



Culinary Craftwork Newsletter: May 2010

Some Like It Hot!

Exploring Chili Peppers

Introduction

This issue of the newsletter focuses on the warm and wonderful world of chili peppers with four of my own recipes: **Malaysian Chicken or Pork Satay with Spicy Peanut Sauce (Page 6)**; **Jamaican Jerk Chicken Wings and/or Thighs (Page 8)**; **Pork in Green Chili with Posole (Page 11)**; and **Chiles Rellenos Stuffed with Turkey Picadillo & Pepper Jack Cheese (Page 13)**.

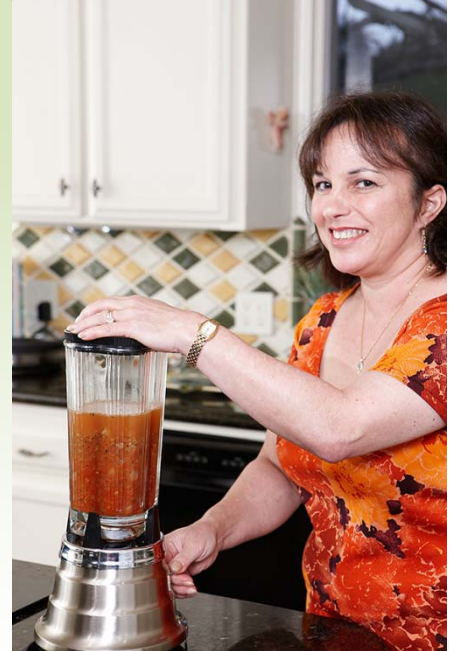
Culinary Craftwork is my business, which specializes in offering private, semi-private, and group cooking classes. Some of you may remember me from when I taught cooking classes at Williams-Sonoma in Los Gatos. I am grateful to all of you who encouraged me to branch out on my own!

The Culinary Craftwork experience is different in that the classes I offer are fully customizable to what you want. I teach the classes in your own home at a time that is convenient for you. And I do all the shopping.

It is my mission to give you the tools you need to prepare meals that will seduce you with savor and wow your guests.

My website contains many sample menus that focus on building different skills, but I am happy to partner with you and come up with something new. The classes are fun, informal, and informative — and you get to eat!

The Culinary Craftwork newsletter is a monthly publication that focuses on seasonal fare with recipes and pictures. My newsletter also includes a section called "Ask the Chef", so please don't be shy—email me with your questions.



Professional In-home Cooking Classes

Culinary Craftwork offers professionally taught in-home cooking classes by a chef with over 20 years' experience in restaurants and catering.

The classes are designed to build basic skills and boost confidence in the kitchen. I teach the classes in your own home, offer themed menus, cooking class parties and catered dinner parties.

Full class descriptions and prices are available on my website.

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Common Fresh Chiles



The Jalapeno Chile is hot.
[Ja #20: 2,500 to 8,000 SU]



The Serrano Chile is hotter.
[Se #25: 8,000 to 22,000 SU]

[See Periodic Table of Scoville Units on page 3 for details.]



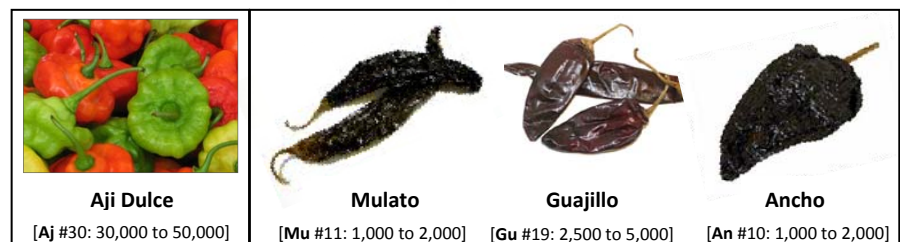
Some Like It Hot!

For some people, hot and spicy foods are an acquired taste, while others go crazy for hot peppers and engage in all sorts of chile-related activities, festivals, and research. As for me, I've loved their zing and sting since early childhood, but I don't consider my enthusiasm to be over the top. That hot, peppery zing comes from capsaicin, a chemical compound that is found in the chile's membranes and placenta.

