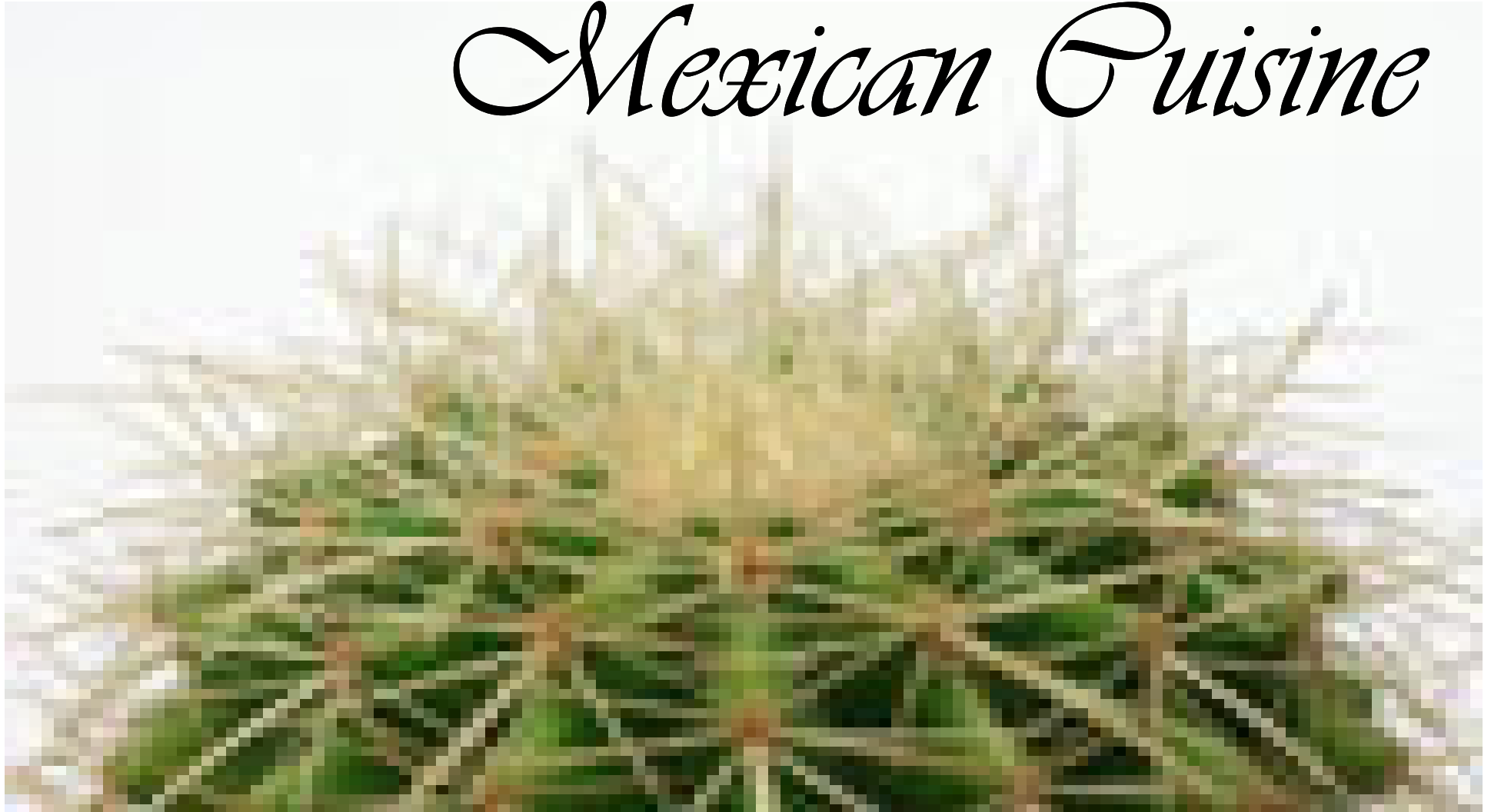


Mexican Cuisine



Introduction

Mexican food has a widely diverse history that started with the natives. Then the Spaniards introduced new spices and foods and finally there are the Americanized versions of Mexican dishes. Real Mexican food is quite unlike the dishes found in most Mexican and Tex-Mex restaurants in other countries. In tourist areas you'll find restaurants with familiar names and *gringo* menus, though the offerings will often be over-priced and not of a high standard.



