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The Whole Enchilada

By Susie Iventosch



Front row, from left: LeeAnn Martini, Eileen Tarrab, Terry Kolhede, Constance Clayburn, Constance Pinckert, back row from left, Jamie Ertola, Meggin Schlinkert, Robyn Varellas, Juli Cunningham, Brenna Long, Jamie Bonetto and Fran Miller. Photo provided

friend Fran's house, and to go along with them she made a fabulous salad, combining butter lettuce, dried cranberries, fresh pear, blue cheese and toasted pecans all tossed in her divine stone-ground mustard-rice vinegar dressing. This salad will accompany all sorts of dishes, but it went particularly well with the enchiladas!

When Constance reported back on her party fare, she told me that she picked up a "to-go" bag of tortilla chips, salsa, guacamole and blue cheese dip for an easy appetizer.

"It was the perfect appetizer to go along with the dinner," she noted.

And, when I looked at the photos of the Bunco group assembled at Constance's party, lo and behold, not only was Fran's salad featured, but Fran was also there!

"Yes, I had the 'salad lady' herself at the party," said Constance. "We had a good laugh over the coincidence!"

Chicken Enchiladas

By Susie Iventosch

Now that the holiday teas and cookie exchanges are over, it's time to refocus on real food for our monthly meetings and social gatherings! Of course, after eating all of the cookies and fudge from those holiday parties, we've all made New Year's promises to eat low-calorie foods ... at least for a while. But, combining delicious and low-cal is not necessarily an easy feat. Alas, for the 3Bs (Bunco, Bridge and Book Clubs) we must venture forth!

This year, I received another email from Constance Clayburn of Moraga, who was planning ahead for her January Bunco gathering. She was hoping to find a recipe for just such a low-calorie dish. She thought perhaps a soup and salad, or maybe a crockpot dish that could be served in a bowl with a side salad would be nice. She also said she has a pretty silver holder for a casserole dish, so that could work too. But there is always that darn caveat ...

"Something low-calorie and healthy," she said. "It's January and everyone is resolved to get thin!"

So, I put on my thinking cap, and remembered how much everyone loves these chicken enchiladas made with Ortega chilies and fresh cilantro. They can be made with reduced fat cheese, nonfat sour cream or plain yogurt and avocado as an accompaniment. And, even though avocados may be fattening, they have the good kind of monounsaturated fat, the kind that, according to many nutritionists, actually lowers cholesterol levels! That is music to my ears, because I adore avocados.

Over the holidays I brought these enchiladas to my



Photo Susie Iventosch

Fresh avocado slices for garnish

*Serve with refried beans and/or rice and guacamole.

Chicken filling

2 1/2 pounds chicken breast tenders or boneless, skinless chicken breasts

1 cup medium-hot salsa

2 cups water-or enough to cover chicken in pot

1/2 yellow onion, coarsely chopped

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon pepper

2 large cans mild Ortega chilies diced (fire roasted or roasting your own are excellent, too)

1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro

1-2 tablespoons Louisiana hot sauce (more or less, depending on your heat tolerance!)

DIRECTIONS

Place chicken tenders in a large, frying pan, at least three inches deep. Pour salsa and water over chicken. Add onions and salt and pepper. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, and simmer on stovetop for approximately 20-25 minutes, or until tenders are completely cooked through. Remove from stove and cool. Once cooled, remove tenders and discard liquid. Shred chicken using two forks. Place chicken in large bowl. Add 1/2 cup grated cheese, 1/2 cup enchilada sauce, Ortega chilies, cilantro and hot sauce. Mix well. Add salt and pepper as needed to taste.

To Assemble:

Heat tortillas in microwave for one to two minutes just enough to make them pliable. Lay tortillas on flat surface and spoon about 1/4 cup of chicken filling on each tortilla. Spoon just a teaspoon or two of extra cooled enchilada sauce over filling and sprinkle one tablespoon of extra cheese over sauce. Roll tightly into a log. Place in greased or sprayed casserole dish side by side. (Can be made a day or two ahead, and refrigerated or kept frozen for several weeks, but do not cover with remaining enchilada sauce until ready to heat and serve.)

To Serve:

Pour remaining sauce over enchiladas and sprinkle evenly with remaining cheese. Dust the top of each enchilada with paprika for color. Bake at 400°F for 15-20 minutes, or until cheese is bubbly and slightly browned. Garnish each enchilada with a dollop of plain yogurt, sliced black (or green) olives, a sprig of cilantro and serve with guacamole and refried beans on the side.

Marilyn Greco's Enchilada Sauce

If you haven't tried homemade enchilada sauce before, you'll be surprised at how easy it is. I had always wondered how to make it, when one day Marilyn told me she makes a great enchilada sauce. She was right. This is heads and tails above the canned version.

INGREDIENTS - can double for extra sauce to serve on the side

2 tablespoons canola oil

3-4 tablespoons chili powder (this makes the huge difference for the sauce ... make sure you pick a chili powder that is not too terribly hot!)

2 tablespoons flour

3/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

1/4 teaspoon dried oregano

1/4 teaspoon cumin powder

2 teaspoons cider vinegar

2 cups water

DIRECTIONS

(Makes 12)

This is the dish I love to deliver to friends and family when they need a little extra help getting food on the table, whether it's because they have a lot of family in town, they're throwing a big potluck party, or they've been sick and out of cooking commission. The recipe makes a lot and can be easily doubled, and it stores well in the refrigerator or freezer!

INGREDIENTS

12 large flour tortillas (can use corn, but will need about 16 corn tortillas)

1 recipe chicken filling (recipe follows)

1 recipe Marilyn Greco's Enchilada Sauce (below) or, substitute canned sauce

2 1/2 cups grated taco blend cheese (Monterey Jack and medium sharp cheddar, and can also use low fat cheese or feta)

2 teaspoons paprika for garnish

1 can (3.5 ounces) sliced ripe olives

3/4 cup plain nonfat yogurt for garnish

Fresh cilantro sprigs for garnish

In a medium pot, heat oil and with a wire whisk add chili powder, flour, seasonings and spices and brown slightly over medium heat to open up the flavors. Slowly add hot water, stirring all the while with a whisk to keep from clumping. Bring to a boil and continue on low boil for about 10 minutes, adding more water as necessary for desired thickness. Stir in vinegar. Cool and refrigerate until ready to use. Can store for several weeks in the refrigerator.

Frannie's Harvest Salad

By Susie Iventosch

(serves 6)

INGREDIENTS

1 large head butter lettuce, torn into pieces
1/2 cup dried cranberries
1 pear, cut into bite-sized pieces
1 ripe, but firm avocado cut into bite-sized pieces (optional)
1/3 cup toasted pecans pieces
1/4 cup crumbled blue cheese
1 recipe Frannie's stoned-ground mustard vinaigrette (below)

Vinaigrette

1/3 cup rice vinegar
1/2+ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1-2 teaspoons lemon juice
1-2 tablespoon stoned ground Dijon
Salt and Pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

Mix all and shake well! Toss over salad. (Adjust oil, vinegar and mustard to your own tastes - while some like a more tart dressing, others prefer more olive oil.)

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