**The History on Some of Our Favorite Foods**

Salsa was sold in the Aztec market places. Salsa, the Spanish word for sauce, is uncooked and sometimes pureed until chunky, smooth, or chopped.

**We can thank the Aztecs for Chocolate.** It was through the Aztecs, who mixed ground cacao seeds with various seasonings to make a spicy, frothy drink that the Spaniards brought the product to Europe in 1657.

The term “enchilada” wrap can be clearly linked to the Aztecs. The word enchilada means "in chile."

The Aztecs domesticated the tomatillo. . . though never popular with Europeans, it thrived in Italy. Today a relative of the fruit is common in the US. Tomatillo, a member of the night shade family, provides tart flavor in many different green sauces.

In the late 15th century, Columbus brought chili peppers home to Europe. There is archaeological evidence that peppers were in use since 5000 BC.

**The tamale can be traced to Pre-Columbus time.** The Spaniards were served tamales by the Aztecs in the 1550’s.

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**Menu**

- Tortilla Soup
- Ensalada de Toronja (Grapefruit Salad)
- Toritas de Jaiba con Salsa de Chipotle (Crab Cakes with Chipotle Sauce)
- Carne Guisada (Mexican Beef Stew)
- Pollo al Carbon (Grilled Chicken)
- Arroz con Pollo (Chicken with Rice)
- Elotes (Mexican Corn)
- Calabacita con Elotes (Zucchini with Corn)
- Papitas al Ajillo (New Potatoes with Garlic and Cumin)
- Pay de Limon con Tequila (Lime Pie with Tequila)
Mexican Recipes

Our thanks to two sources who provided this month’s recipes: Carolyn Mayers, and the Mexico Chapters, led by Natha Katz.

Recipe provided by Mexico Chapters:

Tortilla Soup

2-3 cloves of garlic
½ small onion
6-7 plum tomatoes roasted (or 3-4 large tomatoes)
1 roasted dried chile guajillo (or use ½ if prefer less spicy)
1 roasted dried chile pasilla (or use ½ less spicy)
1 sprig of epazote (can be left out if not available)
10 tortillas cut in strips and fried
1 liter of chicken broth

To serve with soup:
100 grams of panela cheese cut in small pieces (can be substituted for another white cheese if not available)
1 avocado cut in small cubes
Chile pasilla cut in small pieces

Place the chiles, tomatoes, onions and garlic (the garlic should have the skin so it doesn’t burn) on a comal to roast (This can also be done in the oven at high heat or directly on a open flame). When blackened, peel the tomatoes and chiles. Then put the roasted chiles, tomatoes, onion and the peeled garlic in the blender and puree.

In a big pot, put a spoonful of oil and then when hot, add the puree from the blender. You can also strain the puree if you like before adding it to the pot. Season with salt. After a couple of minutes add the chicken broth and the epazote. Bring to a boil and cook another 10 minutes or so.

Fry the tortilla strips in hot oil.

Do not add the tortilla strips until ready to serve. At the table, place the cheese, avocado and the fried chile pasilla if desired.

Mexican Etiquette

• Bring flowers to your host, but pay attention to the colors: According to Mexican folklore, yellow flowers symbolize death, red flowers cast spells, and white flowers lift spells.

• Punctuality is not expected at social events such as parties and dinners. When invited to a party in a Mexican home, it is generally understood you should arrive at least 30 minutes late.

• Men will shake hands during greetings that may become particularly warm between close friends. Women, however, will often pat each other on the right forearm or shoulder.

• Conversations occur at a much closer physical distance than you may be accustomed to in other cultures, such as the United States and Canada. Moving away to establish distance is considered unfriendly. In response, a Mexican will often step forward and close the distance again.

• Men should avoid putting their hands in their pockets when in public.

• Avoid putting your hands on your hips—it signifies you’re making a challenge.

• The “O.K.” gesture with the thumb and index finger is considered vulgar.

• In a store, Mexicans pay for their purchases by placing the money directly in the clerk's hand, rather than on the counter. Leaving a payment on the counter is generally rude.

