



# Mama's Kitchen Recipes

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“The only time to eat diet food is while you're waiting for the steak to cook.”  
— Julia Child

# The “Seven” Moles of Oaxaca

By Marcia Chaiken and Jan Chaiken



Our friend, Sol, categorically stated, “I do not like mole; I do not eat mole.” We tried, unsuccessfully for several years, to convince him that the term mole (MOH-lay) encompasses many different sauces with different tastes and textures. But, even in one of the best restaurants in Oaxaca City renowned for its quality moles, he chose to order plain shrimp.

Then, a few years ago, there was a mole and tortilla contest on the golf course in Tangolunda, Huatulco. Sol joined us at our table looking forward to sampling the tortillas of the dozen chefs participating in the contest. Just to be polite, at the first booth, he accepted some of their mole on his tortilla. He took a small bite and his whole face lit up. The smile on his face grew broader and broader as he sampled the mole from virtually every booth. After completing the circuit, he had definite opinions about the “good, better, best” of the twelve or so preparations.

“Twelve or so preparations?” you may be wondering. “Why the title, “The Seven Moles of Oaxaca?” It turns out to be just a casual expression for a fairly large number. So, it alerts you to expect variations among a relatively large number of different mole mixtures.

The most visible differences among the moles of Oaxaca are the colors: black (*negro*), green (*verde*), yellow (*amarillo*), and red (*rojo* or *coloradito*). The colors generally are a guide to the basic taste. Black moles frequently have a slightly sweeter taste, produced by adding chocolate or black raisins. Green moles often have the distinctive taste of ground cilantro, parsley, or other similar herbs that help produce the vivid color. Yellow moles frequently are less assertive, and one can sometimes distinguish the taste of squash, ground almonds or *masa* (corn meal) that is used to thicken the sauce. And the red moles – well unless you are familiar with the specific type and chef – get prepared to have your mouth tingling. Although almost all of the reds have a rich tomato base, some of them, notably the *mancha mantel* (tablecloth stainer), have their spiciness tempered with fruit; others may set your tongue on fire.

Independent of color, the preparation of Oaxacan moles is labor-intensive. Most have fifteen to twenty ingredients. Some have thirty or more. The ingredients generally include several types of chilies both fresh and dried such as mulatto, pasilla, chilhuacle, ancho, guajillo or other species virtually unheard of north of the border. A variety of seeds, such as sesame and pumpkin, are also important ingredients.

Peanuts are a common addition as well as true nuts, especially almonds or pecans. Fresh herbs can include hoja santa, pitonia, or epazote. And the dried spices can run the gamut of the range in gourmet grocers shelves. Other frequently used ingredients are some types of fruits or vegetable such as red or green tomatoes, onions, garlic, plantains or pineapples. The liquid ingredient is commonly rich chicken broth, made from scratch of course. And a thickening agent such as *masa* or bread is also fairly ubiquitous.

Preparation traditionally begins early in the morning at the *mercado* to choose the chicken and fresh ingredients. Back in the kitchen, after the chicken and flavorings are set on the stove to simmer for the broth, other ingredients are separately soaked, fried, or roasted, individually ground or pureed, combined together and then sautéed to produce a wonderfully complex intensive-tasting paste. The paste is thinned with the chicken broth and then reduced and thickened. For some moles, additional ingredients such as chocolate are added at this point and simmered until just the right consistency. Sounds easy when summarized, but this process can take hours, many pots and pans, and specialized strainers and grinders.

Unlike north of the border, where mole is typically used as a sauce on a large slab of chicken, Oaxaqueños prefer to appreciate the complexity of the tastes with just a small amount of chicken or a tortilla or some rice to transport the sauce from your plate to your mouth. Just as with a fine wine, they are to be savored by sight, smell, taste and texture. When prepared by different cooks, no two moles of the same name are prepared in the same way or taste alike, and distinguishing the differences is part of the enjoyment.

If until now, you have done your best to avoid trying mole, hopefully our description will stimulate a desire to rethink your position and try at least one kind. If you find yourself in the city of Oaxaca, you will easily find excellent moles to sample, or you can take lessons in how to cook them yourself. Then, when you have mastered all “seven” moles of Oaxaca, you can branch out to the different (even famous) moles in other states of Mexico.

***Marcia and Jan Chaiken travel from their home in Huatulco at least once a year and make sure they enjoy local moles wherever they go.***

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## Mole Negro

1 whole chicken

For Mole Sauce:

1 1/2 cups of vegetable oil

15 chile Ancho- these are dried

Poblano Chiles

7 roma tomatoes

1 1/2 white onions

3 garlic cloves

1/2 cup white sesame

1/4 cup roasted unsalted peanuts or almonds

1/2 cup raisins

2 tablespoons dried oregano

2 tablespoons dried thyme

4 cloves

4 whole black peppers

1 ripe plantain, skinned and cut into thick slices

1 (2-ounce) tablet Mexican drinking chocolate

10 saltines if you wish to make the mole thicker



Cut whole chicken into 6-8 pieces. Put the chicken into a pot of water, add garlic cloves and half an onion, cover and salt to taste. Bring to a simmer, and continue simmering until the chicken is just tender, about 35 minutes. Strain, reserving the broth.

Remove the stems from the dried chiles. Slit them open, and remove seeds and veins. Fry the chiles in 1 cup of vegetable oil for about a minute on each side and remove. Continue frying tomatoes, onion, plantain, almonds or peanuts, cloves, black pepper, herbs and raisins separately. Place all fried ingredients into a large bowl. Gradually add chicken stock while breaking up ingredients with a spoon until it resembles a chunky soup.

In batches use a blender to mix ingredients. Adding chicken stock as needed. Blend chocolate with chicken stock and pour through sieve into the large cooking pot.

