

Home on the Range



Clockwise from left: Pupusas, Tamal Azteca, Tamal Liviano wrapped, and Tamal Liviano

September 15 marks the beginning of Hispanic Heritage Month and "el Día de la Independencia," or Independence Day. During this weekend several Latin American countries—Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua among others—as well as many Hispanic communities in the U.S. come alive with the sights and sounds of the celebration of freedom. Generations of families gather to celebrate and share their favorite traditional dishes and customs in an age-old cultural experience.

Although each country has its own unique traditions and foods, they all share similar attitudes: the importance of the family gathering, the intricacies and dedication to the preparation of the meal, and the attention to the details of the celebration. Another shared characteristic is the use of corn masa in traditional recipes, which date back to pre-Columbian times and have been handed down from generation to generation. When preparing delicious tortillas from scratch, traditional tamales or the incomparable pupusas, today's generation has the advantage of the availability of *corn masa flour*. This helps eliminate the difficult task of making the corn masa from scratch. So, as ingredients are picked carefully and meats are slow-cooked to perfection, the anticipation builds for the feast to begin.

Today, we can all share these flavorful recipes as old as history, yet still alive and full of ceremony. Here they are to enjoy during this Hispanic Heritage Month and throughout the year. Independence never tasted so good!



Enjoy a Taste of Independence Latin American Style!

Tamal Liviano (Light tamale)

In keeping with a desire for lighter fare, these Nicaraguan tamales eliminate the lard and add more vegetables, but the traditional flavors remain. These tamales are wrapped in banana leaves to give a subtle but distinctive flavor to the tamale dough, which is always best when prepared from scratch with high quality corn masa flour.

- One 3 1/2-4 (three and a half to four) pound chicken, cut in quarters
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/2 teaspoon rosemary
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin powder
- 1/4 teaspoon coriander seeds

- For the tamale dough**
- 4 1/2 cups corn masa flour
 - 1 teaspoon salt (optional)
 - 2 1/2 cups mashed potatoes
 - 5-7 cups water or chicken broth

- For the filling**
- 1 cup cooked brown rice
 - 3 large carrots, peeled and cut in thin strips
 - 2 medium red bell peppers, cored and seeded, and cut into strips
 - 1 can (8 ounces) garbanzo beans (chickpeas), rinsed and well drained
 - 1 cup canned green peas
 - 1/2 cup raisins
 - 1/2 cup pitted green olives
 - Cilantro sprigs

Place the chicken parts in a heavy casserole and add salt, black pepper, thyme, rosemary, cumin powder and coriander. Add enough water to cover by 2 inches. Gently bring to a boil, skim, turn down heat and simmer for about 1 hour or until chicken is tender enough to fall off the bones. Strain and

To make tamale dough, place the Maseca masa flour, salt and mashed potatoes in the bowl of an electric mixer equipped with a dough hook. Mix masa flour and mashed potatoes. Measure 7 cups of the chicken's cooking liquid, adding water if necessary. Gradually add the liquid to form a soft, pliable dough. Or place the masa flour and mashed potatoes in a large bowl, gradually add water and mix with a wooden spoon. Turn on to a floured counter and knead by hand for about 2 minutes.

To assemble:

- 20 banana leaves or aluminum foil

Heavy string

Put all filling ingredients in bowls and set on the counter to make assembly easier.

Cut the banana leaves (or foil) into 10-inch squares. Place the banana leaf with a small piece of cloth and lay it lengthwise on your work surface, with the grain running from left to right. Moisten about 4 tablespoons of tamale dough to the center of the square. Lay with a spoon the filling in the center and top the whole cover. Again, as if wrapping a gift, do the tamal securely with the string. Repeat with remaining filling and banana leaves.