Not all peppers are hot, however; in fact, some are quite sweet, and some are piquant combination of spicy, sweet and savory, such as the aji dulce peppers used abundantly in Latin American cooking. I spent three years working as a chef on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico and learned first-hand how important aji dulce peppers in combination with recao (also known as culantro, a relative of cilantro) are to the local cuisine. Their flavor is similar to that of the habanero or scotch bonnet but with only the tiniest bit of heat.

If you've ever had Puerto Rican chicken and rice (arroz con pollo), then you've probably tasted the flavor of aji chiles. These adorable little peppers come in a variety of colors and look like miniature lanterns; they can be found, seasonally, in Latin American and Asian markets.

The most commonly used chili peppers in our area are the jalapeno and the serrano, which while similar in flavor vary in heat. Typically, serrano chiles are hotter than jalapenos, but both are used extensively in Mexican cooking, as are the ancho chile, guajillo and mulato. Commercially produced "chili powder" is typically a blend of ancho chiles, cumin and oregano. When making a "chili" from scratch, I definitely recommend seeking out pure ancho chile powder and adding your own spices rather than using the commercial "chili powder."



[See Periodic Table of Scoville Units on page 3 for details]

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Chile names and how they are spelled can be confusing; some chiles are known by one name when fresh and another when dried. For example, fresh poblano chiles are known as both chile ancho and chile mulato when dried; however, ancho and mulato chiles differ slightly from one another. Another example is the fresh mirasol chile, which is known as chile guajillo when dried. The differences can be credited to how the chiles are ripened and dried. Fresh poblano and pasilla chiles are also very similar to one another and suitable for stuffing, as in chiles rellenos.

Then there is the issue of spelling. Chiles can be spelled in several different ways, for example: chiles, chillies, chillies—all of which are correct, but the spelling “chiles” is preferred. One chile, two chiles. The exception is “chili peppers.”

One of life's little questions: Why are peppers hot?

It's a classic case of Darwinism—but with a twist.

An amusing fact that I uncovered in my research on chili peppers involves their unique strategy for perpetuating their species. Once upon a time, long, long, *long* ago, pepper plants were confronted with the problem of being eaten by various mammals. To discourage these animals, pepper plants evolved the ability to produce capsaicin, which caused a burning sensation potent enough to deter most animals—that is until man came along.

Prior to the agricultural revolution we were just another predator; however, along the way we acquired a taste for the fiery little fruits and began to cultivate them, thus ensuring their survival. Now cultivated peppers can be found just about everywhere on Earth.

A little pepper history

Peppers are indigenous to the Americas and were first cultivated near present-day Peru and Mexico around 7,500 B.C. According to Wikipedia and other on-line sources, it was Diego Alvarez Chanca, a physician traveling with Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the West Indies, who first brought chili peppers to Europe in 1493, and it was not long before they made their way to Asia.

Chanca started documenting the medical benefits of chillies in 1494, and while medical research is still ongoing, capsaicin is presently in use in topical creams for the treatment of arthritis as well as in herbal remedies. On a personal note, I have found capsaicin cream to be helpful for sore joints.

When it comes to peppers, how hot is hot?

In 1912 a chemist named Wilbur Scoville, working for Parke-Davis, developed a method to measure the heat level of chili peppers: the “Scoville Organoleptic Test” was a subjective dilution-taste procedure. In the original test, Scoville blended pure ground chillies with sugar-water and a panel of “testers” then sipped the solution (in increasingly diluted concentrations) until they reached the point that the liquid no longer burned their mouths. A number was then assigned to each chili pepper based on how much it needed to be diluted before they could no longer taste (feel) the heat.

Nowadays a more scientific and accurate method, liquid chromatography, is used to determine capsaicin levels. The heat factor of chili peppers is measured in multiples of 100 Scoville units, or SU. For starters, sweet bell peppers rate zero SU compared to the world’s hottest pepper on record, which rates a staggering 1,000,000 units.

Where's the heat?



Contrary to what most people believe, the seeds of the pepper are not actually hot, but they can pick up heat by their proximity to the membranes and placenta—particularly in tiny, seed packed chillies, such as the Thai chili pepper. (Technically speaking, all peppers are seed filled fruits.)

Raging hot chiles



The Habanero Chile is blisteringly hot.
[Oh #49: 150,000 to 325,000 SU]



The Naga Jolokia, or Bhut Jolokia (also known as the ghost chile), is the world's hottest chile on record.
[Bj #53: 1,041,427 SU]

[See Periodic Table of Scoville Units]

The ever-so-popular scotch bonnet and habanero chiles, long thought to be the world's hottest, weigh in with a range of 150,000–325,000 Scoville units; today, the hottest chile on record is the naga jolokia (ghost pepper) or bhut jolokia, at over 1,000,000 SU.

