

Art & Jackie's Christmas Tamales

Yield: about 12-15 dozen tamales.

You Will Need:

1. Pork shoulder (about 20 lbs.)
2. Prepared masa (20-25 lbs.)
3. Dried chile pods (1 bag each: Pasilla, New Mexico, and California)
4. Corn husks (about 2-3 bags)
5. Peppercorns
6. 1 large onion
7. 1 garlic bulb
8. Bay leaves
9. Manteca (lard)
10. Salt
11. Trader Joe's 21 Seasoning Salute
12. Cheesecloth & twine

Preparing the Cheesecloth

On a cheesecloth, place the onion (quartered), about 6 peeled garlic cloves, 3-4 bay leaves and about 1 tbsp. of peppercorns. Wrap the ingredients in the cheesecloth and use the twine to tie it closed. Set aside.

Preparing the Meat

When preparing the pork shoulder, start by trimming any excess fat. Cut meat into about two-inch by half-inch chunks and place into a pot. Fill the pot with water about one-inch over the top of the meat. Then, place the wrapped cheesecloth ingredients on top. Bring to a boil and add about 1 tbsp. of salt (or more to taste). Cover and simmer for 1.5 to 2 hours (with the lid slightly open).

Note: After about 30 minutes, be sure to skim the scum from the top of the pot. Then, continue skimming every 5-10 minutes until scum no longer forms.

Preparing the Chile Sauce

Place the dried chile pods into a large colander and rinse well. Slice them lengthwise down the middle to remove seeds, and rinse again to remove any remaining seeds. Next, place a few chile pods at a time in a pan over medium-high heat, toasting for only a few seconds on each side (this releases their flavor). Then, place all the toasted chile pods into a pot and fill the pot with just enough water to cover them. Simmer on medium-high heat for 10-15 minutes.

Place just enough chile pods to fill the food processor about half way, add a little bit of water from the pot, and blend for about 30 seconds. Once blended, empty the processor into a fine strainer and blend more of the pods. When the strainer is about half full, use a spatula (or the back of a wooden spoon) to work the blended chile pod mixture through the strainer until you have a smooth puree. Repeat this process until you have gotten through all of the chile pods.

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To remove the raw taste, it is necessary to cook the chile puree mixture. Begin by making a roux: in a hot pan, add about ½ cup of vegetable oil. Then, add about a tbsp. of minced garlic and about 8 tbsp. of flour. Stir until thick, adding more oil as necessary if the paste becomes lumpy. Cook for a few minutes to remove the raw taste of the flour. Then, add the chilli puree mixture to the roux. Stir well to combine, and add about 1-2 tbsp of salt and about 1 tbsp of Trader Joe's 21 Seasoning Salute. Cook for 8-10 min on a medium-low heat.

Preparing the Meat for Tamales

Strain the meat from the pot in batches onto a large cutting board, making sure to save and set aside the stock. With two forks, pull the meat apart until achieving a coarse shred, removing any large pieces of fat, if necessary. Then, place the shredded meat into a large foil pan (or other large semi-flat container) and add chile sauce until the meat is well coated. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Preparing the Corn Husks

To make the corn husks pliable for wrapping tamales: fill a large pot with very hot tap water. Separate and place each husk into the pot of water and leave to soak overnight. The next day, remove the husks from the water and make sure to dry each husk well. Store husks in a foil pan or container until ready to begin assembly.

Preparing the Masa

In a stand mixer using the paddle attachment (or a hand held mixer), add small to medium batches of the store-prepared masa, some of the chile sauce to give the masa a slight color, and beat on medium speed until fully mixed. While beating, add some of the broth a little at a time to help thin out the masa. To help make the masa more fluffy, you may also add small amounts of Manteca (lard) and baking powder. Once well blended, you may increase the speed to high to really beat the masa making it much more fluffy.

Note: to test the masa to see if it's done, try putting a drop of masa in a glass of water. If the masa floats it's ready to make tamales.

Assembling the Tamales:

Open a husk and lay it flat with the textured side facing down and the pointed end towards you. Spread a liberal amount of prepared masa onto the husk, making an even layer about ⅛ inch thick, leaving a space about two inches from the bottom of the husk. Next, scoop about two spoonfuls of the marinated meat and place it vertically in the center of the masa-coated husk. Then, place two olives, spaced evenly, on top of the meat. Finally, roll the husk horizontally from end to end as tightly as possible, and fold the bottom up.

Steaming The Tamales:

Fill the bottom of a tamale steamer pot with water and drop in three pennies (the pennies will stop rattling when the water has evaporated, prompting you to refill the pot with water). Place the tamales upright into the steamer basket with the bottom ends down, and place the steamer basket into the pot. Then, place a piece of foil over the top of the tamales, pushing the ends of the foil down into the pot, and cover with the lid. Start on high-heat until it begins to boil then reduce heat to medium for 1.5 to 2 hours, making sure not to let the pot go dry (doing so will burn the tamales). Once the masa is fully cooked, remove the tamales from the pot and enjoy.

Serve with Beans, Rice, Salad, Salsa, Guacamole, and Sour Cream.