Excerpted from: Executive Planet - Mexico
Recipes provide by Carolyn Mayers:
Questions about the following recipes? e-mail Carolyn at crmayers@mac.com

For appetizers, I recommend you keep it simple and put out some salsa and guacamole and corn chips – easy, good for the warm May weather and everybody seems to like them. If you want to try something a little different, check out the great salsa mixes from The Women’s Bean Project, a non-profit organization whose mission is in harmony with that of Dining for Women, with the difference being that they provide jobs and skills training for chronically unemployed, poor women here in the U.S. Their slogan is “Transforming the Lives of Women” and that is exactly what they do! I tried (and loved) their Green Chili Salsa Mix – just mix about half a packet (less if you like things less spicy) into either 8 oz. sour cream OR 4 oz. sour cream and an avocado, finely chopped and tossed in a bit of lime juice to prevent browning. Quick and DELICIOUS! You may find the salsa mix, as well as soup and chili mixes, cookie and brownie mixes, instant teas and more, here - http://www.womensbeanproject.com/sal02.html

Feel more adventurous? Then try the crab cakes recipe below – make them in miniature and serve with a tiny dollop of the sauce on top with a sprinkling of minced cilantro or parsley – beautiful! If you don’t find anything you like among the recipes given here, or need some more choices, I strongly suggest you visit http://www.mexconnect.com/cuisine. There you will find articles about Mexican food and hundreds of great Mexican and Mexican-inspired recipes, including some wonderful sounding cocktail recipes, which I know makes some of you very happy. I found most of the recipes I made this month there. If you look to the right side of the page you will see the recipes can be searched by course. Go out and buy some limes – it seems nearly every recipes has lime juice in it!

Ensalada de Toronja (Grapefruit Salad)
Adapted from http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/2263-grapefruit-salad-ensalada-de-toronja

Light and refreshing, and very pretty with the pink grapefruit pieces. In our home, we generally do not care for salads with citrus in them, but loved this. Feel free to play around with the quantities of grapefruit or avocado to your taste. Another variation could be to omit the grapefruit and add a couple of chopped tomatoes instead – sort of like a guacamole salad.
Serves 6 - 8

1 medium head any lettuce, or one small red and one small green, washed and torn into pieces
1 large or 2 smaller red grapefruits, peeled, separated into segments, white membranes removed
1 – 2 ripe but still slightly firm avocados, peeled and chopped into small pieces and tossed with just a bit of lime juice to prevent browning
4 scallions, thinly sliced
Salt to taste about 1/8t
4T olive oil
1½T cider or rice vinegar
1/8t ground cumin (or a little more to taste)
Ground black pepper
Place the lettuce in a salad bowl. Place the next 3 ingredients (grapefruit sections through avocados) on top of the lettuce. Sprinkle with salt. In a separate small bowl, whisk together the oil, vinegar and cumin. Drizzle the dressing over the salad and toss gently. Grind pepper over salad and toss again to distribute. Serve immediately.

NOTE: Alternately, the lettuce could be divided between 6 – 8 plates, with the grapefruit and avocado pieces placed on top, and the scallions and pepper scattered over it. This could be kept refrigerated for a few hours and then dressed just before serving.

Toritas de Jaiba con Salsa de Chipotle (Crab Cakes with Chipotle Sauce)
Adapted from http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/3584-crab-cakes-with-chipotle-sauce-tortitas-de-jaiba-en-salsa-de-chipotle

Crab season has just opened up here on the Chesapeake Bay and that means wherever possible I will include a crab recipe for the next few months while it is available! How fortunate to find this superb preparation. If you have never used canned chipotle chilies in adobo sauce, I will warn you it is spicy. But it has such a wonderful, smoky flavor, so please try it. Just use a smaller amount called for here if you don’t like heat. This versatile ingredient appears in this and other recipes given here, so pick up a small can from your supermarket international food section and give it whirl. Whatever you don’t use will keep almost indefinitely in a container in the refrigerator.

Serves 4 – 6, OR make them small and serve as an appetizer, as described in above.