Pure capsaicin ranges between 15,000,000 and 16,000,000 SU. Capsaicin has even become “weaponized.” Police grade pepper spray is rated at 5,300,000 SU. That’s enough to stop most people dead in their tracks.

Unlike the periodic table of elements, the chart from the Scoville Food Institute, ranks chili peppers by Scoville Units rather than atomic number. Interestingly, the jalapeno only ranked 20th out of 53 in terms of heat.

Periodic Table of Scoville Units™

1											2						
Bp Sweet Bell 0											Pi Pimento 0						
3	4											10					
Cy Cherry 0 - 500	Pe Pepperoncini 100 - 500											An Ancho 1,000 - 2,000					
11	12											18					
Mu Mulato 1,000 - 2,000	Pa Pasilla 1,000 - 2,000											Mi Mirasol 2,500 - 5,000					
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
Gu Guajillo 2,500 - 5,000	Ja Jalapeno 2,500 - 8,000	Cp Chipotle 5,000 - 8,000	Hw Hot Wax 8,000 - 15,000	Py Puya 8,000 - 15,000	Hi Himalayo 8,000 - 17,000	Se Serrano 8,000 - 25,000	Ma Manzano 12,000 - 30,000	Sh Shipkas 12,000 - 30,000	Da De Arbol 15,000 - 30,000	Jo Jalisco 30,000 - 50,000	Aj Aji 30,000 - 50,000	Ta Tabasco 30,000 - 50,000	Ca Cayenne 30,000 - 50,000	Sk Santitas 40,000 - 50,000	Sc Super Chile 40,000 - 50,000	Pq Piquin 40,000 - 50,000	Ya Yatsushira 50,000 - 75,000
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	
Hm Hainem 70,000 - 80,000	Ci Chiltepin 80,000 - 85,000	Th Thai 85,000 - 100,000	Tb Tabasco 85,000 - 115,000	Ba Bahamian 85,000 - 115,000	Cc Carolina Cayenne 100,000 - 125,000	Ku Kumataku 125,000 - 150,000	Jh Jamaican Hot 150,000 - 200,000	Be Bird's Eye 150,000 - 225,000	Te Tejin (Wild) 80,000 - 240,000	Dt Devil Young 125,000 - 325,000	Fa Fatali 125,000 - 325,000	Oh Orange Habanero 150,000 - 325,000	Sb Scotch Bonnet 150,000 - 325,000	Ch Chile Habanero 200,000 - 385,000	Rs Red Savina Habanero 300,000 - 577,000	Bj Bhut Jolokia 1,041,427	

1 — Pepper Rank
Bp — Symbol
Pepper Name
0 — Scoville Units

To download a full page printer-friendly copy of the Periodic Table of Scoville Units [click here](#).

[Click here](#) to see Uncle Steve's Hot Stuff webpage. It's an interesting website with lots of good information.

How to alleviate the heat?

Many of us have had the unfortunate experience of tasting something that is too hot for us to handle. The best way to ease the burning sensation is to consume dairy products such as milk, yogurt or cottage cheese.

Casein, a substance found in dairy products helps to dilute the burning sensation. Eating rice can also be helpful, but I prefer ice cream. Drinking water is not recommended, it will spread the heat around without absorbing it.

If you get chile oil on your hands, beware of touching your face! You may want to cleanse your hands with rubbing alcohol then soak them in milk; this seems to neutralize the burning.

Unfortunately, if you touch your eyes the only thing you can do is rinse repeatedly with water. I once got squirted in the eye by a habanero, so I understand the pain.

The Hellfire Challenge

Thanks to our cultural diversity in the South Bay, there's absolutely no shortage of hot food here. Generally speaking I think many of us prefer dishes with a certain degree of heat. But there are those among us (usually college-aged men) that want to test their mettle by taking things to the extreme. Smoke Eaters restaurants provide those people with that opportunity: it's called The Hellfire Challenge. This contest is definitely not for everyone, especially those with a weak stomach.

We've eaten at the restaurant in Santa Clara but have never seen anyone undertake the challenge—that is, until we saw an episode of *Man vs. Food* on the Travel Channel. This competition requires the challenger to eat what the restaurant describes as 12 of the hottest chicken wings on the planet in 10 minutes. The challenger is not allowed to drink anything or use napkins.

