

salsas and moles

FRESH AND AUTHENTIC RECIPES

*for Pico de Gallo,
Guacamole, Chimichurri,
Mole Poblano, and More*

**DEBORAH
SCHNEIDER**



salsas and moles

FRESH AND AUTHENTIC RECIPES

*for Pico de Gallo, Mole Poblano,
Chimichurri, Guacamole, and More*

**DEBORAH
SCHNEIDER**

photography by Maren Caruso



TEN SPEED PRESS
Berkeley

Copyright © 2015 by Deborah Schneider

Photographs copyright © 2015 by Maren Caruso

All rights reserved.

Published in the United States by Ten Speed Press, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC, a Penguin Random House Company, New York.

www.crownpublishing.com

www.tenspeed.com

Ten Speed Press and the Ten Speed Press colophon are registered trademarks of Random House LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schneider, Deborah M.

Salsas and moles : fresh and authentic recipes for pico de gallo, mole poblano, chimichurri, guacamole, and more / Deborah Schneider ; photography by Maren Caruso.—First edition.

pages cm

Includes index.

1. Salsas (Cooking) 2. Sauces. 3. Cooking, Mexican. I. Title.

TX819.S29S374 2015

641.81'4--dc23

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-60774-685-0

eBook ISBN: 978-1-60774-686-7

Design by Kara Plikaitis

Food Styling by Robyn Valarik

v3.1

To Barry, Will, and Annie, your love is the broth
in which the dumpling of my life floats,
and your pungent (and very funny) observations
season all my days.



contents

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[The Essential Guide to Chiles](#)

[Working with Chiles](#)

[Ingredients](#)

[Essential Techniques](#)

[How to Use This Book](#)



[CLASSIC TABLE SALSAS](#)



[HOT SALSAS](#)



[MOLE AND ENCHILADA SAUCES](#)



[SALSAS FOR TACOS](#)



[CHUNKY SALSAS AND BOTANAS](#)

[Resources](#)

[Index](#)

acknowledgments

I HAD SUCH A BLAST WRITING THIS BOOK!

I am extremely grateful to Ten Speed Press for the opportunity to bring this collection of stellar salsas to my tribe of cooks, bedside chef-readers (you know who you are), and food wonks. Thanks to the group of talented individuals who made a wonderful book: my so-patient editor Kelly Snowden; editor emeritus Melissa Moore, whose idea this book was; book design artista Kara Plikaitis; and publicist Erin Welke. Photographer Maren Caruso's amazing aesthetic highlights the beauty of this simple food, aided by stylist Robyn Valarik. And as usual, my dear friend and super-agent Carole Bidnick rode in on her white horse to make it all happen.

In the case of anything food-related, it takes a village—armed with tasting spoons—to make it all come together. To all my customers at SOL Mexican Cocina and Solita Tacos & Margaritas, my heartfelt gratitude for your support and feedback over the years. I learn from you! To my partners Matt Baumayr, Rich Howland, and the Mastro family, thank you for letting me follow my vision, even if it did have to expand to include a burrito.

All cooks build on the expertise of those who went before us. I want to thank all the cooks who answered my questions or let me watch them cook and generously shared their skill and knowledge. You taught me so much and set me on this road. To Benito Mirafuentes, Joe Saldana, and Manny Lopez; Chefs Octavio Flores, Ernesto Lopez, and their cooking crews at SOL and Solita; Danny Esparza, Francisco Arenas, and so many others: all of you patiently and graciously shared your memories of Mexico and decades of experience with me. Love you guys! I am eternally, profoundly grateful for the access to Mexico's culinary soul so generously shared by Ruth Alegria, Patricia Quintana, and Chef Gerardo Lugo of Mexico City's Restaurante Nicos. And of course, to Toni Allegra, who started it all.

¡Abrazos!



introduction

A GREAT SALSA MAKES A BIG IMPRESSION WITH A LITTLE BITE

In some form, salsas will be part of every bite you eat in Mexico. They are the highest culinary expression of a creative culture and carry a kind of cult status, because every Mexican cook (and street stand) has a special, secret salsa recipe.

