



GARDEN STATE ON YOUR PLATE

PEPPER

RECIPES



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EL SALVADOR

Pupusas with Bell Pepper Curtido

Here's an adaptation of a dish that Pomptonian serves in the school cafeterias in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. Pupusas are a traditional food with roots in the Pipil tribes of pre-Columbian El Salvador. "Pupusa" means "stuffed" in the Nahuatl language. Traditionally, they are made with corn masa and filled with beans, squash, and herbs. They are a staple in celebrations, family gatherings, and street food markets. Make the curtido three days in advance so flavors meld. The pupusa recipe is by Ham El-Waylly, <https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1024428-pupusas>. The curtido recipe is by Francis Lam, <https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1017184-curtido>.

12 servings

For the Curtido

1 pound cabbage, finely shredded (green or red or both)
2 cups chopped multi-color bell peppers
1 cup chopped carrots
1-2 chopped jalapenos, if desired
2½ cups water
¼ cup neutral vegetable oil (olive or canola)
½ of a medium onion, thinly sliced
½ cup white vinegar or apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons kosher salt
½ to 1 teaspoon dried oregano, crumbled
Black pepper, to taste

For the Filling

4 tablespoons neutral oil
3 jalapeño, seeded and diced
Kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal)
6 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped
1½ teaspoons ground cumin
3 (15-ounce) cans black beans, drained
6 ounces low-moisture mozzarella or Oaxaca cheese, shredded (1½ cups)
For the Dough
3 cups masa harina
1 tablespoon kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal)
Neutral oil, for frying

1. Make the curtido: Combine all ingredients in a large, clean bowl. Using clean tongs or hands, gently crush the vegetables in the brine. Place a clean plate on top of the vegetables, and weigh it down to fully submerge them under the brine. Let sit at room temperature for at least 3 days, or longer to your taste; the flavor will deepen and mellow over time. When it's to your liking, transfer to clean jars, making sure brine covers the vegetables, and store in the refrigerator. Can keep for weeks.
2. Make the filling: In a medium skillet over medium heat, add the oil, jalapeño and a pinch of salt. Cook until jalapeño has slightly softened, about 2 minutes. Add the garlic and cumin and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in the beans and a pinch of salt. Mash with a fork or potato masher until most of the beans are mashed but mixture is still chunky. Taste and season with salt, if necessary. Transfer mixture to a bowl and refrigerate until cool, 10 to 15 minutes. Once cool, remove from the fridge and stir in mozzarella until combined. Divide the mixture into 4 portions.
3. Make the dough: In a medium bowl, combine the masa harina, salt and 2¼ cups warm water. Mix with straight, stiff fingers to form a dough. Using both hands, roll into a ball and return to the bowl. The dough should not be overly sticky, but also shouldn't be so dry it crumbles. Cover and let rest for 10 minutes at room temperature. Divide the masa into 4 portions and roll into balls. While working with one ball, keep the others covered so they don't dry out. Using your thumb, create a divot in the middle of the ball. Continue pressing all around the divot to create a bowl shape large enough to hold 1 portion of the bean filling.
4. Form the stuffed patties: Add the bean filling to the masa and pinch around the edges until it's closed. Roll again to make a uniform ball and place it on a piece of parchment paper. Using the palm and fingers of one hand, press the ball into a ½-inch-thick cake that is about 4½ inches in diameter. (Masa is very malleable, so pinch to close any cracks. It's OK if some filling pokes through the surface of the corn cake.) Repeat with remaining portions of dough. If at any point the masa is cracking too much, moisten your hands with warm water and knead masa to reintroduce some moisture into the dough.
5. Cook the pupusas: In a large (12-inch) skillet over medium heat, add enough oil to coat the bottom of the pan. Once the oil is hot, gently add the pupusa by putting it on your fingertips and placing it in the pan away from you like you are waving away a fly. Add a second pupusa to the pan and fry both until the sides touching the pan are crispy with splotches of darker spots, 3 to 4 minutes. Flip the pupusas and cook until the second sides are also crispy, 3 to 4 minutes more. Transfer to a plate lined with paper towels and season with salt. If there is any residue in the pan, wipe it out with a paper towel and start with fresh oil to cook the remaining pupusas. Serve warm with curtido or salsa alongside, if desired.

MEXICO

Chicken Quesadilla with Peppers and Onions

Here's an adaptation of a dish that Pomptonian serves in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. Quesadillas originated in northern and central Mexico in the 16th Century, and historically were made with corn tortillas and filled with squash and pumpkin.

The quesadilla recipe is adapted from Food52.