Mexican cuisine has some superb rich or spicy dishes. Mexican fare is like the melting pot of cuisines. They started with their own native flavors and then eventually added influences from Spain, Europe, India and even China

Mexico's Food History

Mexican food, when viewed as a whole in terms of diversity of appealing tastes and textures, imagination used in combining ingredients, and being appetizingly presented, compares favorably with any cuisine in the world, including that of the French.

You could say that corn and beans are the two main foods of indigenous Mexicans, and much of Mexican cuisine is based on these two ingredients. There's something interesting to think about here. One wonders to what extent the ancient Aztec and Maya cultures owed their glory to the homey little fact that somewhere along the line they began eating corn tortillas smeared with bean paste...

During the 1520's, the Spaniards imported into Mexico plants and animals that no Mexican had ever seen. These included horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, and chickens. Among the condiments that also were introduced were olive oil, cinnamon, parsley, coriander, oregano, and black pepper. The Spaniards likewise introduced nuts and grains such as almonds, rice, wheat, and barley; and fruit and vegetables such as apples, oranges, grapes, lettuce, carrots, cauliflowers, potatoes (these brought from Peru), and sugarcane (whence comes sugar).

During colonial times, experiment-minded Spanish women and members of Spanish religious orders invented much of today's more sophisticated Mexican gastronomy. Nuns pioneered such now-traditional Mexican fare as the candy called *cajeta*, fritterlike *buñuelos*, and the egg-based liqueur called *rompope*. Also from the colonial period comes such fare as *Lomo en adobo* (pork loin in a spicy sauce), *chiles rellenos* (chilies stuffed with cheese, beef or pork), guacamole (avocado, tomato, onion, chili and coriander), and *escabeche* (marinades).

To get an idea of what a fancy Mexican dish is like, let's consider Mexico's most fervently honored dish, *mole poblano*. This dish is about a foot across! *Mole* (pronounced MOHL-leh) is a very rich, thick sauce made from several kinds of pepper and a remarkable number of seasonings, which vary from recipe to recipe, and which can number over a hundred different items. Among the prime ingredients of one recipe are ground peanuts, sesame and anise seed, cinnamon, salt, black pepper, sugar, garlic, onion, clove, coriander, tortilla, wheat bread, tomato, raisins, lard, pieces of pork, and... *chocolate*. Don't forget that chocolate is a native Mexican invention, so it has every right to be here.

Between 1864 and 1867, Mexico was ruled by the former Austrian archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, who was kept in power by French troops. Though Maximilian's reign was brief and tragic, French cooking left its mark on many Mexican-restaurant dishes. French-inspired Mexican dishes include *chiles en nogado* (stuffed chilies in a walnut sauce), and *conejo en mostaza* (rabbit in mustard sauce).

Nowadays a Mexican class is developing and this class appears to be driving Mexican cuisine into yet a new direction -- a generally northern one. Former tortilla eaters are becoming patrons of white bread. *Licua*dos of papaya or orange are losing ground to Cokes and Pepsis. Many of this new kind of Mexican can't stand hot sauce any better than a gringo. Hamburgers and Kentucky Fried Chicken are all the rage.

Yet, there is still a rainbow of traditional Mexican cuisine out there if you look for it. And there's no better place to find it than in and around traditional mercados.

Enjoy it while you can...



The Basics

Tortillas

The staple food of generations of ordinary Mexicans, tortillas can be made of flour (more common in the north) or maize (the traditional method and still the most common in the south). Often served alongside a meal as bread would be, tortillas are also used in many typical dishes – rolled and baked for enchiladas, fried for tacos or grilled for quesadillas.

Frijoles (beans)

A good source of protein, beans of different varieties are most commonly boiled and then fried. They can be a main ingredient in a meal or served almost as a garnish.

Chilies

In general, the bigger the chili, the milder the flavor. Large Poblano chilies are stuffed and served as a main course, the small habañero is ferociously hot. To ask if a dish is spicy, say “es picante?” – though hotel menus will often specify dishes that might offend tourist palates.