Salsas are always as important as entrées or side dishes and have specific uses: simple table, or casera, salsas are used to add last-minute flavor and juiciness to food. Hot salsas always make an appearance, because Mexican cooking is almost never spicy in and of itself—you get to add heat to your own taste, *al gusto*. Chunky raw fruit and vegetable salsas are so colorful and full of flavor that they can stand alone as *botanas* (snacks). Dried chiles and fresh chiles are transformed into salsas of incomparable flavor, often used as the savory base for soups and stews, such as *carne con chile colorado*. At the very peak of sophistication is *mole*—in appearance just a salsa, but in taste, embodying the culinary history of Mexico.

Salsa in Mexico represents more than just something to eat, though. Salsa is the heart of the cuisine. Because I am such a silly romantic about food, salsas seem to me to hold the story of Mexico—history in a bite. As my friend Ruth Alegria says, you “get” Mexican food when you “get” salsa—when you understand its role and its importance to the cuisine. You get a sense of Mexico, too: this gorgeous, vivid hybrid of medieval Spain and thousands of years of native American cultures.

Mexico’s cuisine is far more complex and imaginative than that of its closest neighbors. It begins with geography. The country encompasses multiple climate zones from north to south, from snow-capped mountains to searing desert to tropical jungle; from east to west it traverses infinite microclimates, climbing from sea to mountains and descending to sea again—a fertile matrix for botanical and culinary diversity. Further boosting its diverse influences, Mexico has been a crossroads of ancient trade paths from North America to South America for thousands of years. Canoe traders of the Caribbean and Pacific coastlines brought ingredients and ideas to already sophisticated indigenous cultures in the central highlands and along the coasts; the Spanish brought meat, dairy, wheat, and exotic Eastern spices.

Mexico is revolutionary, imaginative, colorful, wildly varied, and hyperregional, though lines have blurred so that different regions, once remote, have flowed into each other, and some previously regional salsas are familiar throughout the country. But still, in the Maya country, you get Mayan salsas and flavors that exactly complement their unique tropical cooking; in Chihuahua, you taste desert heat and flint in salsas made of spicy dried chiles, tailor-made for the *vaquero* cooking of meat, beans, and cheese. In Veracruz, salsas reflect the hot face of the Caribbean sun and are exactly right for the languid lifestyle and fresh seafood cooking of this region. You always know where you are in Mexico by the salsas set before you. No other country infuses so much variety and flavor into its everyday cooking.

The expectations we have in the United States for what salsa is supposed to be and do are very different than in Mexico. In Mexico, one or maybe two salsas might be offered, and their function is simple and precise: add a bit of expected flavor, add some moisture, maybe add some heat to what’s in front of you. You will always see the same kinds of salsa used in the same way—traditional salsas are always served with their time-honored partners. Of course, those traditional Mexican combinations of flavors are perfect: nothing is better with *carnitas* than *salsa verde* and onions!

American cooking has no such rules or expectations about eating salsa. Instead, we expect to eat any salsa with chips (virtually unknown in Mexico) while we worship the twin iron laws of escalation (always more, always bigger, always hotter) and overkill (too much, too hot, too crazy). I believe it is important for the cook to understand salsas in their Mexican context, based on their culinary, regional, or cultural settings.

Understanding the basics will help you make your salsas taste authentic, even when tweaked, avoiding awkward substitutions and pairings. But don’t let those boundaries dictate what is a “real” salsa or its “proper” use. You will have a lot of creative fun playing with salsas and using them in different ways.

Like an artist’s use of a slash of vivid color, salsa can add *un poquito mas*: something more—more color, more taste, more vivid punctuation of flavor—to all your cooking, and not just Mexican recipes. That little bit of flavor will take your cooking to the next level.

MYTHS ABOUT SALSA

- All salsas are meant to be eaten with chips: Eating salsa with fried tortilla chips before your meal is common in the United States but almost unknown in Mexico, except in tourist areas.
- All salsas are raging hot: Most salsas have mild or no heat. There will always be a “hot” salsa available, for those who prefer a more piquant flavor.
- Salsas are the same throughout Mexico: There are some shared cooking techniques and ingredients, but salsas are hyper-local, utilizing the local produce, chiles, and herbs and reflecting the season. Part of the fun of traveling in Mexico is discovering the many variations on a type of salsa.