<https://food52.com/recipes/3995-chicken-and-roasted-red-pepper-quesadillas>

The salsa recipe is from Cathy Trochelman, of Lemon Tree Dwelling

<https://www.lemontreedwelling.com/bell-pepper-salsa/>

6 servings

For the Bell Pepper Salsa

1 green pepper diced

1 red pepper diced

1 yellow pepper diced

1/2 large red onion

3 jalapeños minced (remove seeds for less spice)

1/2 c. cilantro minced

1/4 c. lime juice

1 tsp. kosher salt

Fresh-ground black pepper to taste

Sour cream or plain yogurt, if desired

For the Quesadillas

6 8-inch tortillas, corn or flour

2 cups monterrey jack cheese, shredded

1/2 cup cotija cheese, grated

1 large chicken breast, roasted, cooled, and shredded

2 red bell peppers

1. Make salsa: Combine all ingredients in a small bowl. Season to taste.
2. Roast peppers : Turn exhaust fan to high. Set oven broiler to high and place red pepper on closest rack to broiler without touching the heating element). Char the peppers on all sides, turning every minute or so. Remove promptly; place in bowl and cover to let the peppers steam and allow for easier peeling of the charred skin. When cool, peel peppers and evenly dice into small 1/2 inch pieces.
3. Assemble and cook: Heat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease large cookie sheet, or line with parchment paper. Lay half the tortillas out separately. Add to each a small amount of cheese, equal amounts of chicken, red pepper, more cheeses, and salsa. Bake for 12-15 minutes, or until golden and cheese has melted. Serve with more fresh salsa and plain yogurt, if desired.

ITALY

Panini with Red Bell Peppers

Here's an adaptation of a dish that Pomptonian serves in celebration of peppers for Garden State on Your Plate.

Panini, or singular, panino, originated in Lombardy, Italy, as a lunchtime meal for workers. As early as the 16th century, panini were mentioned in Italian cooking.

4-6 Servings

For the Vegetable Filling

1 onion, chopped

2 red bell peppers, chopped

2 zucchini, sliced

2 eggplant

2 cups fresh spinach

Dried oregano

Kosher salt

Fresh ground black pepper

Shredded mozzarella, Gruyere, or fontina

For the Vinaigrette

Juice of two lemons, about 6 tablespoons

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 clove garlic, pressed

1/2 teaspoon mustard

Kosher salt

Fresh-ground black pepper

Focaccia, ciabatta, baguette, or hearty loaf bread

1 clove garlic, peeled and halved

1. Saute and roast vegetables: Heat oven to 425. Slice eggplant lengthwise and lay on cookie sheet, greased or lined with parchment paper. Season with salt, pepper, and oregano. Roast until edges are browning and eggplant is tender. Meanwhile, in large, heavy-bottomed skillet, saute the onion, peppers and zucchini, seasoning with salt, pepper and oregano. Add spinach and allow to wilt. Remove from heat; season to taste.
2. Assemble: Cut bread in half horizontally; rub cut sides with garlic clove. Place roasted eggplant on bottom of bread. Top with mixed vegetables. Add a layer of shredded mozzarella, and then drizzle with vinaigrette. Close sandwich; place on panini press and heat for 5-7 minutes, or over medium heat on the stove, compressed between two iron skillets.

SPAIN

Romesco Sauce

Serious Eats: "Romesco sauce comes from Tarragona, a Catalan city just south of Barcelona on Spain's north-eastern coast. Its base ingredients usually include nuts—often almonds and/or hazelnuts—tomatoes, dried peppers, garlic, bread, olive oil, and vinegar, all mashed or processed into a paste....It goes with just about anything—meats, poultry, fish, vegetables, on sandwiches, dolloped into bowls of soups, or spread on toasted bread. Stir into stews and braising liquids; put it on pasta, toss it with rice, thin it with oil and vinegar and use it as a dressing for bitter greens." Use jarred red peppers and canned fire-roasted tomatoes as timesavers.

Makes 2 cups

2 or 3 medium tomatoes (5 1/5 ounces or 150 g each), cored (see note)

1 medium head garlic, unpeeled, split in half

1 ounce (30 g) dried ñora peppers (about 4 peppers) or ancho chile peppers (about 3 peppers); (see note)

1 slice toasted or stale bread (1 1/2 ounces; 40 g), any thick and heavy crusts removed, bread broken into small pieces

1 tablespoon (15 ml) red wine or sherry vinegar, plus more if desired

1/2 cup skinned and toasted almonds and/or hazelnuts (2 3/4 ounces; 80 g); (see note)

2 tablespoons (30 ml) extra-virgin olive oil, plus more if desired

Kosher salt

1. Roast vegetables; rehydrate peppers.

- Heat oven to 350°F (180°C). Line a rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and place tomatoes and half of garlic head on it. Roast in oven until tomatoes are wrinkled and lightly charred in spots and garlic is soft, about 1 hour. Let cool. Meanwhile, place dried peppers in a medium heatproof bowl and cover with boiling water. Place a weight or wet paper towel on top to help submerge peppers. Let stand until peppers are fully softened, 30 minutes to 1 hour. If peppers are very stubborn (as thick-skinned ñoras can be), you may need to tear a small hole in them to let water penetrate inside. Drain peppers and discard stems and seeds. Using a paring knife, carefully scrape the flesh from the skins. Discard skins. Peel skins from tomatoes and roasted garlic.