Once all the wings have been eaten, the challenger must wait an additional five minutes to endure the *afterburn*. The victorious diners (and there are only a few) will receive a free T-shirt and their picture proudly displayed on the restaurant wall and possibly posted on the internet.

Smoke Eaters has 7 standard sauces ranging from Mild to Inferno. Just one caution—the hot sauces can pack some serious heat. Traditional Death, the 5th hottest sauce, is as hot as my husband and I will go, and we're not wimps. I can only imagine what Inferno must be like. I can tell you first hand, the afterburn is not a joke.



[Click here](#) for the details concerning the Hellfire Challenge

[Click here](#) to see what others have to say about Smoke Eaters.

Smoke Eaters Restaurant Review



The restaurant is located in a strip mall near Santa Clara University at 2565 The Alameda in Santa Clara.

If you're looking for really hot & spicy buffalo chicken wings you found the place. The restaurant offers 7 standard hot sauces ranging from mild to extremely hot.

I like the fifth hottest sauce, Traditional Death. It tastes like assorted hot chilies in a tomatoey, vinegary sauce base. It's very hot and not for everyone. Also, beware of the afterburn. I don't intend to try the two hotter sauces, Four Alarm and Inferno.

The menu offers a relativity wide range of items including burgers, sandwiches and even a few Mexican offerings. These dishes may taste good but don't seem special. In my opinion, they are not a good value.

If you enjoy really hot wings, give Smoke Eaters a try.



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The secret ingredient



Ketjap Manis

Also spelled Kecap Manis, ketjap manis is a sweet Indonesian soy sauce for which there is no real substitute.

Malaysian Chicken or Pork Satay with Spicy Peanut Sauce



The following recipe is one of my favorites—it is sweet and savory at once—and utterly yummy! It is also a great do-ahead dish for parties; in fact, the meats can be marinated ahead, grilled to perfection, and served at room temperature with the warm, spicy peanut sauce.

When I cook at home, I tend to season the sauce to my personal taste rather than measure out the ingredients exactly, and I recommend that you do the same, as personal tastes vary quite a bit. The Asian fish sauce lends a salty complexity to the peanut sauce, and you can balance the salty/sweet flavors to your own taste by adjusting the amount of fish sauce and sugar.

Malaysian Chicken or Pork Satay with Spicy Peanut Sauce

Makes approximately 8 skewers. If you don't own a grill, you can make this recipe using a broiler.

Ingredients

- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs -Or- 1 lb. boneless pork tenderloin or pork butt
- Bamboo skewers

Marinade for satay

Makes approximately 1½ cups

- 6 Tbs. ketjap manis (sweet Indonesian soy sauce)
- 4 garlic cloves
- ¼ cup light brown sugar or palm sugar
- ½ tsp. salt (optional)
- 2 tsp. ground coriander seed
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 cup coconut milk

(Continued on page 7)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Malaysian Chicken or Pork Satay with Spicy Peanut Sauce (Cont.)

Spicy peanut sauce

Makes approximately 2 cups

- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil
- 1 medium-size onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 or more fresh Thai chiles, minced -Or-*1 tsp. red chili flakes
- 1 Tbs. fresh lemongrass, minced
- ¼ cup ketjap manis
- 2 Tbs. Asian fish sauce
- 2 Tbs. fresh lime juice
- 1 tsp. ground coriander
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 cup chunky peanut butter
- 1 ½ cups unsweetened coconut milk
- 2-3 Tbs. chopped cilantro

Directions

Prepare the satay skewers

Combine the ingredients for the marinade in a blender and puree until smooth. Clean the chicken thighs of excess fat and slice through the center, lengthwise. If using pork, slice the meat into strips that will skewer easily. Place the meat in a Ziploc bag and add enough marinade to coat well. Marinate, refrigerated, for at least 4 hours before skewering and grilling.

Soak the bamboo skewers in cold water for about an hour before skewering and grilling. Soaking the skewers helps keep them from burning on the grill. Remove the meats from the marinade and skewer.

Preheat the grill to medium-high, and oil the grill grates well. Grill the skewers, covered, until half cooked. Turn them over and cook on the other side till done with nice brown grill marks. Serve with spicy peanut sauce for dipping.

