



Chicken in Green Tomatillo and Pumpkin Seed Sauce (Pollo Pepián Verde) (Tested)
Serves 6

“Pepian Verde” is a traditional sauce made with tomatillos and “pepitas,” which is the Spanish word for pumpkin seeds. It is very easy to make, and in spite of the chiles it is not that spicy. The poblano peppers are mild, and contribute a pleasing chile note. Check with your grocer if you don’t see them, they are sometimes mistakenly called “pasilla peppers” as well. Also, Trader Joe’s carries the hulled pumpkin seeds called for in this recipe.

The sauce can be made ahead of time (at least a day or two), which is a bonus. If you do that, store the sauce in the fridge until you are ready to proceed with the rest of the recipe. You will find that in the fridge the sauce will solidify, because the pectin from the tomatillos has thickened it. Once heated, the sauce will become liquid again. Cool!

You can of course, use any kind of chicken parts for this recipe. I chose to use boneless, skinless chicken thighs for economy and ease of preparation. And if you really want to make this an easy dish to prepare, you could purchase a rotisserie chicken and cut the meat into large chunks instead of cooking chicken thighs. Just heat up the sauce and add the chicken pieces to warm.

Ingredients

- 3 fresh poblano peppers
- 12 medium-size tomatillos
- 2 serrano or jalapeno chiles (remove seeds for less heat)
- 2 or more cups of chicken stock
- 1 cup roughly chopped onion
- 3 cloves peeled garlic
- 1 large handful of cilantro, no need to stem
- ¾ cup hulled pumpkin seeds (pepitas)
- 1 tsp. salt

2 tbsp. oil
2 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs
Flour for dusting the chicken (optional)
Additional pumpkin seeds for garnish
Cilantro sprigs for garnish
Lime wedges for garnish

Directions

Begin by making the sauce. To do so, first roast the poblano peppers over a gas flame on the top of your stove (as I do), or broil them in the oven until the skin blackens. (For those who would like a little more instruction on how to roast and peel peppers check out this short video on [roasting peppers](#).) Make sure you keep your eyes on them for the entire process, though, moving your baking tray around as needed.

Once the peppers are roasted and the skin is blackened, place them into a covered bowl to finish steaming. When they are cool enough to handle, pull out the stems and seeds, and remove the skins. There is no need to pull off every bit of skin, as everything will be blended up smoothly. Place the peppers in a blender container.

In the meantime, while the poblano peppers are roasting, remove the papery skins from the tomatillos. Place the tomatillos and the serrano or jalapeno peppers into a saucepan and just cover with water. Bring to a boil, then simmer until they are soft, about 15 minutes.

Scoop the softened contents of the saucepan out of the water and put into the blender container with the poblanos. Add 2 cups of chicken stock, onion, garlic, cilantro, pumpkin seeds, and salt, and blend on high until everything is smooth.

Heat a large non-stick sauté pan over medium heat. Add a couple tablespoons of oil to the pan. Dust the chicken thighs with flour (if using), add them to the oil, and brown on one side. Turn and finish cooking on the other side. You may have to do this in a couple of batches if you don't have a large enough pan. When the chicken is cooked, make sure all the chicken pieces are back in the sauté pan and add the sauce, then let it come to a simmer. This is where you will take note of whether you need to add more stock or water if the sauce seems too thick. Check for seasoning and add more salt if necessary.

Garnish the plate with pumpkin seeds, cilantro sprigs, and a lime wedge. Serve with [Radish Salad](#) and [Mexican Rice](#), both recipes that you will find are already listed in the archives.

Recipe contribution from Linda McElroy, adapted from:

<http://www.lacocinadeleslie.com/2014/03/chicken-pipian-verde-weekdaysupper.html>

Photo credit: Linda McElroy

Customs and Cuisine of Guatemala/Ixil

Local Cuisine

Boxbol is a nutritious traditional Ixil dish is prepared with cornmeal and squash leaves, served with a delicious squash seed sauce and tomato salsa. Ixiles typically use the leaves from the squash güisquil (pronounced whiskeel) which is in the chayote family. The corn is soaked and cooked in water with lime (the mineral, not the citrus!) and a little bit of ash to produce nixtamal, which is then ground into masa (cornmeal dough). The masa is expertly wrapped in the güisquil leaves and boiled for 10 minutes.