Heat remaining 1/2 cup of oil in a large pot. Pour blended sauce through a sieve into the large pot with the oil. Stir, stir, stir! Taste sauce to adjust seasoning. Use blended saltines to thicken sauce as needed or thin using chicken broth. Simmer for 30 minutes, add chicken pieces and continue to simmer for 15 minutes.

Serve over rice.

The 7 moles refers to the 7 regions of Oaxaca.

The regions are:

La Canada

Papaloapan

La Mixteca

Sierra Norte

Valles Centrales

Sierra Sur

La Costa

El Istmo



Even though there are 8 official regions, they are referred to as the 7 regions....go figure!

# Easy Amarillo

10 dried guajillo chiles

2 whole cloves

1/2 tsp. cumin seed

1/2 tsp. dry Mexican oregano, toasted

2 tbsp. corn oil

2 cloves garlic, peeled

1 white onion, peeled and quartered

8 tomatillos, ripe and yellow, husked

4 large hoja santa leaves (you can use fennel fronds)

6 cups chicken stock

1/2 cup masa harina

1/2 tsp. salt



Boil all ingredients- except for the masa harina- for 5-7 minutes in the chicken stock. Blend in batches, adding the masa harina to the blender. Pass through a sieve in a cooking pot. Thin with chicken stock or thicken with masa. Adjust seasonings to taste.

# Handmade Corn Tortillas

There's just no comparison between supple, aromatic, freshly made corn tortillas and store-bought ones. You can roll out tortillas by hand, but a tortilla press makes for faster, more consistent results. It's an inexpensive tool and if you have one, it's more likely that you'll make fresh tortillas often.

2 cups masa harina; more as needed  
1/4 tsp. table salt

In a medium bowl, combine the masa harina and salt with 1-1/4 cups warm water. Mix and knead with your hands until the dough is smooth and homogenous. It should be soft but not sticky, like soft Play-Doh; if necessary, adjust the texture with more water or masa harina. Cover with plastic and set aside at room temperature for at least 30 minutes and up to 2 hours.

Cut two squares or rounds of heavy plastic (from a ziptop bag or a plastic grocery bag) to fit the plates of a tortilla press. Set a large flat griddle on the stove, straddling two burners. Turn one burner on medium low and the other on medium high. (Use two skillet if you don't have a large griddle.)

Pinch off a golfball-size piece of dough and roll it into a ball. Cover the bottom plate of the press with a sheet of plastic and put the dough ball in the center. Cover with the other sheet of plastic and press with your palm to flatten slightly. Close the press and firmly push down on the handle. Rotate the tortilla one-half turn and press again. Repeat if necessary until the tortilla is an even 1/16 inch thick.

Peel off the top sheet of plastic, flip the tortilla over onto your hand, and carefully peel off the other plastic sheet. (If the tortilla breaks, the dough is too dry; if it sticks, the dough is too wet.)



Lay the tortilla on the cool side of the griddle by quickly flipping your hand over the griddle. Cook just until the tortilla loosens from the griddle, 15 to 20 seconds (if the tortilla bubbles, the heat is too high).



With a spatula, flip the tortilla over onto the hot side and cook until the bottom is lightly browned in spots, about 20 seconds more.

Flip again so the first side is on the hot part of the griddle and cook until the tortilla puffs in spots and browns lightly on that side, about 20 seconds more (if it doesn't puff, the griddle isn't hot enough, the dough is too dry, or you cooked it too long on the cool side). Immediately wrap the tortilla in a clean, dry cloth.



Repeat pressing and cooking the remaining dough, stacking and wrapping the finished tortillas in the cloth. Once they're all cooked, let them rest in the cloth for 10 to 15 minutes before serving. During this time, they'll steam themselves, becoming soft and pliable. You can also wrap the cloth-wrapped stack in foil and keep warm in a 200°F oven for about an hour.

**Make Ahead Tips**

Well-wrapped tortillas keep in the freezer for up to a month. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator and reheat before using.

From Fine Cooking Magazine

# Tequila vs. Mezcal

There are three key reasons why mezcal is different from tequila:



1. Tequila and mezcal are produced in different states of Mexico (though there is overlap).
2. Tequila can only be made, by law, with one variety of agave: the Blue Agave. Mezcal can be made with upwards of 30 varieties of agave, though most are made with the Agave Espadin.
3. The production process for mezcal is different from tequila which leads to a distinctly different flavor profile for mezcal.

## Tequila and Mezcal are Produced in Different Regions

First, you must know that all tequilas are mezcals. Mezcals are any agave-based liquor, and therefore tequila is a subset of mezcal produced in specific regions of Mexico and made only from the Blue Agave. Tequila is made in 5 specific regions: Jalisco, Michoacan, Guanajuato, Nayarit, and Tamaulipas. Jalisco is definitely the center of the tequila universe and where the town of Tequila (yes, there is a town named Tequila) is located.

## Mezcal Margaritas

2 shots freshly squeezed orange juice  
1 shot of mezcal  
3/4 of a shot of simple syrup  
juice from 1/2 a lime  
Place ingredients in a shaker with ice.  
Shake well and pour.



Mezcal is made in 8 specific regions of Mexico: Oaxaca, Durango, Guanajuato, Guerrero, San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas, Zacatecas, and the recently approved Michoacan. Oaxaca is the center of the mezcal world, as 80-90% of mezcals are made in Oaxaca.

Tequila and Mezcal are made from different varieties of agave. Tequila must be made from the Blue Agave. Mezcal, on the other hand, can be made from more than 30 varieties of agave, including the Blue Agave. Most mezcals are made from the Agave Espadin, which is the most prevalent agave variety found in Oaxaca.