Make the peanut sauce

In a skillet, heat the vegetable oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion, garlic, chiles and lemongrass. Cook for several minutes until the onion is lightly browned and fragrant.

Stir in the spices, ketjap manis, brown sugar, lime juice and peanut butter. Cook for a minute or so, until the peanut butter is thoroughly absorbed into the paste.

Add the coconut milk and simmer over low heat, stirring frequently, for about 5 minutes. Add the chopped cilantro and remove the sauce from the heat.

This sauce can be served as is, or pureed in a blender or food processor for a creamier consistency. The sauce can be made ahead and re-warmed gently just before serving.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Lemongrass



Lemongrass adds a citrusy flavor to recipes and helps give the spicy peanut sauce an added dimension of authenticity.

Use the back of a knife to beat the stalk and release its perfumed juices. Then you can slice it and chop it more easily as well.

Use a re-sealable bag to marinate the chicken



Re-sealable bags make marinating meats a snap. Be sure to mush the chicken around in the bag so that the marinade penetrates evenly. Place the bag in a container to prevent possible leaks or spillage.

Piercing the chicken through the skin with a sharp paring knife aids in penetration of the marinade. This process of piercing is known as "jerk."

Jamaican Jerk Chicken Wings and/or Thighs



I first tasted jerk cooking in New York City at the Island Spice restaurant in Midtown Manhattan and fell in love with the peppery, hot, tangy and slightly sweet flavors. I've been searching for a recipe ever since that would closely replicate that experience. The recipe below is my own creation after testing and tasting eight recipes.

Through trial and error, I've uncovered some techniques that assist in the success of this dish, so please read my directions carefully.

Note: I found that using pre-ground allspice and black pepper did not deliver enough punch, so I ground the whole spices in a coffee grinder, which worked out very well; the flavor of the chicken was much improved. The success of the dish is dependent on the spicing and the different levels of heat from the chiles, black peppercorns, and allspice.

The smell of the marinade reducing on the stove and the chicken on the grill will make your mouth water! Chicken wings can be a messy dish to eat, so have plenty of paper towels or napkins on hand.

What is Jerk Cooking?

This method of cooking pork and chicken dates back to the Carib-Arawak Indians who inhabited Jamaica. After capturing an animal and thoroughly cleaning and gutting it, the Indians placed it in a deep pit lined with stones and covered with green wood, which, when burned, would smoke heavily and add to the flavor. But first, the meat was "jerked" (punctured) with a sharp object to make holes, which were stuffed with a variety of spices.

Nowadays, jerk cooking is typically done on an outdoor grill over low heat. The jerk marinated meats are cooked slowly and basted with sauce to keep them from drying out. Some people recommend using an oven to cook the meat, but while the result may be tasty, it will also be lacking in dimension without the smokiness of grill cooking. It is, however, possible to improvise a smoky flavor by using wood chips, as noted chef, Tyler Florence does. [Click here](#) to view Tyler Florence's recipe for jerk chicken.

Jamaican Jerk Chicken Wings and/or Thighs

Makes approximately 3 cups marinade; wings serve 4 as an appetizer.

Ingredients

- 3 Scallions, finely chopped
 - 2/3 cup finely chopped Onion
 - 2-3 Scotch bonnet peppers (or habaneros) or use 2-3 Tbs. habanero chile sauce
 - 1 Tbs. freshly ground allspice (see note)
 - 1 Tbs. fresh thyme, chopped
 - 1 Tbs. coarsely ground black peppercorns (see note)
 - 1 Tbs. Kosher salt
 - 3/4 tsp. Ground nutmeg
 - 3/4 tsp. Ground cinnamon
 - 2 heaping Tbs. chopped garlic
 - 3 Tbs. (packed) Brown sugar
 - 1/2 cup Olive oil
 - 1/4 cup Soy sauce
 - 2/3 cup Wine vinegar
 - 1/2 cup Orange juice
 - 1 Lime, juiced
- 12 chicken wings, wing tips removed, and joints separated to form drumettes -Or- 8 chicken thighs with skin and bones, or 8 boneless skinless thigh meat.

Directions

Using a spice grinder or a coffee grinder, grind the peppercorns coarsely and grind the allspice berries finely. Measure the amounts needed for this recipe and store the remainder in jars.