SEASONING

- Salsas are a laboratory where you learn to balance and play with flavor. In time, you will train your own palate. Use my recipes as a guide for seasonings or follow your own instincts!
- If a salsa tastes flat, keep working on it. Don’t be afraid to push all the seasonings—lime, salt, heat. That’s how you learn!
- Fresh salsas “swallow” salt and other seasonings. An hour after a salsa is made, it is a different beast than the one you first tasted. You often need more salt than you think. If you have refrigerated leftovers, always drain, stir, and reseason before serving.
- With one exception, salsa should always be flavor-packed and seasoned when you taste it from a spoon—almost too strong, because you are using small amounts of the salsa on a lot of food. If the salsa isn’t powerful, it will just disappear. The exception is dried chile salsas and moles. For those use less salt than you would expect, because salt can make chiles taste bitter.

ELEMENTS OF SALSA FLAVOR AND BALANCE

Sweet: Tomato, lime, and onion are sweet. Balance with salt and spiciness.

Acid: Acidity is usually provided by tomatillos, but a dash of mild white vinegar, in combination with lime, can bring out the sweetness of fresh salsas, especially fruit salsas. Vinegar is an essential part of hot salsas made from dried chiles, pumping up the flavor without adding bitterness.

Spicy: Fresh chiles are hot and herbal “green” tasting—add lime juice, vinegar, and salt to balance.

Complex: Dried chiles are spicy and have many fruit, berry, tobacco, dry grass, and pepper flavors. Balance with herbs, tomato, onion, and garlic.

Salt: Use sea salt or kosher salt. Fresh salsas and table salsas should be well seasoned. Use less salt in dried chile salsas and moles.

Herbal: Cilantro, epazote, parsley, and local herbs are used in fresh and cooked salsas; black peppercorns, thyme, marjoram, and Mexican oregano are used in cooked recipes. Balance with tomato, onion, garlic, and tomatillo.



THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CHILES

Fresh Chiles (hottest to mildest)

- 1 THAI BIRD CHILE 9 A thin-fleshed chile with many seeds, fruity flavor, and searing heat. (Common)
- 2 HABANERO 8 A very hot chile with a fruity aftertaste. It will make your lips burn and can affect your sense of taste. Handle with care. (Common)
- 3 MANZANA 7 TO 8 An unusual chile with coal-black seeds and thick flesh, which needs to be cooked before use. Handle with care. (Rare)
- 4 SERRANO 6 Narrow and reliably spicy, with a fresh “green” taste and many seeds. Cooking tames its heat. Used for fresh and cooked salsas. (Common)
- 5 JALAPEÑO 5 A rounded chile, wide at the top. Sometimes medium hot, sometimes almost mild. Used in fresh and cooked salsas; also eaten grilled and pickled. (Common)
- 6 GÜERO 4 Thin-fleshed and pale yellow. It can be spicy or mild and must be cooked. Excellent stuffing chile; also eaten grilled. (Seasonal)
- 7 NEW MEXICO 3 A large, long, narrow chile resembling an Anaheim but darker in color, with more heat and better flavor. Sometimes called a Hatch chile. Always used cooked. (Seasonal)
- 8 POBLANO 3 Large, triangular shape, very dark green, and shiny. Must be cooked. Excellent flavor. Used for stuffing or charred and torn up, for rajas, or strips. (Common)
- 9 ANAHEIM OR CALIFORNIA 1 A large, long, narrow chile with a light green color. Always mild. Use this chile to add flavor without heat. (Common)
- 10 RED BELL PEPPER 0 Thick-fleshed and sweet. Used raw or cooked to add color and flavor to salsas. (Common)

Dried Chiles (hottest to mildest)

