



Chiles & Chocolate
Cooking Classes
Huatulco, Oaxaca

Street Food Recipes

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“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.”

Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own

A Brief History Of The Tortilla....

The mainstay of the Mexican diet was, and still is, the tortilla, made from corn. The tradition continues today with little change. The kernels are cooked with lime to remove the husk and then ground on a stone slab with a grinding stone. The dough is formed into little round balls and then patted out by hand into thin round cakes or wrapped in a corn husk, the tamale, to then fill and eat. The versatility of the tortilla as a wrapper is endless. They are used for tacos and enchiladas, among native Mexicans, tortillas are commonly used as eating utensils, as a plate as in a tostada, and much more.

In northern Mexico and much of the United States, tortilla means the flour version. Flour tortillas are the foundation of Mexican border cooking and a relatively recent import. Their popularity was driven by the low cost of inferior grades of flour provided to border markets and by their ability to keep and ship well.

Sometime about 3000 B.C., people of the Sierra Madre mountains in Mexico hybridized wild grasses to produce large, nutritious kernels we know as corn. Mexican anthropologist and maize historian Arturo Warman credits the development of corn with the rise of Mesoamerican civilizations such as the Mayans and the Aztecs, which were advanced in art, architecture, math and astronomy. The significance of corn was not lost on indigenous cultures that viewed it as a foundation of humanity. It is revered as the seed of life. According to legend, human beings were made of corn by the Gods."

By the time Spaniards reached the shores of what is now Mexico in the 1400s, indigenous Mesoamericans had a sophisticated and flavorful cuisine based on native fruits, game, cultivated beans and corn and domesticated turkeys.

1519 - When Hernán Cortés (1485-1547), and his conquistadores arrived in the New World they discovered that the inhabitants (Aztecs Mexicas) made flat corn breads. The native Nahuatl name for these was tlaxcalli. The Spanish gave them the name tortilla. In Cortés' 1520 second letter to King Charles V of Spain, he describes the public markets and the selling of maize or Indian corn:

This city has many public squares, in which are situated the markets and other places for buying and selling. . . where are daily assembled more than sixty thousand souls, engaged in buying and selling; and where are found all kinds of merchandise that the world affords, embracing the necessities of life, as for instance articles of food. . . maize or Indian corn, in the grain and in the form of bread, preferred in the grain for its flavor to that of the other islands and terra-firma.

1940s - In the 1940s and '50s, one of the first widespread uses of small scale gas engines and electric motors was to power wet grain grinders for making masa. A hand press or hand patting were used to form the masa into tortillas.

1960s - Early tortillas took hours to make but by the 1960s, small-scale tortilla-making machines could churn out hot, steaming tortillas every two seconds.



Taco Basics

Karen Hursh Graber in her article *Wrap It Up: A Guide to Mexican Street Tacos* says the following on the different types of tacos in Mexico:

Many foreigners come to Mexico with the idea that they can get tacos any time, but this is not generally true. Looking for tacos around midday, perhaps at the time of the gringo lunch, will not normally be a successful pursuit. Tacos are either a morning treat or a nighttime snack, pretty much disappearing between the hours of noon and six p.m. This is because the main meal in Mexico is eaten in the afternoon. Not to worry: by about six the smell of meat begins to permeate the air and the taquerías are back in business. . .



From noon until about six there are almost no tacos available; morning vendors are closed until the next day. Right around dusk, however, there is a perceptible change in the atmosphere of the street following the afternoon lull. Permanent puestos, stalls and storefront taquerías begin opening, and ambulatory taco carts roll into place, usually connecting the wires from their naked light bulbs into overhead lines. . . The most compelling signal of “taco time”, however, is the aroma. Of all the street food in Mexico, the taco is King of the Night, attracting clients with the appetizing scent of grilled, fried or steamed meat. Since the big meal of the day is eaten in the afternoon, many people opt for a late supper, or *cena*, and taquerías usually stay open until about midnight, and later in big cities. On weekends, taquerías near discos and clubs stay open until the wee hours of the morning, when they provide welcome sustenance to hungry partygoers.



The regional differences in origin include differences in the type of tortillas used. Generally, the northern Mexican grilled meat tacos are wrapped in flour tortillas while the corn tortillas dominate in the south. The size of tortillas also varies, small corn tortillas being the most common with white corn tortillas preferred over the yellow ones for tacos. Because of their 3-4 inch diameter size, the tortillas are usually doubled and tacos sold by *una orden*- an order- made

up of two or three. The large majority of tacos are made with soft tortillas, the exception being *tacos dorados* which are fried until crispy.

