

Tamales – Corn Husks Full of Love!

By Susie Iventosch

My husband and I are in Baja, Mexico for a few weeks and where we are staying, a local man drives by on Tuesdays to sell the latest catch of fish and seafood from the back of his truck. He honks the horn to roust his customers. You can't find fresher fish unless you're right on the boat!

On Mondays another fellow comes by to sell his wife's tamales and empanadas. He rings a little bell to let us know he has arrived. Naturally, being curious cooks, we purchased a couple of each and gave them a try. While we thor-

oughly enjoyed the empanadas, I thought we could do better on the tamales. Then, the idea surfaced that this would be a fun project for the food column.

So, I set about learning how to make tamales – it is quite a time-consuming, but really fun, project. The good news is that a lot of it can be done in stages; for example, you can cook the meat and make the sauce ahead of time and refrigerate until you're ready to assemble and cook your tamales. However, once you make the tamale dough, I think it should be "go" time!



Photos Susie Iventosch



Susie Iventosch is the author of Tax Bites and Tasty Morsels, which can be found at Across the Way in Moraga, www.amazon.com, and www.taxbites.net. Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. **This recipe can be found on our website:** www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.

Chicken-Tomatillo Tamales with Cilantro Lime Tomatillo Sauce

(makes 10-12)

Corn Husks

1 package dried corn husks (at least 14 are needed to make 12 tamales)

Place corn husks in a large container (pot or bowl) and cover with water. Place a plate, or something heavy, on top of the husks in order to keep them submerged. Soak for several hours or overnight. When ready to use, remove from water and pat dry with a paper towel. Keep all husks whole, except two or three – enough to make strips for ties. You will need two ties per tamale.

Chicken

- 2-3 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1 1/2-2 inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 fresh tomatillos, chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Juice of one lime
- Salt and pepper
- 2-3 large tomatillos for grilling to be used in sauce (recipe below)

DIRECTIONS

For the chicken, you can either bake on the barbecue, wrapped tightly in foil, or in the oven in a covered baking dish. We used the barbecue, so we could grill the tomatillos at the same time.

Place chicken in the center of a large piece of heavy-duty foil. (We double-wrapped the chicken to keep juices in.) Squeeze lime juice and olive oil over chicken. Sprinkle fresh cilantro and chopped tomatillos over chicken. Season with salt and pepper. Wrap tightly in foil and bake on barbecue until done, approximately 20 minutes over medium-high heat. When cooked, remove from heat and cool. Shred chicken and reserve all cooking juices with shredded chicken. Refrigerate until ready to use.

At the same time, grill two or three large tomatillos until beginning to brown and soften. Remove from heat and cool. Once cooled, mash with a fork or knife. Set aside for sauce.

Roasted Tomatillo Sauce

- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 poblano peppers, roasted, skinned, seeded and chopped
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely diced
- 6 fresh tomatillos, chopped
- 2-3 roasted or grilled tomatillos, mashed (see above)
- 3/4 cup chopped cilantro
- Juice of 1 lime
- 1 1/2 cups chicken broth
- Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

In a sauté pan, heat oil and cook onions and garlic until translucent and soft. Add poblanos, jalapeno, tomatillos and lime juice. Mix well. Add chicken broth and continue to simmer over low heat for about 10 minutes, until slightly reduced.

Remove half of this mixture for sauce to pour over tamales when serving. Add shredded chicken and cilantro to remaining sauce in pan. Cook for an additional 10 minutes over low heat. Remove from stove and cool completely. Refrigerate until ready to assemble tamales.

Tamale Dough

- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, softened to room temperature
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cumin powder
- 2 cups masa harina
- 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 cups chicken broth

DIRECTIONS

In a mixing bowl, beat butter with baking powder, salt and cumin until creamy. Add corn flour and stir into butter mixture with a fork until mixture is crumbly. Slowly add chicken broth, half cup at a time, until mixture is still thick enough to form into dough, but not too soft. Divide dough and form into 12 balls. Place each ball in the center of a prepared corn husk and spread out into a 3-4 inch square. Place about 2-3 tablespoons of chicken filling in center of each square of masa dough. From one of the long edges of the corn husk, begin to roll tamale into a tube, making sure dough and filling are tucked inside of the corn husk. Using the corn husk ties, tie each end of the tamale close to the end of the filling inside. Double knot the ties. (Here I snipped off the excess ends of corn husks, leaving about a two inch tail on either side of the ties.)

Place tamales on a French steamer in a large pot or in the steamer basket of a pot and fill pot with water to just below the steamer basket. Cover pot with a tight-fitting lid. Bring water to boil, and then turn heat down slightly to medium, and continue to steam tamales for 1.5 to 2 hours. Add water as needed, so pot does not dry out. Can be cooked ahead of time, refrigerated and reheated when ready to serve.



First stage of assembling the tamales



Second stage of assembly



Ready to serve

To Serve

When ready to serve, heat tamales in steamer or oven. Cut ties, but serve in corn husks and pass extra sauce. You could also serve grated jack or cheddar cheese to garnish.

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