- 1 GHOST (BHUT JOLOKIA) 8 TO 9 The bhut jolokia is used as elephant repellent in India. This chile causes a full body sweat. (Specialty)
- 2 PEQUÍN OR TEPÍN 8 TO 9 Tiny and extremely hot, this chile is used to make hot salsas and is difficult to find outside of Mexico. (Specialty)
- 3 MORITA 7 A dried serrano chile, the morita can be very hot, with a fruity aftertaste. Once rare, they are becoming easier to find outside of Mexico. (Specialty)
- 4 ARBOL 7 Chiles de arbol are the easiest chile to find. Try to purchase them with the stems on—these will be Mexican grown, instead of Asian. (Common)
- 5 CHIPOTLE 5 Ripe jalapeños are dried (mora) or dried and smoked (meco and sometimes mora). Mora are wrinkled and dark red; meco are smooth and brown. Medium heat with some fruitiness. (Common)
- 6 PUYA 4 About 4 inches long, puya chiles have a great red color, predictable heat, and are commonly used for salsa roja. Japones chile is similar but spicier. (Specialty)
- 7 NEW MEXICO 4 With their deep flavor and noticeable heat, dried New Mexico chiles can be combined with milder chiles for salsas. (Common)
- 8 GUAJILLO 3 Wine-colored guajillo chiles have a distinct berry flavor and some heat and are typically used to make enchilada and other chile salsas. (Common)
- 9 ANCHO 2 A dried poblano chile, the ancho chile has a complex, grassy, tobacco smell and taste, and a red color when cooked. It’s widely used in salsas. (Common)
- 10 PASILLA 2 Pasillas look very similar to ancho chiles but have a darker color when cooked and a more coffee and chocolate taste. (Specialty)
- 11 NEGRO 1 The thin-skinned negro chile has a coffee berry flavor and is typically used in salsas and moles. (Specialty)
- 12 CALIFORNIA 1 Similar to guajillo chiles but less spicy and flavorful, dried California chiles have no heat. (Common)



WORKING WITH CHILES

FRESH CHILES Because fresh chiles are a natural product, you can count on variations in flavor and heat from day to day (and from chile to chile within a single plant), depending on the season and where the chiles were grown. Since many of the recipes in this book depend on fresh chiles for both flavor and heat, you will learn to adapt the recipes to your personal taste. Important: Always wear disposable gloves when handling any kind of chile.

- If you want flavor but no heat, substitute an Anaheim chile or green bell pepper for the hot chiles in any recipe.
- If you like a little heat, remove the seeds and ribs from hot chiles. You may want to scale down to a less hot chile—for example, drop from a serrano to a jalapeño, or a jalapeño to an Anaheim chile.
- If you like medium heat, keep the seeds and ribs, but add half of the chiles called for in the recipe, then taste. You may decide to add all the chiles.
- If you like your salsa hot, you can add more chiles or even go up the heat scale by adding a little habanero.

DRIED CHILES Many steps are necessary to really bring out the subtle and complex flavor of a dried chile. For best results, don't skip, skimp, or speed up the process. The purest, best flavor and texture come from grinding the prepared chiles to a silken paste using a metate and mano, a flat stone table and rolling pin akin to a mortar and pestle. This painstaking process seems to slowly and gently emulsify the ingredients, so the chile skin simply vanishes into the salsa and straining is unnecessary. Food processors and blenders work by cutting all the little bits into smaller and smaller pieces, which then remain in the sauce and have to be strained out.

Choosing dried chiles—Fresh dried chiles should look fresh, with good color; they should be flexible (like raisins or fruit leather) and never dry or broken. They should be clean, not dusty, and have a lovely fruity scent.

Cleaning chiles—Always wear disposable gloves when handling chiles. Remove the stem. With a sharp knife slit one side and open up the chile flat. Remove the seeds and ribs as desired.

Toasting chiles—Heat a heavy cast-iron skillet over medium-low heat. Open up the chile and press flat onto the hot surface with a spatula; turn and press down on the other side. The chile will soften and show small blisters, but it should never, ever be allowed to burn or scorch, as this will make it bitter.

Soaking chiles—Pour hot water over the chiles, either a measured amount specified in the recipe (this is done if you will use the liquid in the recipe) or just enough to cover the chiles. Press the chiles into the water (you may want to weight them with a small plate) and stir occasionally. Too much water will wash away flavor, as will soaking the chiles for too long, so observe the quantities and soaking times in the recipes.

Pureeing chiles—Drain the chiles (reserve the soaking liquid if called for in the recipe) and place the drained chiles in a blender—a food processor does not work as well. Puree, adding as little liquid as possible and stopping and scraping down the sides frequently, until the chile puree is velvety smooth; this may take 3 to 5 minutes. Scrape the puree into a bowl and swirl a small amount of the recipe liquid around in the blender to rinse down the sides.