In a blender, combine the onion, scallions, Scotch bonnets (or habanero sauce) allspice, thyme, black pepper, salt, nutmeg, cinnamon, garlic and brown sugar. Add the olive oil, soy sauce, vinegar, orange juice, and lime juice. Blend well.

Pierce the chicken through the skin with a small, sharp paring knife. Place the chicken in a Ziploc bag along with enough marinade to coat well. Marinate the chicken, ***refrigerated, overnight.**

Preheat an outdoor grill to high; scrape and oil the grill grates well.

In a small pot, bring the leftover marinade to a simmer for about 10-15 minutes; reduce slightly to the consistency of a barbecue sauce (the sauce should be a fairly dark brown color.) If the sauce turns thick too quickly, add a bit of water. Use this sauce for basting the meat on the grill and reserve some on the side for dipping.

Remove the chicken from the marinade and carefully place on the grill, skin side down—the jerk marinade is not a substance you want splashing in your eye! If the grill flares up, move the chicken to a cooler area. Do not let the skin char, so turn the heat down to low.

(Continued on page 10)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Habanero Sauce



Scotch bonnet chiles and habaneros can be difficult to find fresh. You can substitute a quality habanero sauce, such as one of those above.

Using the habanero sauce allows you to capture the right flavor and control the heat more consistently than you would be able to do with fresh chiles, which tend to vary in hotness.

Make party skewers



For entertaining, use boneless, skinless chicken thigh meat, and skewer. The skewers are less messy to eat and look great on a platter.

Jamaican Jerk Chicken Wings and/or Thighs (Cont.)

Grill the chicken, covered, for 6 minutes or until grill marks appear on the skin; you can turn the chicken one-quarter to create cross-hatch marks if using chicken thighs.

Turn the chicken so that the skin side faces up. Continue to grill, covered, over low heat. Turn the chicken frequently to avoid charring while fully cooking till tender and the juices run clear. Baste on both sides with the reduced marinade while grilling.

Note: For entertaining, it may be more convenient to use boneless, skinless chicken thigh meat threaded on bamboo skewers. These will cook a lot faster and don't need to be marinated overnight—4-6 hours will do, but marinating them overnight is just fine.

I don't recommend using chicken breasts in any form, as they will turn out too tough and dry. Thighs have enough fat to keep them moist, so don't worry about trimming them too much; the fat will melt off on the grill.

Alternatively, for a more substantial meal than chicken wings, you can use chicken thighs on the bone, with or without skin. Grill them slowly, for about ½ hour, and baste them on both sides. Use the grilling directions above.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Pork in Green Chili with Posole



In honor of the upcoming Mexican holiday, Cinco de Mayo, I thought to include two Mexican recipes. Cinco de Mayo is not widely celebrated throughout Mexico. It is, however, observed regionally in Mexico and in U.S. cities with a significant Mexican population.

The holiday originally commemorated the Mexican army's decisive victory against overwhelming French forces at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862 but is now seen as a celebration of Mexican heritage and pride with its focus is on Mexican foods, music, beverages and customs. It is **not**, as many people think, Mexico's Independence Day, which is actually September 16th.

The following recipe is a stew that I love, and it is very easy to make, especially if you have a pressure cooker. The meat is first browned lightly, then removed. The onions and garlic are added to the pan, as directed below. Then the rest of the ingredients are combined, and the meat put back in. If using a pressure cooker, cook the stew on medium for about 20-25 minutes.

Pork in Green Chili with Posole

Makes approximately 6 to 8 servings.

Ingredients

- 3 Lbs. Boneless Pork Butt, cut into 1 1/2 – inch cubes
- 3 Tbs. Olive oil
- 3 Large onions, diced
- 4 jalapenos, chopped
- 2 Tbs. minced garlic
- 6-8 fresh poblano peppers, charred, peeled, seeded & diced (2 cups)
- 6-8 fresh tomatillos, husked, washed & cut up (2 cups)
- 2 tsp. oregano
- 2 tsp. ground cumin, toasted
- 1 Bay leaf
- 1 strip lemon zest
- 2 cups canned posole (hominy), drained and rinsed
- 2 cups all-natural chicken broth
- ½ cup chopped cilantro
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

(Continued on page 12)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Use a Pressure Cooker to reduce cooking time

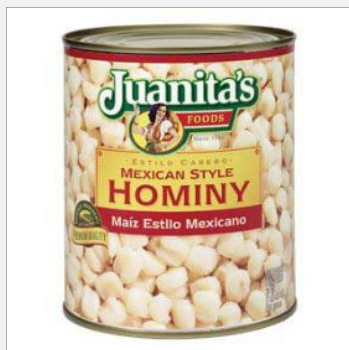


Using a pressure cooker yields a very tender and tasty stew in roughly half the time as a conventional dutch oven and preserves the nutrients in the vegetables.