Guacamole

Avocado mashed with onions, chilies and cilantro (coriander). Served as a dip or as a garnish. Salsa
A salsa is actually just a sauce, although it is most commonly associated with the red or green mix of tomatoes, onion, chili and cilantro (coriander) served on your table as a relish or a dip. Beware of ‘salsa habañero’ in innocuous bottles like small jars of ketchup, and always try just a little salsa first as a precaution.

Tequila

This infamous spirit is most commonly served to tourists in the form of a margarita – mixed with lime juice in salt-rimmed glasses. It is actually derived from the maguey plant – a spiky bush often seen growing in fields. Mezcal is a cruder form of Tequila traditionally served with a worm in the bottle – the worm should be eaten when the bottle is finished!

Cerveza

Mexican beers are now known all over the world. Corona, Sol and Dos Equis are common brands, usually served cold and a very refreshing alternative to iced drinks. Typical dishes

Typical dishes



Chiles Renellos

Large Poblano chilies stuffed with cheese or spicy meat (picañillo). The chilies are mild, though the sauce may not be.

Enchiladas

Tortillas coated in a tomato and chili sauce, stuffed with vegetables, chicken or pork then folded and baked. Despite the chili content, enchiladas are often fairly mild. Enchiladas suizas are topped with sour cream.

Huachinango

Red Snapper, a common feature on the menus at coastal resorts. Often available 'al gusto', cooked in a choice of methods.

Quesadillas

Tortillas stuffed with cheese, folded and grilled. A simple dish often served with beans or a little salad and suitable for those avoiding anything spicy.

Mole sauce

A wonderful rich sauce made with the unlikely combination of chocolate, chilies and many spices. It can be red or green depending on the ingredients and the moles of Puebla and Oaxaca are particularly famous, hence 'mole poblano' or 'mole oaxaqueño'. The sauce is often served over chicken, though turkey is more traditional.



Pipian sauce

Another of Oaxaca's specialties, pipian sauce is green and made from pumpkin seeds. It is often served over chicken.

Poc Chuc

Another Yucatecan specialty, where pork fillet is cooked with tomatoes, onions and spices.

Pollo Pibil

A Yucatecan specialty, not often found outside this region. It traditionally consists of chicken marinated in orange and spices then barbecued in banana leaves.

Tacos

Tortillas fried until they are crispy and served with various fillings

Tamales

Cornmeal paste wrapped in corn or banana husks and often stuffed with chicken, pork or turkey and/or vegetables, then steamed.

Tortas

Mexican sandwiches, often large rolls with generous fillings.

Tostadas

Thin and crisp tortillas served loaded with guacamole, sour cream, chilies, chicken etc. At Breakfast

Mexican Cooking Methods

In many ways, the cooking methods of Mexico are very similar to ones you use everyday. Common ones include frying, grilling and boiling. However, use of the molcajete or a steaming bucket may be new to you.

Early Methods

Mexican natives did not have ovens so everything was heated over an open fire. They used cast iron pots and pans and also ceramic ware. Today, you can get a similar result by using a grill instead of your oven.

Another method used was steaming. [Barbacoa](#) was made by steaming meat suspended over boiling water in a deep pit. The meat was often wrapped in cactus or banana leaves.

Frying was also a popular method of cooking.

Tasty items like taquitos, flautas and chimichangas are a few examples of this method.

Natives also used a "metate y mano," a large tool made of stone or lava rock. It has slightly concave surface on which you can use the grinding stone to grind or mash your ingredients.

They also used a smaller "molcajete" (mortar and pestle) to grind and mash.

Modern Methods

A lot of Mexican dishes are now much easier to prepare with modern conveniences.

Previously, if you wanted tamales you would have to start by grinding dried corn with your "molcajete." Now you can buy masa (cooked, ground corn) by the bag into which you can quickly add in your other ingredients.

Today there are cast iron pans that make it easy to make homemade tortillas. They have a round top and bottom piece that you can press together to make perfect tortillas every time. There are also springform type pans that make flan as easy as pie. A modern metal grinder aides in grinding corn for masa.

