

An Unusual Culinary Column: Mexican Recipes

By Karen Kain

It all started back in 1976, when I met my lifelong best friend Barbara Ortiz. Her mother, Ofelia, and father, Rudy, were born in Mexico. They married and moved to the U.S. where they raised their children. Every time I visited Barb's home, which was often, her mother served me homemade tortillas with homemade beans and salsa. It wasn't until two years ago at her father's funeral that I truly understood what an amazing family they were. During his lifetime Rudy never made over \$25,000 a year. Ofelia never worked. Together they raised six kids and helped raise five other family members who were in need. There was never a time I felt a bit of lack or unhappiness at the Ortiz household. If the family was ever struggling I never saw it.

Most of my memories growing up include some kind of crazy time that I shared with Barb. Her mother was always praying for us. I believe that is how I have made it this far. It is the Ortiz family who is responsible for me wanting to be of Mexican decent. I know that in my heart I am, and always will be, Mexican.

I have recently been in California, helping Barb care for her mother in the end stages of life. Over the past few weeks we have cried, cleaned obsessively, and cooked up some wonderful Mexican dishes. The entire time we were cooking my computer was out and I documented every move Barb made. She works fast, and I have always believed that she has been holding back on a few of the ingredients from her family recipes when sharing them with me. I think I have solved a few mysteries and come up with some wonderful dishes to share with you.

My very favorite salsa recipe is this Salsa Quemada. It takes some effort to make, so Barb roasts extra peppers and onions, then freezes them in a zip-lock baggy for the next batch of salsa. You can always find a batch of fresh salsa and homemade beans in her house.

Next, we made a batch of Abuela's Nopalitos, or cactus salsa. I have never made this recipe before and was happy to learn how. Nopales, or cactus, has many nutritional values. It is a good source of riboflavin, vitamin B6, iron, copper, Vitamin A, C, K, calcium, and magnesium. This is a great recipe to be served with roasted chicken, tortillas,



rice and beans. I highly recommend that you give it a try.

After one long day Barb made some Entomatadas. This is a "hot off the stove" dining experience. Growing up in a family with six kids and a dining room table that only sat four, Barb's family ate in shifts. She explained to me that this was one of her favorite family meals that held many memories. I found them to be delicious and am very happy to add this recipe to my repertoire.

I hope you are all having a wonderful summer.

Salsa Quemada "Burnt Salsa"

Ingredients:

- 3 Yellow chiles
- 4 Jalapeno chiles
- 3 Serrano chiles
- ¼ Large onion
- 3-6 Cloves garlic, peeled
- ½ Teaspoon salt
- 1 Teaspoon cumin
- 2 14.5-Ounce cans of stewed tomatoes
- 1 Handful of cilantro

Directions:

Heat up an iron griddle pan on the stove top to high heat. You can also do this under the broiler. Put the onion, garlic and chilies on the grill. Turn as they brown and burn on all sides. Remove from the heat then discard the stems. Once the chilies, garlic, and onion are roasted put everything but the garlic into the blender. Add the salt, cumin, and canned tomatoes, then puree. Make sure you taste test to see how warm the temperature is, then add more chilies or tomatoes if needed. Once you get the salsa to your liking, finely chop the garlic, add it to the salsa and serve.

Abuela's Nopalitos "Grandma's Cactus Salsa"

Ingredients:

- 2 Cups chopped cactus, rinsed well and drained
- 2 Teaspoons vegetable oil
- ¾ Cup chopped white onion
- Salt & pepper to taste
- 2 Large tomatoes, chopped
- 1 Blackened serrano chile, chopped
- ¼ Cup Queso Fresco, crumbled
- 1 ½ Teaspoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 ½ Teaspoon olive oil
- 3 Tablespoons cilantro, chopped

Directions:

Heat up a cast iron skillet to medium high add the oil. Once the oil is hot add the onion and the cactus. Fresh cactus is a bit slimy. You want to cook the slime out of it. Don't let this gooey slime detour you from trying this recipe. Keep turning as you cook until the slime is gone and the cactus turns to an Army green. Add the remaining ingredients and serve with roasted chicken and tortillas or as a caprese salad over an avocado.

Entomatadas

Ingredients:

- 2 8-Ounce cans tomato sauce
- ½ Cup spicy salsa, Salsa Quemada works great
- 1 Teaspoon cumin
- ½ Teaspoon salt
- Vegetable oil for frying
- 12 Corn tortillas
- 2 Cups shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- 4 Sliced green onions
- Sour cream, salsa, black olives for garnish

Directions:

Mix the tomato sauce, salsa, cumin, and salt together in a medium bowl. Heat up a large skillet to medium high heat, add enough oil to cover the bottom of the pan. Have all your ingredients ready, once the entomatada is cooked you want to eat it right away. Pour ½ cup of sauce onto a plate. Start with one corn tortilla at a time, place the tortilla into the sauce, then flip if over and cover on both sides. Then put it into the frying pan. The tortillas cook fast. Let it cook on one side for about 15 seconds, using a spatula, gently flip it as soon as it gets soft. Cook on the second side then carefully transfer it to your plate. If the tortilla tears, the heat is too high or you cooked it too long. You might need to practice with a few before you get it right. Once it is done, stuff it like you would an enchilada with cheese, then roll it up. Once you are done cooking all the tortillas, put a teaspoon of oil into the pan, add the remaining tomato sauce mixture into the pan and fry it until hot. Pour over the entomatadas. Garnish with sour cream, green onions, and black olives. This goes great when served with rice and beans.

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