

Pan Dulce Mexicano: Conchas ~ Mexican Sweet Bread: Shells



Dough (Makes 16 conchas)

3 $\frac{3}{4}$ - 4 cups (500 g) all-purpose flour

1 $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp (7 g) salt

2 $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp (12 g) bread machine (not active dry) yeast

1 cup whole milk

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp vanilla extract (add to the milk)

2 eggs

1/3 cup (90 g) granulated sugar

6 TBSP unsalted butter, softened

2 TBSP (30 g) pork lard or vegetable shortening

→In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook, mix together flour, salt, and yeast for 1 minute on medium speed.

→Add 1 egg and half of the milk/vanilla and mix on medium speed for 1 minute. Add the remaining egg and milk/vanilla and mix on medium speed for an additional minute.

→Add the sugar and mix on medium speed for 1 minute. Finally, add the softened butter and lard/shortening and mix on medium-high speed for 5-7 minutes.

→The dough will be rather sticky and difficult to work with. Refrain from adding any flour as it will dry out the dough. Scrape down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula and gather the dough to the center to form a ball.

→Pour about 2 tsp of vegetable oil (I used avocado oil.) in a clean, large bowl. Rub the oil around the bottom and sides of the bowl. Carefully gather the concha dough and place it in the oiled bowl. Flip the dough over so that the oiled side is facing up. The entire ball of dough should be covered with a thin layer of oil. This will prevent the dough from drying out.

→Cover the bowl with plastic wrap in place in the refrigerator to rise. Leave in the refrigerator for 8 hours or overnight.

→Remove the dough from the refrigerator. Lightly flour your work surface and place the ball of dough in the middle. Punch it down.

→Divide the dough into 16 equal portions. Each ball will weigh approximately 60-65 g.

→Take a small ball of dough in one hand and place on a lightly floured surface. Cup your hand over the dough and using a circular motion, roll the dough into a smooth ball. [[You can watch this video clip to see what I'm talking about.](#)] Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet seam side down. Repeat with remaining dough. You will need to use two baking sheets. Place 8 conchas on one and 8 on another. They conchas expand quite a bit during rising and baking, so be sure to leave enough room in between each one.

→Let the conchas rise for 2 hours or until doubled in size.

Sugar Topping (Makes about 14 servings)

3/4 cup (100 g) all-purpose flour

1 cup (100 g) powdered sugar

6 TBSP unsalted butter, softened

1 TBSP vegetable shortening

1 ½ tsp vanilla extract

¼ tsp baking powder

5-7 drops of pink food coloring (I used Americolor gel paste.)

1 tsp cocoa powder

2 TBSP butter

→While the conchas are rising, create the sugar topping. Place the first 6 ingredients in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment. Beat on medium speed for 1-2 minutes or until the ingredients form a ball of soft dough.

→Divide the sugar topping into two balls. One ball will remain vanilla; you can set this to the side. Divide the remaining ball of topping into two. Place one of these balls back into the stand mixer and add 5-7 drops of pink food coloring. Mix on medium speed until the color is completely incorporated. Remove the ball of pink dough and place to the side. Place the remaining ball of topping into the mixer. Add 1 tsp of cocoa powder. Mix on medium speed until the cocoa is completely incorporated.

→Divide the ball of vanilla topping into 8 equal parts. Divide the ball of pink topping into 4 equal parts, and divide the ball of chocolate topping into 4 equal parts. You will have 16 balls of topping total. Using a tortilla press and two pieces of plastic grocery bag (or using your hands), flatten each ball of sugar topping into a 2.5-3" disc. Lightly flour a concha cutter and press into the flattened topping. Press hard enough to make a mark, but don't cut through the topping! If you don't have a concha cutter, you can use a knife to make the shell marks.

→Melt 2 TBSP of butter in the microwave. Lightly brush the butter on top of each concha. Carefully place the stamped topping on the buttered concha. Do NOT press down or you will deflate the concha. Repeat with the remaining topping and conchas.**

→Bake in preheated 350°F oven for 20-22 minutes. Remove and let cool on a cooling rack.

**You can place the topping on the conchas at two different times. 1)You can place it on the concha right after you have formed each one and before they rise for two hours. In this case, you should press down on the topping so that it sticks. When the dough rises, it will create a more spread out concha pattern. 2)You can place the topping on the conchas after they have risen. In this case, you will have to be careful not to flatten the dough. This yields a neater-looking concha pattern. It is your preference. The ones below were made using method #2.

NOTES:

- I suggest making the dough one day before you plan to eat/serve these.
- Conchas are best eaten on the day that they are made. However, they will keep for 1-3 days in a plastic container at room temperature. I don't like to totally seal container because I find that the topping becomes mushy. I simply lay the lid on top, but I don't push it down. You could also store them in a plastic bag, but once again, I wouldn't seal the bag shut completely.
- Many recipes call for the use of vegetable shortening in both the dough and topping. I try to eliminate vegetable shortening from my recipes as much as possible. For this reason, I use pork lard (a somewhat healthier/natural alternative) in the dough. The taste of the lard is not detectable at all. Rather, it maintains their freshness. I had to add 1 TBSP of shortening into the topping because I found that the topping spread too much without it. I tried using some lard in the topping, but I didn't like the final taste.

- I searched high and low for a concha cutter in Mexico, but couldn't find one. I bought mine from a [company in the U.S. called Concha Cutter](#). I highly recommend them. Their service was great and they shipped the cutter out very quickly. I love it!

Recipe Source: Adapted from Irving Quiroz's Panes Mexicanos

