

*Mexican Cuisine:
Prehispanic traditions and Colonial transformations*

*Claudia Alarcón Cacheux
Verónica A. Vázquez López*



*Maya at the Playa
September 23, 2021*

Recetario ~ Recipes

Salsa Borracha

This “drunken salsa” is a popular example of a Mexican table salsa made with dried chiles. It comes from the highlands, where pulque is widely produced and consumed. Although not all ingredients are of pre-Hispanic origin, it is a very simple salsa that mimics pre-Hispanic technique.

Traditionally this salsa is made in a molcajete, ground by hand, and pulque is used instead of beer and orange juice. It is a classic accompaniment to barbacoa, but it can be served as a topping for tacos or alongside any roasted or grilled meats.

8 pasilla chiles, wiped clean, stemmed, slit open, seeded and deveined
1/2 cup (125ml) fresh orange juice
1/2 cup (125ml) Mexican beer or as needed
2 garlic cloves, peeled
1 teaspoon salt
¼ cup chopped white onion

Toast the chiles in a comal or heavy skillet, turning them over and pressing so they toast evenly until they blister slightly, and insides are dark brown, about 1.5 minutes. Do not let them burn.

Place them in a bowl and cover with the orange juice. Let them soak for 30 minutes or until soft. Put the chiles with the juice and the rest of the ingredients, except the onion, in the blender. Puree until smooth but with some texture. Pour the salsa into a serving bowl, taste and season with more salt if needed. Add the onion and stir before serving.

Sikil P'aak

Recipe adapted from David Sterling

This dip of pre-Hispanic Maya origin is still widely eaten in cantinas and restaurants in the Yucatan peninsula, where it's enjoyed as an appetizer with an ice-cold beer. Traditionally it is served with corn tortillas or tortilla chips (*totopos*), but you can dip it with celery or other veggie sticks. It is best served the day it's made, but can last 2-3 days in the refrigerator if it doesn't disappear at the table.

In Yucatan, sour oranges are widely used in cooking. Since they are not easy to find outside the peninsula, you can substitute a mix of sweet orange, lemon and lime juices. The recipe is below.

2 cups (250g) raw pumpkin seeds, hulled
2 medium tomatoes
1 chile habanero or any fresh, hot green chile (such as serrano or jalapeño)
2 medium garlic cloves
1/2 cup (125ml) water
¼ cup (60ml) sour orange mix
2 teaspoons salt, or to taste
½ medium white onion, charred and finely chopped
3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro (coriander)
3 tablespoons chopped chives (optional)

Sour orange mix:

1 cup (250ml) fresh lime juice
½ cup (125ml) fresh orange juice
½ cup (125ml) fresh grapefruit juice (white preferred)

Heat a thick frying pan or comal and toast the seeds, turning them constantly, until they start to pop and become fragrant. Set them aside to cool. Meanwhile, toast the chile, garlic and tomatoes, turning from time to time until they're blistered and black-brown in spots.

Grind the toasted seeds in a food processor to a coarse powder, about 3 minutes. Scrape the sides of the processor and grind again for 2-3 minutes until powder starts to clump. Transfer powder to a large mixing bowl.

In the processor or blender, puree the tomatoes, chile (remove the seeds if you want it less hot), garlic, water, orange juice and salt until thoroughly liquified. You should have 2 cups of puree, if not add water to make 2 cups. Add ¾ of the puree into the ground pumpkin seeds, and stir to combine. Let the mixture sit for 10 minutes to let the seeds absorb the liquid and form a

thick paste. If you like a thinner consistency, keep adding the rest of the liquid and stirring until it's to your liking. Add the cilantro, chives, and chopped onion, and mix well.

Guisado de la Milpa

For centuries, Mesoamerican peoples have been growing corn in the traditional way, following the seasons and rain cycles. But these corn fields, known in Spanish as *milpa*, are an example in biodiversity and companion gardening. Among the corn stalks grow squash vines, climbing beans, chiles, tomatoes, tomatillos, and wild greens such as epazote. Mushrooms such as the famed huitlacoche, which grows on the ears of fresh corn, are also a nourishing and readily available addition.

This versatile dish can be served as a side, wrapped in a corn tortilla as a filling for tacos or quesadillas, over white rice as a vegetarian main course, or as the basis of the Central Mexican staple *sopa de milpa*.

- ½ cup (64g) chopped white onion
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 2 medium zucchini or Mexican *calabacitas*, diced
- 2 ½ cups (200g) fresh corn kernels
- 2 chiles poblanos, roasted, peeled, and chopped
- 1 cup (128g) sliced mushrooms
- 1 ½ tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 medium tomatoes, diced
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 sprigs fresh epazote or cilantro

In a large frying pan, sauté the onion and garlic in the oil for about one minute. Add the zucchini and cover the frying pan, and cook for about 5 more minutes. Add corn, mushrooms and poblanos, stirring to prevent browning. Keep cooking for 3 minutes and add tomatoes and epazote. Stir and season with salt and pepper. Cover and simmer until zucchini and corn are tender. If tomatoes are not juicy, add some water to prevent sticking.

If you like, you can garnish with crumbled *queso fresco* or a grated aged cheese such as cotija or asiago.

Pipián Rojo

Adapted from a recipe by Ricardo Muñoz Zurita

This dish is of pre-Hispanic origin, and was enjoyed by the people of Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City) when the Spanish conquerors arrived. It was a simple dish of fowl cooked with a tomato, chile, and pumpkin seed sauce. After the Spaniards introduced new ingredients the dish grew in complexity, with sesame seeds and spices from the Far East.

Many variations of *pipián* exist in different Mexican states as well as in Guatemala.

Serves 12

For the meat

- 2 kg chicken, in pieces
- 4 liters water
- 2 white onion quarters
- 12 medium garlic cloves
- 4 teaspoons salt

For the sauce

- 5 chiles guajillos, seeded, deveined and toasted
- 2 chiles chipotles toasted
- 2 chiles anchos seeded, deveined and toasted
- 1 cup (125g) pumpkin seeds, roasted
- ½ cup (42g) peanuts, roasted
- ¼ cup (30g) sesame seeds, toasted
- 6 cm cinnamon stick, toasted
- ½ teaspoon cumin seed, toasted
- 5 cloves, toasted
- 6 allspice, toasted
- 1 small white onion (about 150g), roasted
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled and roasted
- 2 tomatoes, roasted
- 1 tablespoon oil
- 2 teaspoons salt

Cook the chicken in the water with the onion, garlic and salt for 30 minutes or until tender. Drain and reserve both the meat and broth separately.

Heat three cups of the liquid, add the chiles and boil for 10 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool.

Blend the seeds, the spices, onion, garlic, tomatoes, chiles with the chile cooking liquid to obtain a sauce of smooth consistency.

Heat the oil until it smokes, then fry the sauce. Let it come to a boil, check seasoning and add the chicken. You can add more of the broth if the sauce is too thick. Serve the chicken with lots of sauce and corn tortillas on the side.