

Tamales de Calabaza de Sra. Inés



Sra. Inés' Pumpkin Tamales (Makes about 20-25 tamales)

Roasted pumpkin

2.5-3 lb. pumpkin (Use Calabaza de Castilla. It is also called *C. moschata*, Fairytale Pumpkin, or Musquee de Provence); This will yield about 1-1.5 lbs. of cooked pumpkin

→ Cut the pumpkin in half. Clean out any of the seeds and guts using a metal spoon.

→ Cut each piece into quarters, then into eighths.

→ Fill a steamer with water. A large tamal steamer works best. Place the cut pumpkin in the steamer and put the lid on. Cook for 1 hour.

→ Once cooked, remove the pumpkin from the steamer and let cool. When it is cool, use a spoon to remove the pumpkin from its outer shell. Discard the shell.

→ Place the pumpkin in a medium-sized bowl, and slightly smash with a spoon. Set aside. ([pumpkin](#))

Shrimp

1 oz. of dried whole shrimp (These can be found at a Mexican grocery store.)

3 oz. of fresh shrimp, boiled

¼ cup water

→In a small skillet, toast the dried shrimp for about 3 minutes until fragrant.

→Place toasted shrimp in a blender. Add ¼ cup of water to the blender so that the shrimp heads/tails mix together easily. Set the pureed mixture to the side (**toasted shrimp**).

→Remove the shells from the boiled fresh shrimp. Cut into ¼" pieces. Place in a bowl. Set to the side. (**fresh shrimp**)

Pipián

4 oz. green pumpkin seeds/pepitas (I bought mine at Trader Joe's because I was looking for a specific type. TJ's pumpkin seeds are the closest match I have found.)

1 cup water

→Place pumpkin seeds in a skillet. Toast over medium heat until fragrant, about 3-5 minutes. The seeds will begin to pop when ready.

→Place the toasted seeds in a blender. Add 1 cup of water. Blend for about 1 minute until completely smooth. Place blended mixture to the side. (**pipián**)

Tomato Mixture

3-4 large Roma tomatoes, quartered

1 small-medium garlic clove

1 slice (about ¼" wide) white onion

2 TBSP vegetable oil (I used avocado oil, but you could use any neutral-flavored oil.)

1 caper, chopped

2-3 seedless green olives, chopped (I used Spanish olives.)

½ cup of fresh cilantro, chopped (I chopped the cilantro and then measured it.)

1 ½ tsp. salt

- Put tomatoes, garlic, and onion in a blender. Blend for about 1-2 minutes until completely smooth.
- Add oil to a medium-sized pot. Heat the oil over medium heat for about 1 minute until it shimmers. Add the blended tomato mixture to the hot oil and begin to cook over medium heat to bring out the flavor. Cook for about 3-5 minutes.
- Add the chopped caper and olives to the tomato mixture. Stir to combine. Then, add the **fresh shrimp** and **toasted shrimp** mixture (see above). Stir again to combine.
- Add the chopped cilantro. Mix well. Cook over low heat for about 10 minutes, stirring every so often.
- Then, add the cooked **pumpkin** (see above). Mix thoroughly and let the mixture cook for an additional 5-10 minutes.
- Add the **pipián** (see above) and 1 ½ tsp of salt. Mix well and let the mixture cook for an additional minute.

Masa

2 lbs. fresh corn masa (see this post for how to make fresh masa) *Make a day in advance

2 cups water

8 oz. pork lard, at room temperature

2 tsp. baking powder

2 tsp. salt

→Put masa in a bowl. Add 2 cups of water and let soak for about 1 hour. Mix with your hand to break up lumps. The mixture should be smooth and resemble atole.

→Place the liquid masa in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment. Add the lard, baking powder, and salt. Mix on medium-high speed for about 3 minutes. There should be no lumps and the mixture should still resemble atole.

Forming Tamales

Fresh banana leaves measuring about 12"x12" (This is approximate. The leaves will have a more rectangular shape.

→Place the banana leaf with the hard seam side on your left-hand side.

→Wipe the inside of the leaf clean with a damp rag.

→Pour about 1/3-1/2 cup of masa onto the center of the banana leaf. Add about 2 TBSP of the shrimp/pumpkin mixture to the middle of the masa.

→Fold the banana leaf from the bottom to the top in half. Then fold about an inch from the top towards the bottom. Then, fold all the way down so the top meets the bottom. Fold the left-hand side with the hard seam halfway towards the middle. Lift the tamal up so that the folded hard seam is facing down and the unfolded side is facing straight up. Carefully, fold the top down to meet the other fold in the middle. It should form a square/rectangular packet. Be gentle during this whole process because you don't want the masa to leak out. Place on a plate and set aside.

→Fill a tamal steamer with water and bring to a boil. Once boiling, turn to medium-low heat. Carefully, place the tamales in the steamer with their folded side facing down. Stack them on top of each other. You should only put about 20 tamales in the steamer at a time.

→Cook on medium-low heat for about 1 hour.

→Turn the heat off, and remove the tamales to a glass tray. Let cool for about 5-10 minutes before enjoying.

NOTES:

- It is worth trying to find the specific pumpkin mentioned in this recipe. I have yet to try it with a different type of pumpkin. These tamales are seasonal for that reason. We found this pumpkin once at a smaller nursery near our house in October, and once at a Latin market in Boston in September. We also have planted this pumpkin in our garden. If planted in May, it will not be ready until October.
- You should really attempt to use fresh masa when making these. If you are lucky and have access to fresh masa, this will be easy. If not, you can follow the recipe for fresh masa that is posted on my blog.
- Good banana leaves are hard to find. They sell the frozen kind at our Mexican grocery store, but sometimes they are cracked and hard to fold. Let them thaw completely, and try to cut them where there are already breaks. We were lucky enough to find packaged fresh leaves at a Latin market in Boston. Sra. Inés says that you could also use corn husks, but they will absorb more of the manteca and will be slightly drier.
- I suggest making this recipe over a few days so that it is more manageable. I would make the fresh masa first (without the water, lard, baking powder, and salt) and refrigerate it overnight. I would also cook the pumpkin a day in advance. You can even prepare the complete pumpkin/shrimp mixture a day before.
- The first time you make these, the whole process might seem overwhelming, but the second time I made them, I felt much more comfortable with the each step.
- My brother is allergic to shrimp, so I have also made a crab version and a chicken version of these. The flavor is totally different, but at least he can enjoy tamales with us.
- You can reheat any leftover tamales in the microwave! Yay!

Recipe Source: Mi suegra, Sra. Inés; My mother-in-law, Inés