



ANSON MILLS

Tamales Pequeños

Yield

45 to 50 (2½- to 3-inch) tamales; serves 10 to 12 as an appetizer

Time

2 days (cook the chicken and begin the broth on day 1; complete the filling, make and steam the tamales, and make the dipping sauce on day 2)

Cooking Remarks

The striking singular difference between masa and tamal dough is broth (tamal dough has it, masa does not). When cooking scratch hominy corn for tamal, there are two main things to observe: (1) simmer, don't boil, and (2) begin tasting the corn after 1 hour, then once every 15 minutes thereafter. You want to catch the corn kernels while their interiors are still slightly crumbly with distinct particle texture. This state is just *before* the corn kernels achieve an al dente texture. Hominy for tamales is overcooked if the kernels take on the characteristic of a smooth gel.

We discovered a terrific new source for organic leaf lard: Tendergrass Farms sells 1-pint glass jars that are easy to scoop from and reseal.

We found our cured corn husks for tamale wrapping at Mexicangrocer.com Buy a couple of packages of them, and sort through them before soaking the husks. Discard any husks that have holes in them, as well as those that are unusually small.

For steaming the tamales, we used a perforated pasta insert and large pot with lid. Lots of different steamer contraptions will work. What will not work, however, are the collapsible fanlike steamers that are popular for vegetables.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe, you will need a digital kitchen scale, a heavy-bottomed 5- to 6-quart stockpot, a pair of tongs, a rimmed baking sheet, a fine-holed colander, a heavy-bottomed large saucepan, a glass measuring cup, aluminum foil, a food processor, a large skillet, a large stockpot or similar vessel in which to soak the corn husks, a large baking dish, a rubber spatula or plastic dough scraper, a ruler, a tablespoon measure, a steamer rig (steamer insert, pot, and lid), a pair of scissors, and a small serving bowl for the dipping sauce.

Ingredients

for the filling and chile-infused broth

1 whole chicken (3 to 4 pounds)

2 medium yellow onions, diced

1 large carrot, peeled and chopped into 1-inch lengths

1 celery rib, chopped into 1-inch lengths

1 head garlic, cloves separated and peeled, plus 2 garlic cloves, peeled and halved lengthwise
8 sprigs fresh thyme or 2 teaspoons dried thyme
1 Turkish bay leaf
Handful of fresh parsley stems
2 quarts spring or filtered water
2 guajillo chiles
2 medium poblano chiles
8 ounces ripe tomatillos (about 3 medium)
Fine sea salt
8 ounces young Manchego cheese, coarsely shredded (about 2 cups loosely packed)

for the tamal dough and forming the tamales

60 large corn husks (see Cooking Remarks)
1 recipe Fresh Whole Hominy, just cooked, flushed of pericarp, and *still hot*
Chile-infused broth (see above)
2 ounces (4 tablespoons) leaf lard, plus additional as needed
2 teaspoons baking powder
1½ teaspoons fine sea salt

for the salsa verde dipping sauce

8 ounces ripe tomatillos (about 3 medium), quartered
1 serrano chile, seeded and cut into 1-inch pieces
¼ cup chopped sweet onion, such as a Vidalia
3 tablespoons juice from 2 juicy limes
1 cup loosely packed (0.5 ounce) cilantro leaves
Fine sea salt

- 1. Cook the chicken for the filling and begin the broth:** Place the chicken, breast side up, a heavy-bottomed 5- to 6-quart stockpot. Add the onions, carrot, celery, whole garlic cloves, thyme, bay leaf, parsley stems, and water. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat, and then turn down the heat to low, cover the pot, and simmer gently until the chicken legs pull easily away from the carcass, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Remove the pot from the heat and let cool for 30 minutes.
- 2. Using tongs, transfer the chicken to a rimmed baking sheet; reserve the liquid in the pot.** Let the chicken stand until cool enough to handle, and then remove the meat from the bones and pull or cut it into small pieces; reserve the bones but discard the skin. Put the meat into a container, cover, and refrigerate until needed. (Note: 1 pound of chicken meat is all you will need for the tamales; if you have extra, save it for something else.) Return the bones to the pot, bring to a simmer over medium heat, and simmer until the broth is rich, flavorful, and reduced to 1 quart, about 45 minutes. Strain the broth through a fine-holed colander into a heavy-bottomed large saucepan. Let cool, cover, and refrigerate overnight.
- 3. Complete the chile-infused broth:** Use a spoon to lift the congealed fat from the surface of the broth and discard. Bring the broth to a simmer over medium-high heat and let it reduce until

you have 1½ cups. Into a glass measuring cup, pour ¾ cup of the broth and set aside for the filling. Cover the saucepan to keep the remaining broth hot. Heat a medium cast-iron skillet over low heat until hot, about 3 minutes. Toast the guajillo chiles until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes, turning occasionally and pressing them against the skillet with tongs or your fingers. (We like to wear rubber gloves when we're fooling around with chiles.) Pull the tops off of the chiles to remove the stems, and then shake out the seeds. Drop the toasted chiles into the hot broth in the saucepan, cover, and let infuse for 1 hour. Fish out the chiles and set a fine-mesh strainer over the saucepan. With your fingers, pull each chile lengthwise into halves and rub the pulp against the strainer. Using the blade of a knife, scrape the pulp from the strainer into the broth; discard the skins. Set the chile-infused broth aside for making the tamal dough.