Crab Cakes
½ c masa harina (finely ground corn flour – widely available)
1 lb. fresh crabmeat
3 scallions, minced
3T minced fresh cilantro or parsley
1T mayonnaise
1 egg, lightly beaten
1T fresh lime juice
1/8 t salt
pinch of cumin
pinch of ground chipotle, cayenne or ground black pepper
small pinch ground cloves
3-4T oil for frying

Sauce
¾ c mayonnaise
1 chili from can of chilies in adobo sauce, minced or pureed (omit if you do not like heat)
1t adobo sauce from the can
2T minced scallions
1T fresh lime juice
salt to taste
sour cream (optional – may be added to turn down the heat)

Preheat oven to 300. Place the masa harina on a jelly roll pan in a thin layer. Cook the masa harina in the oven for about 10-15 minutes of until lightly toasted. Set aside to cool. In a medium bowl, place all of the
crab cake ingredients EXCEPT the masa harina and mix lightly. Sprinkle half (¼ cup) of the masa harina over the crab mixture and gently stir to combine and distribute the ingredients evenly. Let the crab cake mixture sit for about 10 minutes while you make the sauce. Make the sauce by combining all the ingredients in a small bowl and mix well. Cover and refrigerate. On a griddle or large skillet, heat corn or other oil (I use ghee because I like the flavor of butter with crab) over medium heat. Form the crab mixture into 6 (fairly flat) patties if making as a main course, or about 20 if making them as an appetizer. Place the remaining hasa marina on a plate. Coat the crab cakes lightly with it. Place crab cakes in skillet and cook for about 5 minutes per side or until lightly browned and crispy. Serve hot or warm with sauce on the side or as desired.

**Carne Guisada (Mexican Beef Stew)**
Adapted from the Food Network

The original recipe called for serving this over “Chipotle Sweet Potato Mashers”, which sounds really good but I did not try. The recipes for them is at the link given above. This beef stew recipe is a keeper, as my husband likes to say. A glistening, dark, thick, rich stew, and not at all complicated. I used some delicious stewing beef from my friends at US Wellness Meats. You can find them at http://www.grasslandbeef.com/StoreFront.bok. We served the stew over rice and it was wonderful!
Serves 6 - 8

1/3 c all-purpose flour
1T unsweetened cocoa powder
1T ground ancho chili powder
2 – 2½ lbs. beef stew meat, cut into 1 – 1½ inch cubes
3T oil of choice
1 large onion, chopped
1c mixed sweet peppers, chopped (optional)
2t ground cumin
1t unsalted chili powder
pinch cinnamon
14oz. can diced tomatoes, including liquid
1½ - 2c low-sodium beef broth (I use Swanson Stock)
1 chipotle pepper from canned chipotles in adobo sauce, minced or pureed
1t (or more to taste) adobo sauce from can of chipotles
½t salt or more to taste
½t ground black pepper

Place flour, cocoa powder and ground ancho chili in a large bowl and stir well to distribute ingredients evenly. Add beef cubes and toss to coat with mixture, and shake off excess. Remove beef and set aside, reserving any remaining flour mixture (should be about 1 – 2 tablespoons). Heat 2 tablespoons of oil over medium heat in a large, heavy pot. Add half
(or less) of beef, not crowding the pan so it will brown nicely. Remove first batch and set aside. Repeat until all beef is browned. Add remaining tablespoon of oil and onions. Cook onions, stirring, for 4 minutes. Add peppers (if using) and cook 3 minutes. Add cumin, chili powder and cinnamon, and remaining flour mixture and stir well. Cook for one minute. Stir in beef, then add tomatoes, broth or stock, and chipotle pepper and sauce. Stir well and scrape the bottom to incorporate the browned bits. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to a low, cover and simmer stew, stirring fairly regularly to prevent sticking, for about 1½ to 2 hours or until the beef is nice and tender. You may need to add a bit more broth. Turn off the heat and let sit for 10-15 minutes before serving over rice or mashed sweet potatoes. You could also serve it in hot tortillas.

