

FISH

Continued from Page B1

Lopez calls Veracruz “the Italy of Mexico,” in part because of the region’s use of tomato in its cooking, and something that gives her pibil a twist. Instead of pairing vinegar with citrus for a multilayered acidity, she subs in tomato.

“I love the flavor that the char imparts and it gives the dish sweetness and fruitiness along with that acidity and helps with the texture of the sauce.”

Banana leaves offer more than their sensual properties — “an almost herbal, fruity scent,” says Lopez — but gentle insulation from the oven’s searing heat. You’ll find them fresh at many local Asian and Latin markets around the city, “but you can also buy them in the frozen section, too,” says Lopez, who has spied them at Publix on occasion.

“It’s just as good as fresh. You thaw it in the fridge, roll them out and you’re good to go. They’ll be a little wet, but that’s good because it will help steam it — plus it won’t catch on fire.”

Neither will your taste buds. Though puerco pibil and habaneros are best friends, Lopez’s lighter version doesn’t push the heat level.

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— Chef/Partner Wendy Lopez, Reyes Mezcaleria

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On the table, the dish is paired with simple accompaniments: pickled onions, cilantro and rice. Feel free to serve tortillas alongside, as well. There’s no such thing as double carbing in Mexico.

“A tortilla never feels like a carb. It’s a spoon,” jokes Lopez. “Tortillas are silverware!”

WHOLE FISH PIBIL

One whole 2-3-pound fish of your choice. Ask your fishmonger to scale and gut it. You may also use filets.

For sauce

- 2 Roma tomatoes, split
- 1/2 white onion
- 3 cloves garlic
- 10 dried guajillo chiles, destemmed and deseeded
- 2 ounces achiote paste
- 1 cup orange juice
- 1/2 cup fresh lime juice
- 1/2 cup fresh lemon juice
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 sprig oregano
- 1/4 cup honey
- Salt to taste

Directions for sauce

Place tomatoes and onion in cast-iron pan over medium-high heat for 3-6 minutes or until charred, adding garlic for last minute or two.

Remove from heat and all other ingredients except honey. Cook ingredients for 15-20 minutes until reduced by half.

Turn off heat and stir in honey. Allow to cool a little.

Place mixture in blender and blend until smooth. Allow to cool.

Season fish of choice with salt and pepper, both sides for filets or inside and out for whole fish. Score exterior (see photo).

Using some of sauce mixture as marinade, coat fish on both sides/inside and out.

Wrap fish in banana leaves and bake in 400-degree Fahrenheit oven for 15 minutes or until internal temperature reaches 135 degrees. With caution, unwrap leaves and add more of sauce mixture. Return fish to oven for 2-4 minutes to achieve a crust.

Serve with pickled onions and cilantro as a garnish, along with a side of your favorite rice and tortillas.

CHICKEN

Continued from Page B1

When you’re ready to cook, add the cornstarch to the bowl with chicken, a few tablespoons at a time. Stir to coat the chicken, until all the pieces are covered with cornstarch.

Place the chicken pieces into your air fryer basket (or tray), without overlapping. Spray oil onto the chicken until there’s no dry cornstarch on the surface.

Set air fryer to 350 degrees. Place chicken in air fryer for 10 minutes. (You may have to do this in batches depending on the size of your fryer.) Take out the chicken, flip and spray with oil again.

Raise the temperature to 400 degrees and cook until the chicken turns golden brown, 5 minutes or so. Transfer all the chicken pieces to a big bowl. Sprinkle about half of the spice mix over the chicken and gently toss it with a pair of tongs. Taste the chicken. Add more spice mix if needed.

Add the sliced basil to the chicken, garnish with chili pepper and serve with lemon wedges on the side, if using. Serve hot as an appetizer or over steamed rice as an entree.

Serves 4.

— Omnivorescookbook.com

NUTRITION

Serving: 1 serving



Gretchen McKay/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Air-fryer chicken cooks up crispy on the outside and tender on the inside.

Calories: 318 kcal, Carbohydrates: 17.4 g, Protein: 33.2 g, Fat: 11.9 g, Saturated Fat: 3 g, Cholesterol: 101 mg, Sodium: 682 mg, Potassium: 311 mg, Fiber: 0.6 g, Sugar: 0.8 g, Calcium: 28 mg, Iron: 2 mg



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CROSSWORD PUZZLER

ACROSS

- 1 Spiciness
- 5 Slangy courage
- 9 Lively dance
- 12 Cats do it
- 13 Calcutta nanny
- 14 Flightless bird
- 15 Beech or oak
- 16 Hindu princess
- 17 Cool cucumber
- 18 Like winter roads
- 20 Snake toxin
- 22 Masked swordsman
- 25 Wild guess
- 27 Fiesta cheer
- 28 PC alternatives
- 30 Chicago NBAer
- 34 Well-worn
- 35 Give a home to
- 37 Memo abbr.
- 38 Return encl.
- 40 Church alcove

DOWN

- 1 Head cover
- 2 Make a blunder
- 3 Excellent
- 41 Zoologists' mouths
- 42 Marbles or tag
- 44 Skinflint
- 46 Bridge tower
- 49 EMT's skill
- 50 Protective shelter
- 51 Rapper
- 54 Moe Dee
- 54 Ocean predator
- 58 moment's notice
- 59 Polynesian cookout
- 60 Muchacho
- 61 Kennel sound
- 62 Colleen's home
- 63 Plummeted

Answer to Previous Puzzle

O	N	U	S	U	C	L	A	B	R	A		
L	A	N	E	N	E	A	T	I	N	C		
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