4. *Finish the filling:* Adjust an oven rack so that it is about 3 inches from the heating element and heat the broiler. Line a rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and brush lightly with olive oil. Lob off the top and bottom ¼ inch of each poblano chile and slit down one side of each chile to open it. Working at a time, lay the chile skin side down on a cutting board and slide the blade of a sharp paring knife along the surface of the chile to remove the ribs, core, and seeds. Lay the chiles skin side up on the prepared baking sheet and flatten them with the palm of your hand. Broil until the skins are charred, about 3 minutes; the flesh should remain firm. Using tongs, transfer the chiles to a plastic bag to steam the skins loose; reserve the baking sheet and leave the broiler on. When cool, scrape off the blistered skins with a sharp paring knife and turn the flesh into a food processor. Cut the tomatillos in half at their equators and place them skin side up on the baking sheet used to broil the chiles. Broil the tomatillos until their skins begin to brown and blister, about 2 minutes. Turn them cut side up, toss the halved garlic cloves onto the baking sheet, and broil until the tomatillos begin to turn spotty brown, about 2 minutes more. Turn the tomatillos and garlic into the food processor with the poblanos and process until a thick, smooth sauce forms, about 30 seconds. In a large skillet, combine the poblano-tomatillo mixture, 1 pound of the chicken meat, and ½ cup of the reserved plain chicken broth. Warm the mixture over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until heated through and well combined. Stir in 1½ teaspoons of salt and taste for seasoning. Transfer to a bowl and set aside.

5. Fill a large stockpot or similar vessel with hot water and drop in the corn husks. Place a heavy plate or a lid from a slightly smaller pot on top to keep the husks submerged. Let soak for 1 hour; when ready, the husks will be pliant.

6. *Make and portion the tamal dough:* Warm a medium mixing bowl by filling it with boiling water. Transfer the hot rinsed hominy to a food processor and pulse about 5 times to chop it up. With the machine running, add the chile-infused broth, the lard, baking powder, and salt. Continue to process, stopping the machine at intervals to scrape up the more finely processed dough near the blade and to scrape down the coarser dough near the top of the bowl. When the dough begins to chase itself around the bowl, stop the machine and feel the dough; it should have the consistency of soft, sticky cookie dough. If it is too stiff, with the machine running, add 1 to 2 tablespoons additional lard and process until well blended. Empty the hot water from the mixing bowl and wipe the bowl dry. Scrape the tamal dough into the bowl. Working quickly with

damp fingers, weigh out 0.5-ounce pieces of dough and roll each piece into a little ball; you will have 45 to 50 balls. Line up the tamal balls in a large baking dish and cover with a damp kitchen towel.

7. Lift the corn husks out of the water and lay them in a footed colander to drain. Remove 5 large husks and pull them with the grain into 50 long strips about 1/8 inch wide. Arrange the chicken filling, the shredded cheese, the tamal dough, the corn husks and strips, and a large steamer insert near each other on the work surface.

8. *Make the tamales:* Lay a corn husk parallel with and near the counter's edge. Place a tamal ball in the center. Using a rubber spatula or plastic dough scraper and steady downward pressure, spread the dough in an uninterrupted band 2 inches wide and 3 to 3½ inches high along the lower edge of the husk. The dough should be of an even 1/8-inch thickness. Place a level tablespoon of chicken filling in the center and top with a pinch of cheese. Lift the lower edge of the husk up over the filling so the bottom edge of the dough meets the upper top edge of the dough. Pull back tautly against the dough and filling, and then roll forward. Roll the tamale seam side up. Fold in the wide end of the husk, and then the narrow end. Tie with a strip of husk and trim the ends of the strip if necessary. Repeat with the remaining filling, tamal dough, and husks. (It helps to have friends and family on hand to pitch in!) Stand the tamales on end and side by side in the steamer, with the wide end of the corn husk as the base.

9. Add water to the fill line in the bottom of your steamer pot (the water should not touch the bottom of the steamer insert when the steamer is set in the pot), cover the pot, and bring the water to a boil over high heat. Lower the steamer insert with the tamales into the pot and cover. Steam for 2 hours, adding additional water as needed. The tamales are ready when the dough is set or at least mostly set—the tamales will firm up a bit after they come off the heat—and bears the corduroy imprint of the husks on their surfaces. If you have stacked the tamales in a double layer, it will take longer for them to steam, but begin checking after 2 hours. Remove the steamer insert and allow the tamales to set for 5 minutes before cutting their ties and unwrapping them. Or pass them wrapped like little presents and invite your guests to eat them out of hand, using the husk as a plate. (Tamales are good the following day. We go after them cold, but they'd allow an oven warm-up.)

10. *While the tamales are steaming, make the dipping sauce:* Combine the tomatillos, serrano chile, onion, lime juice, cilantro, and 1 teaspoon of salt in a food processor and pulse until an appealingly coarse salsa results, about 10 quick pulses. Taste for seasoning. If your onion is not sweet enough, add a touch of honey and pulse briefly. Scrape the salsa from the processor into a small serving bowl. Pass the sauce with the hot tamales.