



Recipes and Cuisine of Guatemala

Cuisine

Many traditional foods in Guatemalan cuisine are based on Maya cuisine and prominently feature corn, chiles and beans as key ingredients.

There are also foods that are commonly eaten on certain days of the week. For example, it is a popular custom to eat paches (a kind of tamale made from potatoes) on Thursday. Certain dishes are also associated with special occasions, such as fiambre for All Saints Day on Nov. 1, and tamales, which are common around Christmas. Meat including chicken, beef and pork is usually stewed or braised in sauces that are unique to the region.

Fruit is abundant in Guatemala including mango, papaya, banana, pineapple, melons and many other fruits. Coffee is popular and tends to be served weak with much sugar and milk. (The best coffee is exported to the U.S.) Poor rural families tend to subsist on tortillas and chile peppers and whatever food they can grow.

Guatemalan Dinner Customs

If you are invited to a Guatemalan's home, it is likely his wife will serve everyone first, even if there are servants, and then will be seated herself. Unless you are attending a meal served in a household from the privileged class that observes European-style customs, all of the food will be served at once.

If the meal takes place in a private home, bring a small gift to indicate your appreciation. However, do not bring a gift of food – your hosts will think that you do not appreciate the food they have prepared or that you consider the woman of the house an inadequate cook.

It is appropriate to eat everything you are served. If you don't like the taste of something, just attempt to eat a bit of it. If you cannot eat something for health or religious reasons, explain this and apologize for any inconvenience it may cause.

At the start of a meal, it is the custom to say to everyone, "Buen provecho." (Enjoy your food.) Most Guatemalans are fairly quiet once the food is served. Compliments about the food will be welcome. In some areas of the countryside, food is eaten with the hands. Follow the lead of your hosts. Napkins are provided. There are no special rules about their use.

If you must leave the table, before getting up say, "Con permiso, ya vengo." (With your permission, I'll be right back.) It's appropriate to stand when someone arrives at the table. If you do not want to drink, say, "Lo siento, pero no yo tomo." (Sorry, I don't drink alcohol.) Guatemalan women are expected not to drink. If they do, they have only a glass of champagne at most. This rule is applied to foreign women as well.

The standard toast is to raise your glass and say, "Salud!" You should always offer your own toast: say how pleased you are to be in Guatemala and commend everyone for treating you in such a family-like manner.

If you are invited to a restaurant, your host will pay. It is appropriate to offer to pay for your part of the meal, but your offer will be politely declined. Reciprocate your host's hospitality with an invitation of your own soon afterward.

Sources:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guatemala#Cuisine>

http://www.guatemala.alloexpat.com/guatemala_information/customs_etiquettes_guatemala.php

Guatemalan Beet and Cabbage Tostada (Tested)

Serves 10-12

Ingredients

1 small head white cabbage, cored and finely shredded
½ small white onion, thinly sliced
1 jalapeno, minced
1/2 cup red wine vinegar
¼ grated piloncillo sugar or dark brown sugar
1/4 cup olive oil
5 small beets, steamed, peeled and cut into matchsticks
1 clove garlic, mashed
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 cup cilantro leaves, removed from stems
½ cup crumbled cotija cheese or substitute feta
limes for garnish
12 tostadas or 6" corn tortillas for serving*

Directions

Toss all ingredients in a bowl, through salt and pepper. Let marinate a couple of hours, occasionally tossing with your hands and gently squeezing to break down the cabbage a bit.

Just before serving, stir in the cilantro leaves and garnish with the cheese. This can be served piled onto tostada shells. You can find them at Latin markets, well supplied grocery stores, or even better, you can fry your own.

To so do heat up some oil in a small fry pan and fry the corn tortilla on both sides for about a minute or so, until they are crisp.

Garnish with lime.

*Fried flour tortillas were used to test the recipe.

Recipe and photo credit: Linda McElroy

Guatemalan Red Chicken Pepian (Tested)

Serves 6-8

Pepián , a thick meat and vegetable stew, is a common dish in the area of Antigua (a town just outside of Guatemala City, the country's capital). It is

thickened with ground nuts and seeds. Commonly pumpkin seeds (pepitas) are used, thus the name pepian was given to this type of dish. There are green versions and red versions.

Ingredients

For the chicken and marinade:

One 3 ½ lb. chicken, cut into 8 pieces, or equivalent amount of chicken thighs, bone-in and skin-on

6 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1/2 orange, juiced

1 lime, juiced

1 tsp. salt

1 tsp. ground cumin

1 tsp. chili powder

¼ tsp. cayenne pepper

Marinate chicken at least one hour and no more than 24 hours.

For the cooking sauce (Recado)

3 medium plum tomatoes (about 9 ounces), cored and chopped

3 tomatillos (about 4 ounces), husked and quartered

1 small white onion (about 5 ounces), peeled and cut in half

2 tbsp. olive oil

2 ½ cups chicken broth

¼ cup pepian spice blend (recipe follows)

1 tsp. salt

2 tbsp. corn masa mix (or substitute flour)

Directions

Place the tomatoes, tomatillos and onion in a blender or food processor and puree. Set aside.