You can use a dutch oven to replicate the process of steaming barbacoa and [Birria](#).

Lets get to know our recipes

- 1. Lets salsa*
- 2. Guacomole*
- 3. Flour tortillas*
- 4. Re-fried beans*
- 5. Tres Leches Cake*



Lets Salsa!

Prepare the Serrano (chiles)

-de-seed and chop 2-3 serrano chillies

Add the Tomatoes

-Seed and dice 5 large tomatoes

Add the Onion

- Chop finely 2 white onions

Add the Cilantro

- Chop us the leaves of a bunch of coriander

Add the Lime Juice

- Add 1 tsp lime juice or 2 tsp vinegar if you don't have limes!

Add the Garlic

- 2 tablespoons of crushed garlic

Add the Salt

- Pinch of salt, just to taste

Mix it up

- Now you do the salsa and bring it all together!



Guacamole

INGREDIENTS:

4 avocado
1 medium tomato, seeded and diced
1/4 cup onion, peeled and diced
1 serrano chile, seeded and diced
1/4 cup sour cream
1/8 cup cilantro leaves, coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons lime juice
salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION:

Mash 2 of the avocado with the back of a fork or other mashing utensil. Add in the serrano, onion and cilantro. Fold in sour cream and lime juice. Add salt and pepper to taste. Dice the remaining avocado into 1/4 - 1/2 inch cubes.

Fold the diced avocado and tomato into the mashed avocado mixture. Serve immediately.



Flour Tortillas

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups flour

1/4 cup shortening or lard (you can substitute butter) cold

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1 cup warm water

PREPARATION:

With a pastry blender or back of fork, blend flour, baking powder, salt and shortening, until it resembles coarse meal. When well combined, slowly add water until soft dough forms. Add additional warm water as necessary. Knead for 5 minutes. Separate into 12 portions for small tortillas and 6 portions for large tortillas. Heat a comal or griddle over medium heat. roll each ball out approx. 1/8 inch thick. Place on hot greased griddle pan for 30 seconds on each side. Serve immediately





Re-fried beans

- 1 cup dried pinto beans**
- * 2 T olive oil**
- * half a small onion, minced**
- * 2 cloves garlic minced**
- * 2 tsp salt**
- * 1 tsp cumin**
- * 1 tsp chili powder**

Method:

Soak the beans overnight in a bowl of water. Drain on the rinse water. Cook on the stovetop in 3 cups boiling water for about 2-3 hours or you can cook on low in a crockpot all day.

Saute the onion and garlic in olive oil in a pan. Mash beans and then add to pan along with spices and salt. Cook for 5 minutes

Tres Leches Cake

End a great Mexican meal with a piece of this rich, moist cake.



INGREDIENTS:

1 1/4 cup cake flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 cup sugar
1/3 cup oil
5 eggs, large
1 teaspoon plus 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup plus 1/2 cup milk
1 cup sweetened condensed milk
1 cup plus 3/4 cup heavy cream
1 tablespoon rum
1 pinch salt
optional garnishes- fresh berries or cinnamon

PREPARATION:

Combine flour and baking powder and salt. In a separate bowl, combine the oil, sugar, and 1 teaspoon vanilla extract.

Add the eggs to the sugar mixture one at a time until well combined. Stir in the 1/2 cup of milk, then gently fold in the flour mixture a little at a time. Pour batter into a lightly greased cake pan or baking dish and bake at 325 degrees for 30-40 minutes or until it feels firm and an inserted toothpick comes out clean.

Let the cake cool until it feels room temperature.

Turn it over onto a platter with raised edges. Pierce cake with a fork 20-30 times. Let it cool in the refrigerator for an additional 30 minutes. Whisk together 1 cup milk, 1 cup sweetened condensed milk, 1 cup heavy cream and rum.

Slowly pour over cooled cake. Refrigerate for 1 hour. Occasionally, spoon the milk runoff back onto the cake. In a mixing bowl, add 3/4 cup heavy cream, 1 teaspoon vanilla and 1 Tablespoon sugar. Beat until peaks form. Spread a thin layer over the cake.

Top with a sprinkle of cinnamon or garnish with fresh berries.

Adio's Amego's