The sauce for boxbol is made by grinding the seeds of the güisquil into a paste with a splash of warm water and a dash of salt. The fresh tomato salsa is made using a piedra de moler (similar to a mortar and pestle) with tomatillos or vine tomatoes, chili, and salt.

To make this dish in the US, use Swiss chard or large spinach leaves as a substitute for the güisquil leaves and pumpkin seeds in the sauce.

Caldo de Bodas (Wedding Soup) is a soup traditionally made for big celebrations, especially weddings. Smoked chicken and local vegetables (such as güisquil and corn on the cob) are added to chicken broth and all guests enjoy the soup.

Tamales de Siete Camisas (Seven Shirt Tamales) are another celebratory dish. Masa (cornmeal dough, similar to that used to make tortillas) is flattened and a layer of black bean paste is spread over it. The mixture is then rolled and cut into tamale-sized pieces (about 2 inches by 4 inches) and steamed inside of cornhusks. When the tamale is removed from the cornhusks and cut into, people say that it has the image of seven shirts stacked on top of each other.

Atol de Elote is a warm drink that is a traditional comfort food enjoyed by many Limitless Horizons Ixil scholars and families. Corn is soaked for several hours, and then ground on a metate (grinding stone). Once a smooth paste is formed, it is added to milk or water, white sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon, and salt, and boiled for several hours. This is often made daily and served to visiting family and friends.

Tomate de Árbol (Tree Tomato) Salsa is made from the fruit of a flowering plant in the Nightshade plant family. The plant is native to Central and South America, and the tree tomatoes are commonly ground into a salsa with cilantro, lemon juice, hot peppers, and onion.

Cultural Rituals

Maya New Year is celebrated each February, with the exact date varying based on the Maya calendar. Town elders and members of the community congregate at the town hall and the Maya mayor (a different representative than that of the Guatemalan government) performs a ritual with candles and blesses the town for the year. Although not everyone observes this tradition in modern times, it is still practiced annually in Chajul in an effort to preserve the Maya cultural heritage.

Atol de Masa is a ritual performed with traditional food. During Semana Santa (Holy Week, the week prior to Easter), the seeds of the zapote fruit are toasted, ground, and mixed with masa (cornmeal dough), and a small volcano is formed. A small amount of water is added to this mixture, and if a foam begins to form, it is said that the family will have abundance for the year to come. If it does not foam, the family is believed to be poor and inundated with problems until the following Semana Santa.

Festivals and Celebrations

Second Friday, the second Friday of Lent, is the biggest annual festival in Chajul. Ixiles from the entire region make a pilgrimage to the Christ of Golgatha, a statue of Christ that is believed to give miracles, located inside the main church of Chajul. They bring offerings of traditional food and drink and ask for blessings for the year.

Maya traditions are also celebrated during this celebration. Chajuleneses and Ixiles from surrounding region climb San Andres, the highest point in Chajul. Here, they light bonfires and make offerings, asking for blessings.

In the town center, games, Ferris wheels, other rides, and street food stands are temporarily installed for families to enjoy. Chamomile flowers and rosemary flowers are also traditionally sold by children.

Fería de San Gaspar is the celebration of Chajul's patron saint, San Gaspar. Beginning on January 4 of each year, marimba bands and traditional dancers perform throughout the day for three days in the town center. Each night, large fiestas are held in the town hall, where a young woman who has been chosen to represent the town for the year is honored, music is played, and the community comes together to dance. On January 6, community members wearing traditional Maya dress or costumes and masks dance in the streets and parade throughout the town. In the afternoon of this final day, the town dancers perform one last time, fireworks are lit, and traditional foods such as tamales and soups are eaten in homes with family and friends.

Source: Limitless Horizons Ixil