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat and add the chicken pieces. Brown on both sides and continue to cook until the chicken is half done, about 10-15 minutes. Remove from pan and set aside.

Add the tomato puree to the oil in the same pan and simmer, stirring for 10 minutes, to reduce by about one-third. Add 2 cups of the chicken stock to the pan, along with the pepian seasoning and salt. Bring to a simmer and add the masa, mixed with ½ cup of the remaining chicken stock. (If you don't have masa you can substitute flour. Add the flour or masa to cold stock and shake vigorously and you

shouldn't have any lumps.) Bring back to a simmer, stirring, to avoid lumps. Add the chicken back into the pan.

Continue to simmer until chicken is done. Serve with rice.

Pepian Spice Mix

Makes about 1 ½ cups

Ingredients

16-17 dried guajillo chiles (about 8 ounces) (see note)

7 dried pasilla chiles (about 1 ½ ounces)

1/3 cup sesame seeds

1/3 cup hulled pumpkin seeds (pepitas)

1/3 cup whole almonds

1 tbsp. allspice berries

1 tbsp. whole black peppercorns

1 3" stick of cinnamon

2 tsp. whole cloves

4 ounces cacao nibs (about ¾ cup) (see note)

1 tbsp. salt

Stem and seed the chiles. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Toast the chiles a few at a time until they begin to soften. When you are done with the chiles put them all together and let cool. (ALTERNATIVELY use ½ cup of chile powder and proceed with the recipe.) Next add the sesame seeds for a quick jump in the pan, remove quickly when they turn golden. Place into a bowl. Next toast the pumpkin seeds and the almonds, stirring, until they take on some color, remove and add to the bowl with sesame seeds.

Reduce the heat to medium and add the allspice, black peppercorns, cinnamon stick and whole cloves. Roast the spices until they become aromatic, remove and add to the bowl with the seeds and nuts. If you're adding cacao nibs, add them to the pan and toast, stirring constantly for about 2 minutes. Add to bowl with nuts and seeds. Let everything cool.

Chop or tear the toasted peppers into smaller pieces with your hands and place in a food processor, and process to a coarse powder, transfer to a bowl. Place the rest of the ingredients, all the toasted nuts and seeds, into the processor and reduce again to a coarse powder and add to the bowl with the ground peppers. Mix in the salt.

Finally, working in batches, regrind everything in a coffee grinder or a spice grinder until it is as fine a powder as you can obtain. Pass through a strainer to remove any tough pieces left behind. Store tightly covered for 2 to 3 months.

Note: If you're not able to find whole dried chiles, or it just sounds like too much work, I suggest a quick and dirty substitute of ½ cup of chile powder in place of the whole chiles.

Also, if you're not able to obtain cacao nibs, I would suggest substituting 1 oz. of unsweetened baking chocolate stirred into the sauce just before the chicken is done.

Recipe adapted from: "Gran Cocina Latina," by Maricel E. Presilla
Photo credit: Linda McElroy

Tommy's Scratch Margarita (Tested)

Tommy's Mexican Restaurant, located in the Richmond district of San Francisco, has been an institution and a fixture for 50 years! It is one of the places I regularly visit whenever I am in that town visiting friends and relatives. The food is good, don't get me wrong – but the margaritas! That's why we go, to sit at the bar and chat with Julio Bermejo, Tommy's son, (sadly, Tommy passed away a few years ago) and learn about all things tequila.

When we ordered our usual "Cadillac Margaritas," Julio gladly made them for us. But when we were ready for another round, he took a chance on us and asked if we'd like him to make us his special "Tommy's" margarita. We were game!

Julio developed this margarita more than 20 years ago. He thinks all you really need for a terrific margarita is great tequila, fresh lime juice, and a touch of agave syrup/nectar for sweetener. Triple Sec and Cointreau are often used, but he feels that it's too overpowering and masks the taste of the tequila. If you can, splurge on a good quality tequila; he recommends 100 percent agave tequila. Julio also says that salt on the rim is a "no-no," and that it's basically used to mask the taste of cheap tequila. I was sorry to hear that since I love salt on the rim, but take Julio's advice and skip the salt, or if you must, just salt half the rim.

Julio gladly shared his recipe with us, to tide us over until we can get back to visit him again.

For one:

2 oz. or ¼ cup 100 percent agave tequila
1 oz. or 2 tbsp. fresh lime juice
1/2 oz. or 1 tbsp. agave nectar
lime wedges for garnish

Place ingredients into a cocktail shaker and shake for 30 seconds. Pour over fresh ice into a rocks glass, garnish with lime wedge.

For a pitcher:

2 cups tequila
1 cup fresh lime juice
½ cup agave syrup
lime wedges for garnish

Place ingredients into a pitcher filled with ice. Stir well until very cold. Divide between 6 - 8 glasses, garnish with lime wedges.

If you'd like salt on the rim, rub half the rim of the glass with a wedge of lime and roll in kosher salt.

Recipe credit: Tommy's Mexican Restaurant

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