Frying a sauce—In a deep, heavy pot, heat a very small amount of oil over medium heat. Add the chile puree and quickly slap a splatter screen over the pot. Use the screen to protect yourself and your kitchen from chile splats, while you use a flat-bottomed wooden spatula to stir the chile puree as it cooks for about 5 minutes, until it thickens and changes color. You are driving off excess water and further developing the chile flavor. When the puree is well cooked, add the liquid from the recipe and cook, stirring constantly, for another 2 minutes, until the puree is thickened again. Proceed with the recipe directions.

INGREDIENTS

PANTRY INGREDIENTS

Beer—Mexican amber and dark beers have the best flavor for cooking.

Chile con limón—This addictive mixture of dried chiles, salt, and dried lime tastes great on fruits and vegetables.

Chipotle chiles in adobo—These are sold in 7-ounce, 12-ounce, and 28-ounce cans. Choose a brand that doesn't slosh around when you shake the can. Freeze leftovers.

Chocolate—Chocolate adds color as well as a bit of flavor to some famous moles, especially mole poblano. Handmade Mexican chocolate is ideal; it can be found in some specialty food shops or online. Mexican drinking chocolate, such as Ibarra brand, or any dark semisweet chocolate will work as well.

Lard—Use fresh lard (semiliquid at room temperature) in these recipes because it adds authentic flavor and a rich texture to the finished salsa or mole. If you make carnitas, save the rendered layer of fat for this purpose, or purchase a tub of fresh lard at any Mexican grocery. Rendered chicken or duck fat may be used instead. Vegetarians may substitute a neutral-flavored vegetable oil, but not olive oil.

Mayonnaise—Use an all-natural, extra-thick mayonnaise, such as Hains’.

Nuts and seeds—Purchase shelled raw nuts from a store that turns over its stock frequently. Peanuts, walnuts, pepitas (pumpkin seeds), and sesame seeds are the most commonly used in these recipes.

Oil, vegetable—Any neutral-flavored vegetable oil will do, except olive oil. Olive oil’s flavor doesn’t mesh with the other ingredients typically used.

Salt—Season with a light hand for moles and enchilada sauces, as salt can bring out bitterness in chiles. For fresh salsas, season until the flavors pop. Use a pure, non-iodized salt such as kosher or sea salt.

Soy bacon bits—These can be used as a seasoning, in place of pork products. They add smoky flavor and depth to beans.

Stock—Homemade is always best, but an organic or other high-quality boxed chicken, turkey, or vegetable broth is sure handy. Choose a low-sodium, no-MSG brand and dilute with water by half.

Sugar—Granulated white sugar may be used to balance the more complex moles.

Tequila—Strong, clean-flavored blanco tequila (100 percent agave) can be used to enhance fruit and chile flavors in salsas.

Tomato paste—Used in small amounts, tomato paste adds color, sweetness, and intense flavor to certain salsas.

Tortilla, corn—Yellow corn tortillas are used to thicken and flavor some salsas.

Vinegar—A basic vinegar such as Heinz white or cider vinegar has character without off tastes. Do not use wine or balsamic vinegars.

Water—The quality of this universal ingredient is important. Whenever possible, use filtered water to remove the taste of chlorine.

Spices should be purchased in small quantities and used quickly. Name-brand premium spices are top quality and are worth the extra money.

Allspice—Whole allspice berries are essential for certain moles.

Anise seed—The very mild licorice flavor of anise seed is used in place of avocado leaf, which has a similar flavor.

Bay leaf—Fresh or dried, bay leaf adds savoriness to broths and beans.

Black peppercorn—Use whole black peppercorns rather than preground pepper.

Cinnamon—Mexican cooking calls for true Ceylon cinnamon, which is sold in quills of paper-thin, crumbly bark that has a soft, mild flavor. Cassia bark is thick, hard, and much stronger in flavor; use half as much.

Clove—Whole cloves are best, and a little goes a long way.

Coriander seed—Cilantro seed (coriander) has a flowery, herbal flavor.

Crushed red pepper flakes—Chiles de arbol ground into spicy flakes.

Cumin—Cumin is more often used in the northern states of Mexico. You may toast cumin seeds and grind them fresh or buy good-quality ground cumin.

Marjoram—Marjoram is floral and a bit sweet. It is used in cooking throughout Mexico, alongside Mexican oregano, for which it may be substituted.