Pollo al Carbon (Grilled Chicken)
Adapted from http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/2252-grilled-chicken-pollo-al-carbon

The smell of this cooking is likely to bring your neighbors around asking what’s for dinner!
Use whatever cut of chicken you like, or even Rock Cornish game hens, cut in half.
Couldn’t be easier, and just in time for grilling season. Serve with salsa, or without your choice. Hot tortillas would also be nice.
NOTE: If you don’t usually have orange juice around, one easy way to have it readily available for recipes is to buy a small can of frozen orange juice concentrate and mix one rounded tablespoonful per cup of water. Voila!

Serves 8-10

2 small split chickens, total weight about 7 lbs., or equal weight of other parts
8 cloves garlic, minced
½c cider or rice vinegar
½c orange juice
½c olive oil
1t each dried thyme, oregano and marjoram
¾t salt
¾t ground black pepper

In a bowl, mix thoroughly together marinade ingredients. In a large, non-reactive container (I used a couple of lasagna pans), place a small amount of marinade in the bottom of the container. Place chicken parts on top of marinade and pour the rest over. Cover tightly and allow to marinate for at least 6 hours, turning once. Preheat grill (you will want to cook this over indirect, medium heat). Remove chicken from marinade and place on grill. Cook for about 45 minutes, turning the pieces a couple of times and basting with the marinade after the first turn ONLY. Discard marinade. Poke the thigh with a fork near the end of the cooking time and if the juice runs clear, the chicken is done.
**Arroz con Pollo (Chicken with Rice)**
Adapted from [http://www.myrecipes.com/recipe/arroz-con-pollo-10000000651153/](http://www.myrecipes.com/recipe/arroz-con-pollo-10000000651153/)

Once the prep is done and the chicken is browned, this is a snap to prepare as everything cooks together. A delicious version of one of the most popular of all Mexican recipes. Add a salad and you have a meal. Use whatever cut of chicken you like – I used boneless, skinless for ease of serving buffet-style.

Serves 8

2T olive oil
8 skinless chicken thighs, with or without bone, or drumsticks and thighs
2oz. smoked ham, diced
1 medium onion, chopped
1 cubanelle (light green sweet) pepper, or other green pepper, chopped
1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced
3 cloves garlic, minced
1½t unsalted chili powder
½t ground cumin
1½c long grain white rice
14oz. can diced tomatoes
1T tomato paste
1¼c frozen corn (optional but highly recommended)
2c low sodium chicken broth or stock
½t salt, or to taste
½t ground black pepper
2T fresh parsley, chopped

In a large heavy pot, heat the oil over medium to medium-high heat. Add some of the chicken, not crowding the pan so it will brown well. Brown the chicken, in batches, and set aside. If there is more than 3 or so tablespoons of fat in the pan (likely if you use parts with skin) drain some off, carefully. If using boneless thighs, cut them into 2 inch pieces once it is cool enough to handle and reserve. Reduce the heat to medium and add the ham and onion. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion begins to soften, about 6 minutes. Add both peppers and garlic and cook another 3 minutes. Add the chili powder and cumin and stir. Add the rice and cook, stirring, for 3 minutes. Add tomatoes, tomato paste broth, salt and pepper and stir well. Add the chicken – if using boneless thighs in small pieces, stir the pieces in. If using parts, lay them on top of the rice in an even layer. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer over low heat for about 25 minutes. It is likely the bottom will stick, but don’t worry! Just leave the cover on for about 5 – 10 minutes after the dish is cooked and the rice will miraculously “unstick.”
**Elotes (Mexican Corn “on the cob” – or not)**
Adapted from [http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/3542-mexican-corn-on-the-cob-elotes](http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/3542-mexican-corn-on-the-cob-elotes)

The original recipes called for mixing together the butter and mayo and slathering the corn with it, and then sprinkling the cheese and pepper flakes over the cobs and squeezing lime juice over it. I thought it would be a lot easier to eat and serve with corn OFF the cob, so here is my version of this nighttime street food from Mexico. It is delicious, almost like Mexican creamed corn. Rich.

Serves 6 - 8

2 ½c frozen corn  
⅛c softened butter (you may use less if you like)  
⅛c mayonnaise  
⅛c parmesan cheese (a good substitute for the Mexican cheese cotija)  
⅛t red pepper flakes  
pinch of salt  
1t fresh lime juice (optional)

Melt the butter in a saucepan over low heat and add the corn. Cook corn 6 - 8 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly. Add mayonnaise, parmesan cheese and pepper flakes and stir well. Add lime juice if desired and stir again. Serve warm.

