John Carlile ~

This is part of a new series of gluten-free cookbooks, each exploring regional cooking from all over the globe. In this collection about Mexican foods, you'll find 24 recipes perfected by the author during years of teaching cooking classes. Using fresh ingredients, these recipes are healthy and delicious, as well as easy! Designed for everyone who is following a gluten-free

diet, this book is written simply with recipes using fresh ingredients, and not a lot of complicated instructions. You'll enjoy lovely pictures and step-by-step illustrations to help you create the Mexican meals you long for... even on a gluten-free diet!

## **Mexican Light: Exciting, Healthy Recipes from the Border and Beyond**

~ Martha Rose Shulman ~

If you think Mexican food can't be made light, think again! This book shows you how to take the fat out of Mexican food and still enjoy lots of variations of your favorites like enchiladas and tacos. You'll also find plenty to love when you dig into healthier Mexican fish and chicken dishes, along with desserts and beverages. Don't give up on your favorite Mexican foods - just make them light!

## **Healthy Mexican: 29 Delicious Mexican Recipes That Won't Ruin Your Waistline**

~ Julie Morgan ~

This collection of Mexican recipes is tried and true. But, they are not just the author's favorite recipes - they are healthy versions of her favorites. Once you take a look at the recipes in this book, you'll see how easy it is to cook healthier Mexican dishes. It's really all about choosing fresh ingredients and using them in authentic ways. If you're counting calories or following a specific diet, you will also find lots of help to stay on track. Yes, you CAN eat Mexican food AND stay on your healthy diet!

## **Tortillas! 75 Quick and Easy Ways to Turn Simple Tortillas into Healthy Snacks and Mealtime Feasts**

~ Pat Sparks, Barbara Swanson ~

When you think of cooking Mexican foods, you probably envision most meals with some kind of tortilla at the center. Whether they are rolled, stacked, folded, soft, or crispy, the tortilla does have a major role to play in many Mexican meals. This book celebrates the versatility as well as the cultural history of the tortilla. Stock up on a variety of styles of tortillas and dig in to this lovely collection of recipes.

## **Mexican Street Food Recipes - Healthy Diet Delicious Mexican Street Food Cookbook**

~ Maria J Luis ~

This is the "no frills" Mexican street food served up fresh and fast! If you enjoy authentic Mexican food as it's really cooked and served, and not some watered-down version, this is the cookbook for you. Easy to prepare, spicy and simple, this is the food of the people. And, because the recipes are authentic, made as they are on the street, the ingredients are fresh and simple, making these recipes healthier, lower in fat and calories, and tasty as all get out! There's no prepackaged stuff here with ingredients you can't pronounce. Cook like they do on the streets of Mexico and you will enjoy good, wholesome, flavorful, healthy foods.



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