Mexican oregano—Mild and sweet, Mexican oregano is available dried and whole. Look for it in the Latin foods section of the supermarket. If you cannot find it, substitute marjoram.

FRESH INGREDIENTS

Avocado—California or Mexican Hass avocados have great flavor and a high oil content. They can be fully ripened in a paper bag. They are ready to use when yielding to the touch.

Cabbage—Green cabbage is preferable to lettuce on tacos: it has better crunch and flavor, and it never wilts. Shred it, not too finely, and keep chilled until ready to use.

Cactus pear—Cactus fruit (tuna) is full of rock-hard tiny seeds, but the flavor is something very special. Cactus fruits may be used ripe; they taste like melon. Green cactus pears taste just like the cactus paddles (nopales). Xoconostle are a special variety of cactus fruit, extra sweet, with a lovely color.

Chiles, fresh and dried—Everything that grows tastes of where it is grown. Since chiles are the basis of all the recipes in this book, for best results it only makes sense to source and use good-quality Mexican-grown chiles.

Certain kinds of chiles may look similar but are not interchangeable; both flavor and color will vary in the finished salsa. For a visual guide to chiles, see [this page](#)

Citrus—Tiny Mexican limes are used everywhere, for everything. All kinds of fresh foods love lime, as well as lemon, orange, and sour orange.

Corn—Yellow corn has the best flavor. Supersweet varieties are a little too sweet for use in salsas.

Cucumber—Either English or field cucumbers will work. Peel and seed before dicing.

Fruit—Fruit in Mexico is always ripe and delicious, and that’s what you want to buy. It should smell fragrant. Fruit in season is always best.

Garlic—Buy whole heads of domestic garlic, store them in a covered container, and pop off cloves as you need them. Many salsa recipes roast the garlic right in its peel. Avoid imported Asian garlic and, especially, minced garlic in jars.

Jicama—Jicama root is juicy and crunchy. Use a serrated peeler to remove the tough outer skin before dicing or cutting into strips. The combination of jicama, lime juice, and chile con limón is addictive!

Mango—Buy the smaller, bean-shaped Manila mangoes, if available.

Nopales—Beavertail cactus paddles, or nopales, are usually sold cleaned of their spines, and may be found diced or in strips (nopalitos). The cactus should be firm and not slimy.

Onion—Mexican cooks use white onions exclusively, for both fresh and cooked salsas. The sweet pungency of onion is an essential element of true Mexican flavor. To temper their strength, diced onions can be rinsed under cold running water. If white onions are not available, red onion can be substituted.

Radish—Peppery radishes are added to salsas or just eaten as a palate cleanser alongside tacos.

Tomatillo—An essential component of many salsas, tomatillos look like small, hard green tomatoes wrapped in a husk. They have a tart flavor that works perfectly with chiles and herbs. Buy tomatillos that are about 1½ inches to 2 inches in diameter; the big ones are mealy and tasteless. Field tomatillos (tomatillos de milpa) are the size of marbles and have a purple-black cast to their skin. They are available seasonally.

Tomato—Roma or plum tomatoes are the best choice for fresh and cooked salsas; they have good flavor; firm, dry flesh; and few seeds. You may substitute beefsteak or slicing tomatoes, but be sure to squeeze out all the seeds and let the diced tomato drain for a short time before mixing it with the other salsa ingredients.

Herbs are used by the handful for salsa verde and pipian, and make an appearance in many other salsas. Store bunches of fresh herbs upright in a container with a small amount of water, loosely covered with a plastic bag, in the refrigerator.

Cilantro—The flavor of this herb is green and flowery when fresh and deeply herbal when cooked.

Epazote—This herb has a unique, pungent flavor something like mint and something like oregano. It is always cooked with black beans and is an essential element of true Mexican flavor.

Marjoram—Sweet, floral, and herbal, marjoram is used in cooked salsas and some moles.

Parsley, flat-leaf—This variety of parsley stands in for wild greens in mole verde and pipian.

Thyme—Savory and strong, thyme is used in cooked salsas and some moles.

ESSENTIAL TECHNIQUES

Char—Blackening vegetables to add a wonderful smoky flavor. There are two main methods. The first is to follow the directions for dry roasting, below, but turn the heat on high and allow the vegetables to blacken on one side before turning them to cook on the other side.