**Calabacita con Elotes (Zucchini with Corn)**

The original recipe for this was a taco filling, though it is usually served as a side dish. You may omit the beans if you wish – adding the black beans does make it pretty, though. A delicious combination either way.

Serves 6 - 8

3T oil of choice  
1c chopped onion  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
1/8t chili powder  
14oz. can diced tomatoes  
3 medium zucchini, diced  
2½c fresh or frozen corn kernels  
1c beans of choice, pinto or black recommended  
1t fresh oregano, or ½t dried  
⅛t ground black pepper  
⅛t salt or to taste  
⅛c grated 4-cheeses Mexican style (Kraft and others make this – easy to find)  

warm corn tortillas
Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and cook about 6 minutes. Add garlic and chili powder and cook one minute, stirring. Add tomatoes and cook 10 minutes. Add zucchini and cook 5 minutes. Add corn, beans, oregano, salt and pepper and stir well. Reduce heat and cook, uncovered, for 5 more minutes. Remove from heat and sprinkle cheese over top. Serve warm.

NOTE: If you are serving this in tortillas, reserve the cheese to be sprinkled over the filling.

**Papitas al Ajillo (New Potatoes with Garlic and Cumin)**

*Spring is here and so are fresh new potatoes! If you can find tiny, marble sized new potatoes, by all means use those and cook until just tender. Otherwise, follow the recipe as given below for an easy side dish.*

Serves 6 - 8

1½ - 2lbs. new potatoes, sliced ¼ inch thick or tiny whole ones
3 - 4T olive oil
pinch ground cumin
4 large cloves garlic, minced
1t cumin seeds
¾t salt (or more to taste – I like my potatoes salty – you?) and ground black pepper

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium to medium-high heat. Add the ground cumin and potatoes and stir to coat with oil. Cook the potatoes, turning periodically so they brown evenly, for about 10 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low, add garlic and cumin and cook 3 more minutes or until the potatoes are just tender, being careful not to burn the garlic. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot.

**Pay de Limon con Tequila (Lime Pie with Tequila)**

This was delicious. As you all have noticed I do not usually make dessert, but I love Key Lime Pie so decided to make this and it was worth it!! YUM! You could make it even easier by omitting the meringue and just topping it with whipped cream just before serving. There are many other dessert recipes on the Mexconnect site, including Paletas or Mexican popsicles, which would be perfect for a May meeting! You can find a base recipe here – there are many others out there on the web so have fun with it!


Enjoy!

**Pie**
1 – 9-inch graham cracker pie crust
1-14oz. can sweetened condensed milk
2t grated lime peel (from about 3 limes) divided into 1 ¾ and ¼ t, green only
½c fresh lime juice (about 4 limes) plus 2T gold tequila (if you don’t want to use tequila substitute either more fresh lime juice or key lime juice if you can find it!)
¾t salt

3 egg yolks, slightly beaten, whites reserved for meringue( if making it.)

Preheat oven to 350. In a medium bowl, mix together the condensed milk, 1 ¾t lime peel, lime juice, tequila, salt and egg yolks. Stir well until slightly thickened. Place the pie tin/crust on a cookie sheet. Pour filling into pie crust and bake for 22-25 minutes if you will be topping with meringue, or 30-35 minutes if not. Remove pie from oven when set and allow to cool for 10 minutes. If you are making the meringue topping, see below. If not, allow the pie to cool completely before refrigerating. Serve cold with whipped cream.

**Meringue topping**

3 egg whites
2T superfine sugar
¾t lime peel

Beat egg whites in a medium bowl with an electric mixer on high speed. Add sugar gradually as whites begin to form peaks. Continue beating until stiff peaks form, adding lime peel near the end. Gently place mixture on top of slightly cooled pie, spreading to edges. Place in oven and cook 8 – 10 more minutes until topping is lightly browned. Allow to cool completely before refrigerating. Serve cold.