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Posole = Hominy



Hominy, also known as posole is available in grocery stores (usually in the Hispanic foods aisle or in the canned vegetables aisle).

Hominy/posole is giant white corn that has been treated with lye and dried. If using dried posole, it needs to be soaked in cold water overnight before cooking. However, it is much easier to use the canned product, which is very good.

Hominy is starchy and chewy and holds up well in cooking. It is also used in manufacturing masa for tortillas and tamales.

“Posole” is also the name for many soups and stews containing hominy.

Pork in Green Chili with Posole (Cont.)

Directions

Place a Dutch oven over medium-high heat and add 3 Tbs. olive oil. When the oil begins to shimmer, add the pork in one layer without over-crowding (you may need to do this in two batches). Sauté the pork until lightly browned. Remove with a slotted spoon.

To the same pot, add the onions and garlic; cook till translucent, then add the herbs, diced peppers, jalapenos, tomatillos, hominy and chicken broth. Stir well and add salt & freshly ground pepper to taste.

Add the pork and any accumulated juices along with a strip of lemon zest. Bring to a boil, then turn down and simmer gently, covered, till the pork is tender (about 1 hour). Taste again for seasoning and add ½ cup chopped cilantro.

As with most stews, this Mexican dish will taste better after the flavors have had a chance to meld overnight in the refrigerator. You may need to add some chicken broth to it when reheating.

Serve with steamed corn tortillas and/or rice.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)



Making chiles rellenos is a fun project with a number of steps; get your family or friends to pitch in and make it a fiesta!

The following recipe requires battering and deep-frying the stuffed peppers. If you want to avoid the extra fat and calories, you can prepare the stuffed peppers and bake them in the oven. The stuffed peppers can be served as is, or with a simple tomato and red chile sauce.

Chiles Rellenos Stuffed with Turkey Picadillo & Pepper Jack Cheese

Makes 8 appetizers or 4 entrée servings

Ingredients

- 8 Poblano chiles, roasted and carefully peeled without tearing
- Vegetable oil for frying (canola or peanut oil)
- 8 slices of pepper jack cheese or cheddar cheese (cut into 1/8-inch thin rectangles that will fit neatly inside the peppers, or grate the cheese)
- Toothpicks for sealing the peppers

Ingredients for Turkey Picadillo

- 2–3 Tbs. olive oil
- 1 medium-small onion, finely diced
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. freshly ground pepper
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ lb. ground dark turkey meat
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ¼ tsp. ground cloves
- 1/8 tsp. ground cumin
- 4 canned plum tomatoes, drained and chopped
- ¼ cup golden raisins
- 1 ½ Tbs. cider vinegar or wine vinegar

(Continued on page 14)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Poblano Chile



The Poblano Chile is relatively mild and a good size for stuffing. [Po #9: 1,000 to 2,000 SU]

[See Periodic Table of Scoville Units on page 3 for details.]

Preparing the chiles rellenos for frying



Roasted poblanos (unpeeled)



Lightly dredge the stuffed peppers.



The batter should be light and fluffy.



Fry the battered chile relleno at 375-400 degrees.

Chiles Rellenos Stuffed with Turkey Picadillo & Pepper Jack Cheese (Cont.)

Ingredients for Batter

- 5 Eggs, separated
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 1 ½ Tbs. flour + additional flour for dredging the peppers

Directions

Roast the poblano peppers

Lightly oil the peppers and char them over a direct flame or heat a cast-iron griddle over medium-high heat until a drop of water sizzles on contact. Working with a few chiles at a time so as not to crowd the pan, place them on the hot griddle and cook, turning occasionally with tongs, until they are blackened all over. Don't roast the chiles under the broiler, as they will likely overcook and fall apart.

Place the chiles in a brown paper bag and let sit for a few minutes, but don't let them sit too long, or they will overcook and get soggy. You can also put them in a bowl and cover the bowl with plastic wrap.