The second method is used mainly to remove the skin from peppers, while at the same time half cooking them. Place the washed chiles directly on a gas burner on an outdoor grill, or under a very hot broiler. Once the skin is blackened, turn the chile until all sides are blistered. Wrap the chile in a paper towel and allow it to cool, then rub off the skin and remove the seeds and stem.

Dice—Cutting an ingredient into cubes of an even, uniform size. This is not chopping. My favored dice size for salsas is about $\frac{3}{8}$ inch. Practice, practice, practice.

Dry roast—A stove-top method of slowly cooking vegetables to mellow, rich sweetness. Wash and dry the vegetables, but leave them whole. Line a heavy skillet with foil and heat over medium-high heat. Set the vegetables directly into the pan and cook slowly, turning occasionally, until softened. Lift the foil out of the pan and allow the vegetables to cool.

Mashing, crushing—Roughly breaking down an ingredient (such as avocado) into a chunky paste, often using a tool such as a wooden spoon or masher.

Mince—Finely chopping an ingredient into very small pieces, so it melts into the other ingredients.

Puree—Processing an ingredient in a blender until perfectly smooth, scraping down the sides several times. For the most concentrated flavor, use as little liquid as possible when pureeing.

Toast—Gently cooking an ingredient in a dry pan to intensify the flavors. Dried chiles are usually toasted before soaking (for [directions](#)). Nuts, seeds, and whole spices such as black peppercorns and cloves are usually toasted to intensify their flavors before grinding. To toast, heat a small pan over medium-low heat. When it is hot, add the ingredients to be toasted. Shake and stir spices until fragrant, then immediately transfer to a plate to cool completely before grinding. Toast nuts and seeds until pale golden in color, shaking and stirring constantly, and when done, pour onto a plate to cool.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Cooking is not merely recipes. Recipes, after all, are just words on a piece of paper. Cooking is really about mastering a few simple skills and techniques, which (fortunately) are easy and fun to learn. Salsas and Moles is designed to teach you essential Mexican cooking techniques and one very important skill: how to introduce and balance big flavors to create sensational effects.

In salsas, flavor is everything. Flavor comes from choosing great ingredients and handling them correctly. For the best-tasting, most authentic results, remember that the simpler the recipe, the more important the technique is. There are no shortcuts in technique!

With practice, your confidence will grow. With experience, you will become better at enhancing the flavor of your salsas with judicious seasoning. Then you will start exploring new combinations of your own creation. You won't need my recipes anymore, because your cooking skills will take you anywhere you want to go.

Within the book, recipes are grouped by use (Classic Table Salsas, Hot Salsas, Salsas for Tacos) or in a looser sense, by a class of ingredients (Mole and Enchilada Sauces, Chunky Salsas and Botanas). In each chapter, you will be introduced to the most important techniques (such as charring or toasting) and learn each salsa's traditional use, along with serving suggestions. There are no entrée recipes. Salsa experts won't have any problem coming up with food to put their salsa on, because the salsa makes the meal.





In any home, taco stand, or food stall, the table salsa is the signature of the cook. It is often the recipe she is most proud of. Her salsa reflects where she comes from, her particular tastes, and also her confidence that this salsa will taste good with everything she makes, since basic Mexican cooking is often simple. The salsa is meant to be a condiment—diners are expected to add spoonfuls to taste (*al gusto*) to just about everything. But that salsa is important. It tells you where you are and who is cooking, while also adding an explosion of flavor that makes every bite exceptional and can even make a cook famous.

The typical American experience with table salsa is, too often, a bland red tomato salsa with “bits” meant to be scooped up with chips as a first course. This chips-and-salsa routine—the *antojito americano*—is something that many Mexicans find puzzling; it is the equivalent of eating ketchup on crackers before your meal. Regardless, it is how we roll here in the Land of the Free, and I have included many of my favorite salsas-with-tostadas in this chapter, and you will find more in the *Chunky Salsas and Botanas* chapter.

