

Breads of the World: Mexico

Presented 4/18/2017 by Pedro Arellano

Notes about the tortilla recipe:

- Ingredient measurements are provided both by cups and by weight
- Measuring flour: Precision is necessary if you want the mixing to be easy. If you don't mind adjusting the liquid and using the force to feel when the dough is correct, then don't worry too much about how you measure. For everyone else, be precise.
- If you measure by cups, aerate the flour with a big spoon and then use the spoon to scoop flour into your measuring cup. Do not tap or shake the cup to level it. Level the cup with a knife. Measured in this manner you will have 4.5 ounces in your cup versus 5.5 ounces if you scoop the cup directly into the flour and shake the excess off. That scoop method translates to nearly 1 extra cup of flour, which would have a big effect on the texture.
- Fat: I prefer lard. You may also use shortening or a mixture of the two. I do not recommend liquid oil. Coconut oil works, but it makes a rather cakey tortilla. It will take longer to work the dough with the coconut oil, but it will come around.
- For help in learning how to roll the tortillas, watch the video, "How to make AUTHENTIC Flour Tortillas" posted by Meat & Potatoes, Recipes and More on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTB-TgDFZ5c> the link is posted on the library's home page). The presenter does pretty much everything almost exactly as my mom does it. The woman is imprecise about measuring. Use my quantities or try hers if you want. She's super legit.
- Supplies needed: large bowl, measuring cups and spoons, liquid measuring cup, skillet or griddle and rolling pin.



Flour Tortillas

Ingredients by cups:

3½ cups all-purpose flour
 2¼ teaspoons salt
 1¾ teaspoons baking powder
 ¼ cup fat of your choice (see note, above)
 9 ounces plus 1 teaspoon warm water

Ingredients by weight:

454 grams (1 pound) all-purpose flour
 16 grams salt
 5 grams baking powder
 56 grams fat of your choice (see note, above)
 264 grams warm water

Directions:

1. Mix the flour, salt and baking powder well with your hands until completely mixed.
2. Add the fat to the flour mixture. Cover the fat with the flour mixture and then squeeze/pinch the fat into the flour mixture until it is completely incorporated. The mixture will look like slightly damp sand.
3. Add the warm water to the mixture and blend by hand until the water is completely absorbed into the flour mixture. It will be quite sticky at first and you will likely think you used too much water. Have patience, the flour will absorb the water (assuming you measured correctly).
4. Divide into 14 balls of dough. Create a cup with your hand and rub the dough balls into your counter in a circular motion. You will need to be firm with the dough in order to get it to make a ball.

5. Roll the dough out into circles (if you can't make a circle, that's OK; Wisconsin-shaped tortillas also taste great).
6. Cook on a dry griddle at medium-high heat; the griddle should be between 350-400 degrees. It should take 20-30 second each side to achieve the nice light brown spots on the tortillas; see photo.



Pedro's Simple Mexican Rice (aka Arroz Sencillo al estilo de Jiménez Coahuila)

Ingredients:

2 cups long grain white rice
2 to 3 Tablespoons lard
½ to 1 medium onion, diced
1 to 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
1 quart unsalted chicken stock
24 grams (or 4 teaspoons) chicken base (see note, below)
2 Tablespoons tomato paste (or 1 8 oz. can plain tomato sauce)
Freshly ground Tellicherry pepper to taste
Salt to taste

Directions:

1. Heat lard in a skillet over medium-high heat.
2. Add dry rice and cook until toasty, fragrant and lightly browned.
3. Add diced onions and cook until the onions are well-coated with the fat and fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes.
4. Add finely minced garlic and cook briefly until fragrant, taking care not to burn the garlic, 1 to 2 minutes.
5. Add the tomato of your choice and chicken stock. Add freshly ground black pepper, taste, and add salt to your taste.
6. Cook on medium high heat until the rice comes to the top of the water. Cover and turn down to low until the rice is fully evaporated, about 10-15 minutes.