2. Pound or process sauce:

- To Make Sauce Using a Mortar and Pestle: Add 3 cloves roasted garlic and 1 or 2 cloves peeled raw garlic to mortar. (Feel free to make this recipe more or less garlicky, according to your own tastes, by adding or subtracting roasted or raw garlic.) Smash garlic to a paste with pestle.
- Add bread and moisten with vinegar. Smash to a paste. Add nuts and smash as finely as you can. The mixture should have the consistency of a rough paste when you're done.
- Smash in scraped pepper flesh, followed by peeled roasted tomatoes. Mix in olive oil until thoroughly combined. Season with salt. Add more oil, 1 tablespoon (15ml) at a time, if a thinner, richer sauce is desired. Add more vinegar to taste as well.
- To Make Sauce Using a Countertop Blender or Immersion Blender: Add 3 cloves roasted garlic and 2 cloves peeled raw garlic to jar of blender, or blending container if using an immersion blender. (You can use more or less roasted and raw garlic, as desired, according to your own tastes.) Add nuts. Blend until finely processed, scraping down sides as necessary.
- Blend in peeled roasted tomatoes and scraped pepper flesh. Add bread, olive oil, and vinegar, and blend until smooth. (How smooth to make it is up to you; some texture is okay.) Season with salt and add more oil and vinegar to taste, if desired.
- To Make Sauce Using a Food Processor: In the bowl of a food processor, combine 3 cloves roasted garlic and 2 cloves peeled raw garlic (use more or less roasted and raw garlic, as desired, according to your own tastes), along with bread and nuts. Process, scraping down sides as necessary, until finely chopped.
- Add peeled roasted tomatoes and scraped pepper flesh and process until a thick, rough paste forms. Process in olive oil and vinegar, then season with salt. Add more vinegar and olive oil, as desired, to adjust taste and texture.

Notes

Using three tomatoes instead of two will make a thinner, milder sauce.

Ñora peppers, with their earthy bitterness and molasses-like depth, are more traditional in this sauce. If you can't find them, ancho chile peppers are a good substitute.

Different nuts will give the sauce different flavors. Almonds and hazelnuts are most traditional, but you can also try adding pine nuts or walnuts.

NIGERIA

Obe Ata (Red Pepper Sauce)

Serious Eats: "Main ingredients are red bell peppers along with hot fresh chile peppers like habaneros (or Scotch bonnets), tomato, onion, and garlic. Use more or less red palm oil [or substitute available oil]; add flavorings like Nigerian curry powder, fresh ginger, and ground Cameroon chiles, which are both spicy and smoky; you can even choose whether to make it smooth or leave it chunkier.... Try briefly simmering cooked chicken in it; hardboiled eggs can be shelled and gently simmered in the sauce as well. Lots of vegetables, like sweet potatoes and greens, can be cooked in the sauce for a vegetarian option. As a dip, it's great with plantain chips."

<https://www.serious-eats.com/obe-ata-nigerian-red-pepper-sauce>

Makes about 1 quart

4 red bell peppers (about 2¼ pounds; 1 kg), stemmed, cored, and cut into roughly 1/2-inch dice
5 tablespoons (67 ml) red palm oil, divided (or a neutral oil)
Kosher salt
6 medium cloves garlic, roughly chopped
3 large plum tomatoes (a scant 1 pound; 400 g), cored and quartered
4 Fresno chile peppers (about 1 ounce; 26 g), stemmed, seeded, and cut into roughly 1/2-inch dice (or mild red chili peppers)
2 habanero or Scotch bonnet peppers (about 1/2 ounce; 15 g), stemmed, seeded, and cut into roughly 1/2-inch dice (optional)

1 large red onion (about 1 pounds; 400 g), peeled and cut into roughly 1/2-inch dice
One 2-inch segment peeled fresh ginger (about 3/4 ounce; 20 g), roughly chopped
1 quart (1 L) chicken stock, vegetable stock, or water
5 tablespoons (67 ml) canola or other neutral oil
¼ teaspoon Nigerian curry powder, such as Lion's Brand, or more to taste (optional)
Ground Cameroon pepper, to taste (sub another hot and smoky pepper powder if desired)

1. Roast vegetables

- Heat oven to 400°F (200°C) and set oven racks in the top- and bottom-third positions. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper.
- In a large bowl, toss red bell peppers with 2 tablespoons (30ml) preferred oil (palm or vegetable). Season with salt. Transfer in an even layer to one of the rimmed baking sheets. In the same large bowl, toss garlic, tomato, Fresno chile, habanero, onion, and ginger with 2 tablespoons (60ml) oil. Season with salt. Transfer in an even layer to the other rimmed baking sheet.
- Roast the vegetables, stirring and rotating baking sheets once or twice during cooking, until all are tender, some of their juices have cooked off, and they are charred in spots, about 45 minutes for the red bell peppers and 30 minutes for the tomatoes, chiles, and onions.

2. Blend and cook

- Scrape all of the roasted vegetables into a blender jar and blend until either a chunky or smooth purée forms (a smoother sauce works for when it is used for stews and a chunkier one when it is used as a dip or condiment).
- Transfer vegetable purée to a Dutch oven. Stir in stock or water, remaining oil, curry powder, and Cameroon pepper. Bring to a simmer. Season lightly with salt, then simmer until sauce is reduced to a good stew-like thickness, about 1 hour. If desired, season with additional curry powder and/or Cameroon pepper to meet your desired flavor and spice level.