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A delightful post-Cinco de Mayo menu

By Susie Iventosch



Chicken Enchiladas Photo Susie Iventosch

A few weeks ago, one of our Lamorinda Weekly readers wrote to inquire about freezing the chicken enchiladas we featured in our Jan. 18, 2012 issue. I truly loved hearing that someone is still enjoying a recipe that we published eight years ago. But I told her that since that publication, I've made a few changes to the recipe and sent her the new one. I thought it might be a good idea to share these changes with all of our readers. One of the main changes was substituting fresh diced Anaheim, poblano and jalapeno peppers in place of the canned fire-roasted Ortega chilies. This makes the enchiladas taste so fresh and even if you plan to freeze them before baking, the peppers hold up very well. I also incorporated nonfat plain yogurt and cilantro into the chicken filling, instead of just using these as garnishes. (We also still use them as garnishes, because we love cilantro, and yogurt is so yummy on top.) And finally, I had to change from Marilyn Greco's enchilada sauce

when I accidentally bought a chili powder that was smoking hot and nearly killed our houseguests! From that day forward, I decided to go the safe route and I doctor up either Lawry's or McCormick's Enchilada Seasoning packets for our sauce and it's consistent and perfect every time and no one has caught on fire as a result! That recipe is included in this column. When my sister was giving a big 50th birthday party, she wanted a meal plan to go along with the enchiladas, so I included one of our favorite Costa Rican dishes, Gallo Pinto, as well as a crunchy Southwest Chopped Salad with Salsa Vinaigrette. I know we just celebrated Cinco de Mayo, but this is a super fun meal any time of the year.

Salsa Lizano is similar to Worcestershire Sauce and is used in the Gallo Pinto recipe. You can purchase it through Amazon if you can't find it in your local markets. For more about Salsa Lizano:

<https://theculturetrip.com/central-america/costa-rica/articles/how-lizano-became-costa-ricas-national-sauce/>

Chicken Enchiladas

(Makes about 14-16 enchiladas)

INGREDIENTS

16 flour tortillas (about 8" diameter)

6 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, (cut into smaller pieces if large)

1/2 cup salsa

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon ground pepper

Water to almost cover chicken

2 poblano peppers, seeded and diced

2 Anaheim chilies, seeded and diced

1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely diced

1/2 bunch fresh cilantro leaves, snipped with kitchen scissors to smaller pieces

3 cups grated mixed Mexican cheese (split 1 cup for filling and 2 cups for on top of enchiladas)

1 cup plain non-fat yogurt

1 batch enchilada sauce (recipe below)

Garnishes: sliced avocado or guacamole, sliced black olives, fresh cilantro leaves

DIRECTIONS

Place chicken breasts in a large frying pan with a tight-fitting lid. Pour salsa over chicken and fill pan with enough water to cover chicken. Season with salt and pepper. Cover and bring to a boil. Immediately reduce heat and simmer just until chicken is fully cooked. Remove from heat and cool. When cool enough to handle, shred with two forks or clean fingers. Discard liquid.

Mix shredded chicken with all three diced peppers, cilantro and cheese. (Can freeze chicken-pepper mixture at this point and thaw when ready to continue.) Stir in yogurt and about 1/2 cup of the enchilada sauce. Mix well.

To assemble enchiladas, heat the stack of tortillas in the microwave for just about 1 minute to make them more pliable. (Take them out of the plastic wrap before doing this!) Then lay the tortillas out on a flat surface and spoon about 1/4 cup of filling in the center of each tortilla. Drizzle one spoonful of enchilada sauce and a light sprinkling of cheese and roll tightly. Lay in a greased or sprayed 9x13 baking dish. Can cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate or freeze at this point, too. If you want to make ahead and freeze, the aluminum pans are great, and the 8-inch ones fit right inside of a gallon Ziploc baggie.

To bake, drizzle remaining enchilada sauce over the tops of the enchiladas and sprinkle with remaining cheese. Bake at 350 F for approximately 25 minutes, or until cheese is bubbly and beginning to brown. Serve any extra enchilada sauce on the side.

Enchilada Sauce (can make up to a week ahead)

INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons olive oil or canola oil
2 packets of enchilada sauce seasoning (McCormick or Lawry's)
3 tablespoons flour
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cider vinegar

DIRECTIONS

Heat oil in a medium-sized pot. Add seasoning packets, flour, cumin, oregano and salt. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring with a wire whisk, for about 3-4 minutes, just to slightly bloom the spices and brown the flour. Slowly add water, stirring with a wire whisk, until desired consistency. Bring to a boil and simmer for about 5 minutes. Stir in cider vinegar. You may need to add more water as you cook the sauce.

Gallo Pinto

INGREDIENTS

3 tablespoons canola oil
1 teaspoon cumin seeds
2 tablespoons red bell peppers, chopped
2 tablespoons onions, chopped
1 1/2 cups black beans, cooked (I use canned black beans)
2 1/2 cups rice, cooked
1 tablespoon Salsa Lizano or Worcestershire Sauce
2 tablespoons of your favorite hot sauce (optional)
1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro

DIRECTIONS

Heat oil in a large frying pan over medium heat. Sauté onion and bell pepper, along with cumin seeds for about 2 minutes. Add the black beans and salsa and simmer for about 10 minutes on medium heat. Then, add the cooked rice and mix in the cilantro.

Cooked bacon, pork, chicken or sausage can be added. For breakfast, scrambled eggs can be added.

Southwest Chopped Salad with salsa vinaigrette

INGREDIENTS

1 head romaine, chopped
1 orange bell pepper, chopped
1 Anaheim chili, chopped
1/2 jicama, julienned or chopped
2 tomatillos, chopped
2 tomatoes, chopped
1/2 cup black or green olives, chopped or sliced
1/2 cup fresh cilantro leaves
1/2 cup grated cheese (Mixed Mexican or Monterey Jack or sharp cheddar)
1 recipe salsa vinaigrette:
1/2 cup salsa
1/3 cup red wine vinegar
1-2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
2/3 cup olive oil (more or less as needed to taste)

DIRECTIONS

Toss all with salsa vinaigrette. Serve with crunchy tortilla strips or just all by itself!



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.

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