

Yaya's Tamales

In my family tamales have been and still are very special. They are important for many reasons. To begin, I remember my grandmother and mother in the kitchen with their aprons, making tamale after tamale. The tamale recipe that my family enjoys comes from my Great-grandmother, whom we called "Yaya". She learned the recipe from working alongside her friend's mother and ever since then it has been a part of our Christmas celebration. Christmas without tamales would not be quite the same. My grandmother and mother made all sorts of tamales. They made some of pork in a red chili sauce, some of chicken in a green chili sauce, and some of cheese with jalapeños.

Every Christmas morning around 5a.m. you could hear my mother and grandmother talking and beginning to work on preparing the corn mix (masa) with which they would make the tamales. Somehow this was the beginning of what felt like a very special Christmas. They would also put some background cumbias and dance while they were getting the kitchen set-up to make the tamales. My grandmother loved cumbias. This type of music was her favorite and somehow I felt like the joy she felt in listening to cumbias would carry over into her preparation of scrumptious tamales.

To me, tamales are the taste of heaven. They are filled with delicious ingredients but most importantly they are prepared with time, care and love. Also, those who do not like pork can try the chicken ones and if you do not like chicken you can try the cheese ones that ooze with delicious cheese and are always a favorite!

Many people in Mexico eat tamales. They are a cultural staple for many Mexican households. Although my grandmother is no longer present, it still feels as if she were present on Christmas morning when the tamales are getting prepared. For this and for many reasons tamales are very special to me.

Yaya's Christmas Tamales

Origin: Northern Mexico

Prep Time: 4 hours

Cooking Time: 6 hours

Serves: 16

Ingredients:

- 8 oz cornhusks
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 onion, chopped into large pieces
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 large potatoes
- 1 1/4 lbs pork loin cut into chunks
- 16 oz beef broth
- 4 chile pods
- 1/2 tsp cumin
- 1/2 tsp oregano
- 2/3 cup lard
- 2 cups masa harina flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- Green olives, pitted



Steps

1. Place cornhusks in a bowl of warm water and soak for three hours. Remove from water and pat dry.
2. In a large pot, add in chopped garlic, onion, bay leaf, and pork loins. Fill with water, enough to cover ingredients. Bring contents to a boil. Once boiling, reduce heat to low and simmer for 2 hours. Salt to taste
1. Place chiles into a saucepan, pour in 2 cups water and simmer, uncovered, for 20 minutes.
2. Put chile, 8oz of beef broth, cumin, and oregano into a blender. Puree until smooth. Strain the mixture. Salt to taste. Reserve 1/2 cup for later use.
3. Shred the pork, add in 1 cup of chile mix. Toss together. Set aside for later use.
4. Boil the potatoes whole until tender. Slice the potato into long, thin slices. Set aside for later use.
5. In a separate bowl, beat together a tablespoon of beef broth with lard. Beat until fluffy. Add in remaining salt, masa harina and baking powder. Beat together and add half a cup of the chile sauce for color and flavor. Beat until the dough is smooth and spongy.

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6. Spread about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the dough into a large cornhusk-- about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Add a tablespoon of pork into the middle Add a slice of potato and one olive. Fold sides of the corn husk inward.
7. Place the tamales in layers inside a large steamer. Steam tamales for 1 hour, checking periodically that the masa is thoroughly cooked. Add water to the steamer as needed.
8. Serve hot with Mexican Rice