

Mangoland Cooks! :: A trip to Mexico

SEPTEMBER 16TH, 2008

Good morning. Welcome to the Matrix. Seek the fragrance *within*.

You Need	Mole	Arroz	Frijoles	Relleno	Michilada
Equipment	Fry Pan	Pot	Pressure Cooker	Fry Pan	Beer Opener
	Blender			Knife	
Ingredients	Oil	Rice	Beans	Greens	Beer
	Stock	Tomato	Onion	Cheese	Hot Sauce
	Dry chiles	Onion	Garlic		Lemons
	(see below)	Spices	Epazote		

What is the language of a smile?

Mole

Mole is intense. It's as close as non-Indian food gets to the intensity, strength, and diversity of an Indian curry. *Mole* is dish typical to Mexico's indigenous populations, made over the course of days for huge feasts and celebration. To eat *mole* is a celebration.

There as many different kinds of *mole* as shadows in the moonlight. Each is based on a different combination of chiles. Mostly dry. Some fresh. Some don't have *chiles* at all. This particular base I learned from a grandmother in the market by Puerto Angel, Oaxaca. It produces a dark red *mole*, fat with sesame seeds and almonds. I generally do different variations with the fruit and herb components each time, but keep the same *chiles* the *abuela* used: *guajillo*, *ancho*, and *pasilla*.

12 oz of dried *chile*

1 heaping tablespoon each of marjoram, thyme, and oregano

1 big onion and 1 head of garlic

¼ cup each of almonds, sesame seeds, and raisins

1 banana (and maybe some cinnamon) and 2 good squares of dark chocolate

To prepare the *chiles*, assemble the whole family. It's fun. Everyone can sit in a circle, at the table or on the floor, with newspaper spread out around them. Brush the *chiles* off with paper to clean them. Break them open (with a knife if necessary) and separate out the parts. You should have separate piles for

a) each kind of *chile*, b) the seeds of the *guajillo chile*, c) the seeds of the other *chiles*, d) the veins of all the *chiles*, and e) the bad *chiles*

Note that some of the chiles will have bugs or moths. It happens. Drying and storing chiles take time, in some forgotten land far away. The bugs don't mean the chile is bad, just that it must be wiped clean. We don't want to get the chiles wet because they won't fry well.

Once you have cleaned off all the chiles, put them aside and shell all the chocolate beans, if you are using whole beans. If not, just unwrap your chocolate. Have all your ingredients at the ready. We are going to fry most of the ingredients for the mole, then combine them in a large pot or food processor.

To dry roast

Guajillo seeds

To fry

Chiles, Nuts, Fruits, Alliums

To boil

Stock, chocolate

Blend everything together and thin with stock. Add salt. Balance the flavors. We want strong presence of chiles, and accents of everything else. A slight sweetness will be necessary, but not the focus. The fats should be strongly represented, through the nuts and oil.

Let the mole simmer, adding stock to keep it loose. Now we want to make the enchiladas. Heat the tortillas on a skillet, a few at a time. When they are warm, we will dip them in the mole, fill them with the relleno, roll them into an enchilada, and lay them on the baking tray. After filling a tray we can top it with cotija and bake it for a few minutes to melt the cheese. After the tray comes out of the oven, we will top with slices of red onion and sesame seeds.

Beans (frijoles de la olla)

Beans are huge in Mexico. Hugely popular. Today we'll make one dish, the standard pot of beans. Next time we can work with the leftovers to make refried beans and other treats.

Soak the beans – one cup dried is good for about 4 people, cooked. Keep changing the water, two or three times, over the course of the soaking. Then pressure cook the beans with some epazote and garlic, to get some flavor in and some gas out.

After the beans have been cooked to tender, we can put them back on the stove to simmer. If we want to add spices or sautéed onions, we can. It's up to how simple or how complicated you want to be. I'll often chop an onion and sauté it on medium heat, then add the cook beans to that (new) pan to cook together and flavor. It keeps the pressure cooker from ever touching oil (easier to clean), and takes advantage of the seasoning in the onion pan.

Arroz

One of the simplest and best ways to make Mexican rice starts with toasting the rice in a skillet. Use a wide skillet and toast the rice over high heat in a tablespoon of oil, stirring frequently to prevent The Burn. When the rice darkens a bit and lets off a nutty aroma, I add chopped onions and tomatos. The fire is still high and when the water leaves the vegetables, it's time to really start the cooking. At that point one can add spices, but if we're eating it with the mole, it'll be nice to have some mildness to the rice. Just add water – more than twice as much as rice for the brown rice we're using – and stir.

When the water starts to boil, lower the heat and cover. Check it after half an hour and every ten minutes thereafter. Brown rice takes time. When the rice is cooked, there should be a little moisture still left in the pan. Keep it covered and turn off the heat – the humid climate will keep everything tender until serving time. If, by chance, there is too much water and the rice is done, simply strain out the water. Don't worry about "wet" rice; by the time you serve, the hot grain will have absorbed all excess liquid.

Michiladas

The *michilada* is a delightful and fancy way of taking cheap light Mexican beer to the level of the gourmet experience. A worthy pre-*mole* libation. It's cold, salty, spicy, and fun.

In a glass rimmed with salt go the juice of half a lemon and 3 strong shakes of chile sauce. Stir the cocktail together before adding the beer; let the imbiber stir in the beer herself...

Relleno (the filling)

Again, since the mole will be so amazing, it's good not to compete. We'll keep it stout and simple by steaming some greens and tossing them with some fresh Mexican cheese.

Roughly chop 1 bunch of swiss chard. If you don't have swiss chard, you can use spinach. Later, in December, seek out Russian kale. It's amazing. Steam the greens until soft but still dark and vibrant in color. Watch over the steamer and don't let it go too long. Let the greens cool and drain, then chop them again so they fit kindly on a forkful.

Get some *queso Oaxaca* or other Mexican stringy cheese. Slice or grate it into manageable pieces and toss together with the greens. Often, Mexican cheeses are heavily salted, so taste before adding any more salt.