Recipe notes:

- Instead of chicken stock and base, my Mom used 4 cups of water plus 4 chicken bouillon cubes. I prefer the chicken base.
- Using a rice cooker that seals and locks (like the Aroma brand) makes this recipe foolproof. If you have such a rice cooker then, follow steps 1 through 4 as written then follow steps 5 and 6 in the rice cooker's cooking vessel.

Pedro's Mom's Uber-Simple Mexican Beans

This simple recipe is the one I grew up with; it couldn't be easier.

Ingredients:

2 pounds beans (I grew up with pintos)
2 whole garlic cloves
2 level Tablespoons kosher salt
12 to 16 cups water

Directions:

1. Pick through the beans for rocks and clumps of dirt. (Do not skip this step: I've cleaned hundreds of bags and can count on one hand the times I haven't picked something out.)
2. Rinse the beans well in a colander
3. Add the beans to a pot with the rest of the ingredients and cook until the beans are completely tender, 3 to 4 hours.

Recipe note: My mother always soaks her beans overnight. I don't. Rick Bayless, my cooking hero, doesn't: he finds no difference. I skip it. My Mom considers this to be heresy. There are many little old Mexican grandmas who agree with my Mom. They would gasp at my recommendation. Do what you will.

Mexican Beans variations:

1. Use chicken stock or beef stock instead of plain water.
2. Add half an onion or a whole onion, halved
3. Add a ham bone
4. Add a good grip of diced bacon
5. Add some chicken thighs into the beans right from the start. They will impart flavor into the beans. It's awesome.
6. Add a couple of pork chops into the broth right from the start. Also awesome.
7. Cilantro is always nice
8. The spice epazote is traditional in some parts of Mexico. They say it helps with the gas.

Serving suggestions:

- One of our favorite ways to eat beans is with diced raw onions, diced cilantro and diced jalapeños or a simple hot salsa and, of course, fresh tortillas.
- Use the simple beans as a base for tostadas.
- For something different, find a recipe for Enfrijoladas. They are like enchiladas, but with refried beans.
- Search for Cotija cheese (Queso Cotija) at your Mexican grocer or ethnic section of your grocery store. It is a very buttery, crumbly cheese for sprinkling over the top.

Pedro's Frijoles Borrachos (Drunk Beans)

If you substitute water for the beer, this recipe becomes Frijoles Charros (Cowboy Beans). Serve these beans as a side dish to your favorite Mexican entrée or serve as the main dish with corn tortillas and crumbled Cotija cheese.

Ingredients:

2 pounds pinto beans
16 cups cold water
1 can of beer of your choice
16 servings of ham or chicken soup base (see note, below)
2 medium onions: 1 halved, 1 diced
2 small bunches of cilantro: 1 whole, 1 chopped fine
2 to 4 jalapeños: 1 to 2 halved lengthwise, 1-2 finely diced (see note, below)
2 to 4 whole garlic cloves
2 Tablespoons tomato paste (optional; it adds body and color)
Ground pepper to taste
Salt to taste, if needed

Directions:

1. Pick through the beans for rocks and clumps of dirt.
2. Rinse the beans well in a colander
3. Add the beans to a large pot and add water, ham bone, halved onion, cilantro bunch, halved jalapeños, garlic cloves and pepper to taste.
4. Bring to a simmer. Do not let it boil.
5. As it comes to a simmer, add your base and optional tomato paste.
6. Cook for 2 to 3 hours or until the beans are almost soft enough to eat. Remove the halved onion, whole cilantro, halved jalapeños and garlic cloves.
7. Add diced onion, chopped cilantro and diced jalapeños.
8. Taste for salt; it's not likely to need it.
9. Cook 1 hour or until the beans are completely soft.

Recipe notes:

- I use Tone's brand soup bases. Most bases are 6 grams per teaspoon, which makes 1 cup stock. For this recipe, you would use 96 grams, which is 16 teaspoons or 3.4 ounces, of Tone's chicken base.
- To reduce the heat in this recipe, slice the jalapeños lengthwise and remove all seeds and membranes while rinsing under cold water. Or substitute 1 bell pepper, divided, for the jalapeños.