Arrange a steamer in a pot with a tight-fitting lid. Fill with 2-3 inches of water and bring to a boil (the water should be bubbling). Place

Tamal Azteca (Aztec tamale)

This dish is something like a Mexican lasagna, using homemade tortillas for the layers instead of pasta. The filling in between the layers can vary, but nothing can substitute the taste and freshness of homemade tortillas! Use individual cazuelitas or oven proof dishes for a beautiful presentation.

- 16 homemade 4-inch tortillas made with Maseca
- 1/4 cup corn oil (divided use)
- 1/2 cup onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 ripe tomatoes, seeded and chopped (discard skins)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 small zucchinis, diced
- 2 cups corn kernels, drained
- 1 cup cooked chicken, shredded
- 1 cup crema Mexicana or sourcream
- 2 roasted Poblano chiles, peeled, stems removed, cut into strips
- 1 1/2 cups Monterey Jack cheese, shredded

To make the tortillas, follow the directions on the Maseca package, stack, and cover with a cloth napkin until ready to assemble tamal.

Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a skillet and sauté the onion until translucent. Add garlic, tomato, and salt. Cook on low heat for about 10 minutes or until tomato sauce thickens slightly, stirring often. Reserve.

Preheat the oven to 350° F. In a small casserole, heat the butter. Add zucchini and corn, stir to coat. Add 2 tablespoons water and simmer for about 10 minutes or until zucchini is tender. Reserve.

In another skillet, heat the rest of the oil and fry tortillas on both sides. To assemble, place a tortilla at the bottom of each cazuelita or individual casserole, moisten with the tomato sauce, and layer chicken, vegetables, crema, chiles and cheese. Repeat layers and finish with a tortilla and a sprinkling of cheese. Place the casseroles or dishes on a cookie sheet on the middle rack of the oven and cook until cheese melts, about 15 minutes. Yield 4 individual tamales.

Pupusas

Pupusas are a Salvadoran specialty, something like a filled tortilla. They are served as a main dish or snack accompanied by the encurtido, fresh slightly pickled vegetables. Pupusa fillings are varied and can be made as hot as you wish by adjusting

the amount of hot chile peppers used. The essential ingredient of a good pupusa is the masa flour.

- For the dough**
- 4 1/2 cups Maseca Corn Masa Flour
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - 5-6 cups of water

- For the filling**
- 1 small onion, diced
 - 1 ripe tomato, seeded and diced
 - 1 jalapeño, seeded and stemmed
 - 1/2 pound cooked pork rind, (chicharrón) roughly diced
 - 1 can (15 oz.) black beans, rinsed and well drained
 - 1 pound Monterey Jack cheese, grated

For the dough

Place the masa flour and salt in the bowl of an electric mixer equipped with a dough hook, gradually add water to form a soft, pliable dough that will not stick to your hands. Or place the masa flour in a large bowl, gradually add water and mix with a wooden spoon. Turn on to a floured counter and knead by hand for about 2 minutes. Lightly cover and allow to rest while making the filling.

For the filling:

Place onion, tomato, jalapeño and chicharrón in a food processor and pulse until smooth. Transfer to a bowl, add drained black beans and grated cheese. Stir with wooden spoon to mix well.

Form 2-inch balls with the masa dough. To fill, place the ball in the palm of your hand and make an indentation at the center of the ball. Place 1-2 teaspoons of filling in the center and work the edges of the dough to seal. The filling should not touch the edges or the dough will not stick to itself. Flatten between your hands to form a 1/4-inch thick tortilla. Repeat until all dough and filling are used.

To cook

Lightly oil a comal, griddle, or heavy skillet. Cook pupusas on low heat about 2-3 minutes on each side or until golden and slightly puffy. Yields 36 pupusas. Serve with traditional Salvadoran encurtido.

Encurtido

- 1 medium cabbage, thinly shredded
- 1 large carrot, peeled and shredded
- 2 medium onions, thinly sliced
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and stemmed
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 cups white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon salt

Place all ingredients in a large glass bowl, stir to mix. Let stand about 1 hour before serving for flavors to blend. Yield 36 pupusas.