Methods of preparation also vary which is why different taquerías- taco stands and puestos- ambulatory carts which usually set up shop at the same spot everyday- have different cooking equipment. Whether the taco filling is fried, grilled or steamed depends on the kind of filling being used with each stand having its specialty.

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 zip-top 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 skillets 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

Tlayuda

Tlayudas are a signature food item on a Oaxacan menu. These are thick corn pancakes, larger than tostadas (30+ centimeters in diameter) and usually topped with pork lard, beans and cheese and cabbage. Popular name: the 'Oaxacan Pizza.' Tip: Ask for the tlayuda 'bien tostada' so that it breaks up in multiple parts Tip - If you want a vegetarian diet, ask the waiter to hold the lard (asiento).

TO ASSEMBLE Tlayuda Tortilla (only available in Oaxaca)- use regular large tortillas as a substitute

Asiento or bacon fat

Black Bean Spread

Oaxacan Quesillo- string cheese

Thin-sliced cabbage (don't skip)

Heat oven to 425F. Place a cast iron skillet, griddle or a heavy baking sheet in the oven to heat.

ASSEMBLE Set up an assembly line with tortillas all in a row.

Spread with Black Bean Spread, cheese and cabbage. Don't overload, just a little bit of everything!

Options you can also add chicken or beef.

BAKE

With a spatula, transfer the tortillas onto the hot pan and bake for 5 minutes. Bake for another 5 minutes until the cabbage softens and browns on the edges. **SERVE** Sprinkle each tortilla with cilantro and drizzle with a squeeze of lime. Serve hot.



Red Salsa

3 Roma tomatoes
1 dried chile of your choice
1 clove garlic, peeled
Kosher salt

Directions:

On a comal or in a cast-iron skillet over moderately high heat, dry-roast the tomatoes and chile.

Place the garlic in a molcajete, blender, or food processor and season with the salt. Grind with the pestle or process until a paste forms. Add the chile and tomatoes, one at a time, and grind or process until smooth. Season generously with salt.



Tomatillo Salsa Verde

Ingredients:

1 pound tomatillos, husked
1 garlic clove, peeled
1 fresh chile of your choice
1 ½ teaspoons salt, or to taste
2 cups water

Directions:

1. Place tomatillos and chile pepper into a saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer until the tomatillos are soft, 10 to 15 minutes.

2. Place the garlic in a molcajete, blender, or food processor and season with the salt. Grind with the pestle or process until a paste forms. Add the chile and tomatoes, one at a time, and grind or process until smooth. Season generously with salt.



Taco Filings

Zucchini and Cream

½ chopped onion
1 clove of garlic
2 medium zucchini diced
Sour Cream

Saute onion and garlic in butter until onion is soft. Add zucchini to onion and garlic until golden brown. Turn down heat and slowly add sour cream. Salt to taste

Seafood Tacos

10 shrimp- cleaned and deveined
salt
1/4 cup of cilantro
2 tomatoes diced
½ chopped onion

Saute onion and tomato in butter until onion is soft. Add shrimp, saute until pink. Add cilantro. Salt to taste

Agua de Jamaica

2 cups dried Jamaica flowers
¾ cup sugar
Bring 6 cups of water to a boil then add flowers and the sugar and stir continuously while the mixture boils for one minute. Pour into a non-corrosive bowl and steep for 2 hours. Note: This flower will stain so don't use a bowl that will stain.
Chill and serve over ice with a slice of lime.

Jamaica Margaritas

This is a great recipe for a margarita that is definitely above average.
It uses sugary water that is flavored with Jamaica flowers.
2 shots chilled agua de jamaica
1 shot of tequila
shot of simple syrup
juice from ½ a lime
Place ingredients in a shaker with ice. Shake well and pour.



Blended Black Beans

- 1 pound dried black beans
- 4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 green bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 yellow bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 1/2 teaspoons chile powder, plus more if needed
- 1 1/2 teaspoons cumin, plus more if needed
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more if needed



Directions

For the beans: Place the beans in a bowl or pot, cover with cold water and allow to soak overnight. Drain and rinse before proceeding. (Alternatively, add the beans to a medium pot and cover with hot water. Bring to a boil, and then boil for 2 minutes. Turn off the heat, cover the pot and allow the beans to sit for 1 hour. Drain the beans and rinse them with cold water before proceeding.)

In a medium pot, add the soaked beans, chicken broth, 2 cups water, the garlic, onions and green, red and yellow bell peppers. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer for 1 1/2 hours. Then add the chile powder, cumin and salt and stir. Cover and continue simmering until the liquid level is to your liking, about another hour. Taste for seasoning and add more of what it needs.

Cool and blend.