Peel the chiles by gently scraping away the skin. Rinse them under cool running water if necessary. Make a small incision on the side and scrape out the seeds with your fingers, being careful not to tear the flesh. This is the opening through which you will be stuffing the chile. **This part of the recipe can be done ahead.**

Make the turkey picadillo

Heat the oil in a large skillet (preferably a non-stick pan) over medium heat. Sauté the onions with the salt and pepper for about 5 minutes until softened. Add the garlic and cook 2 minutes more.

Add the turkey, breaking it up with a wooden spoon and spreading it evenly in the pan. Stir frequently, separating any clumps until lightly browned.

Add the cinnamon, cloves, cumin, tomatoes, raisins and vinegar. Cook over low heat for about 10-15 minutes until the pan is nearly dry. Taste for seasoning. Let the mixture cool thoroughly before stuffing the peppers. **This part of the recipe can be made ahead and kept refrigerated.**

Stuff the poblano peppers

Loosely stuff the poblanos with the turkey picadillo and cheese. Seal the edges with several toothpicks. **The chiles rellenos can be made ahead up to this point and held in the refrigerator.**

Preheat the oven to 200°.

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Chiles Rellenos Stuffed with Turkey Picadillo & Pepper Jack Cheese (Cont.)

Make the batter

In a large bowl, beat the egg whites with the salt to soft peaks. Gently beat in the egg yolks, a little at a time, then beat in 1 ½ Tbs. of flour. Stop beating as soon as the flour disappears. The batter should be light and fluffy.

In a frying pan or wok, pour in the vegetable oil to about 1-inch depth. Heat the oil over medium heat until a thermometer registers 375 degrees. Adjust the temperature as needed to hold between 375-400 degrees.

Place about 1/3 cup of flour in a shallow bowl or plate for dredging the peppers. Roll the stuffed peppers one by one in the flour, gently patting off the excess. The flour binds to the egg batter and creates a softly, crispy crust, but too much flour will make it doughy.

Carefully pick up a poblano and dip it into the egg batter, shaking off excess. Gently place the pepper into the hot oil and repeat until the pan is full, but not crowded. Fry until the peppers are brown on one side and then gently turn to brown on the other side.

With a slotted spoon transfer the fried peppers to paper towels to drain. Keep warm on a baking sheet in the oven while you dip and fry the remaining peppers or serve immediately.

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The finished product



The chile relleno should be golden and crusty outside, and moist inside. See how the cheese oozes out with the ground turkey filling.

Ask the Chef



I love hearing from people who have read the newsletter or taken one of my classes. I enjoy the opportunity to answer your questions in this general forum, and I hope that my advice is helpful.

Please continue to send me your questions, comments and ideas. They really make my day.

Thank you!

Alyssa

Ask the Chef (Q&A)

Steaming Corn Tortillas

Teresa asks, "When I go to Mexican restaurants, the corn tortillas always come in a little plastic steamer. Do I need to use one to steam tortillas at home?"

Reply: It is not necessary to have a steamer in order to steam your tortillas. Wrap the tortillas in a clean, slightly damp, cotton dish towel and put them in the microwave for about a minute on high heat.

Peeling Garlic Cloves

Meg asks, "I use a lot of sliced garlic in my cooking. Do you know a quick way of peeling garlic cloves?"

Reply: There are a couple of things you can do. If you need to leave the garlic cloves intact for slicing or roasting, then you can break open the head of garlic and separate the individual cloves. Put them into warm water for a few minutes. The skins will soften, and you can use a paring knife to cut through the root end and remove them.. Alternatively, you can use a rubber garlic peeler (available in most kitchen supply shops, such as Domus or Williams-Sonoma); it's a simple little inexpensive gadget that works quite well.

Calibrating Instant-Read Thermometers

Dan asks, "How do I know if my instant-read thermometer is accurate?"

Place the thermometer into boiling water. It should read exactly 212 degrees. If it doesn't read 212, then it needs to be recalibrated. Unscrew the nut on the back of the thermometer, lift off the cover and manually adjust the display. If you're using an electronic instant-read thermometer, then you may need to change the battery.

Tying Meats with Twine

Sandra asks, "Do I really need to tie my roasts, and if so, does it matter what kind of string I use?"

Reply: Tying your roasts helps ensure that they will cook evenly. It's not essential, but I do recommend that you tie them. String and twine are not the same. You can get butchers' twine in the meat department of better groceries and kitchen stores. I have also used cotton twine from the hardware store.