The many regional variations on table salsas in Mexico are inspiring. In the heart of the country, a robust combination of tomatillos and fresh chiles is common, sometimes made with tomatoes but as often not; tomatillos are the foundation of most salsas in Mexico, and I have included a number of recipes featuring them. A table salsa in the Yucatán might be made of charred green habaneros and little else, or it may be a bowl of thin, very hot tomato sauce. Some salsas might include a little cilantro, but sometimes they taste of epazote, or no herb at all. In the north, dried chiles often go into a spicier kind of table salsa, along with tomatoes, oregano, and plenty of garlic. Some salsas are seasonal specialties, such as those made from cactus pears.

Table salsas are usually mildly spicy but not overwhelmingly so. They tend to be substantial—robustly flavored and thick. Table salsas are almost always cooked, made fresh that day (or several times a day), and ground smooth in a mortar and pestle or blender.

The great thing about table salsas, along with their fresh flavor, is their versatility. These types of salsas are the kitchen’s all-purpose flavor base for making other dishes. For example, a tomato or tomatillo salsa can be mixed with eggs or shredded chicken or added to a soup. A salsa verde is the base for a delicious pork chile verde. Spicy red chile salsa simmered with beef turns into a *carne colorada*, and so on, with uses limited only by your need and imagination. So when you make these salsas, make a lot—you’ll find yourself reaching into the refrigerator day after day, looking for that perfect something to lift your cooking from the merely great to the fantastic. As you make a favorite salsa again and again, you will find yourself adapting the basic recipe to your taste and, in time, creating your own signature salsa.

SIMPLE THINGS TO DO WITH SALSAS

You can just enjoy the salsas in this book with chips, but if you have a little left over, put it to work for you! A bit of salsa will provide an instant flavor boost to almost everything you cook. Here are some typical uses for salsas:

- Stir into cooked rice or beans.
- Make enchiladas: Dip corn tortillas into the salsa, fry briefly, fill with cheese and meat, and fold over. Top with more salsa and broil or bake.
- Use as a soup seasoning: Simmer homemade stock with chicken and vegetables, and stir in a salsa.
- Use as a topping: Spoon generously over burritos or tortas then sprinkle with cotija cheese and thick sour cream.
- Make chilaquiles: Sauté an onion, add a handful of cooked chips and the salsa of your choice (any table salsa works, though enchilada sauce or salsa verde is traditional), and cook until softened. Top with cotija cheese, sour cream, and scrambled eggs.
- Make a quick tinga (stew): Sauté onions and garlic, add shredded chicken or beef and any salsa, and simmer the meat briefly. Add chopped cilantro and a chopped chipotle in adobo.
- Make pollo en salsa: Sauté chicken breast and thigh pieces, drown in salsa, and simmer until cooked through.
- Make chile verde: Sauté diced pork or beef, add salsa verde, and simmer until cooked through.
- Use as a tamale filling: Mix shredded meat with a thick salsa. Serve more of the same salsa with the tamales.

COOK’S NOTES ON TABLE SALSAS

- The all-purpose salsas in this chapter will taste great with chips, American-style. They are useful as well as delicious in their more traditional role, adding an extra dash of flavor to almost everything you make.
- Season the salsa well, and taste and reseason any leftovers before serving (see [Seasoning](#)).
- The salsas will thicken as they sit. Save a little cooking water to thin the salsa.

SALSA QUEMADA

(Roasted Tomato and Tomatillo Salsa)

MAKES 3 CUPS

This salsa tastes good on everything and comes together very quickly. I always have it around at home, since my family eats it with chips and puts it on everything. In my SOL restaurants, we use this salsa to make our wildly popular [Black Bean Salsa Borracha](#).

Proportions of tomatoes to tomatillos can vary according to your taste, but I like to use twice as many tomatillos as tomatoes. If you prefer, you may use all tomatoes, but make sure they are pear or Roma tomatoes. The salsa will be a little sweeter. Or you can leave the tomatoes out altogether and make it with just tomatillos.

This is a dry-roasted salsa, and for best flavor the vegetables need to actually blacken. It will not taste burned, just deliciously smoky. Make it in a cast-iron pan lined with foil, turn the fan on high, and let them char! Important: Wash and dry the vegetables, but do not core or stem; if you do, the juices will run out and nothing will char.

6 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED

3 MEDIUM ROMA TOMATOES, WASHED AND DRIED

2 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

1 OR 2 LARGE SERRANO CHILES, WITH STEM(S)

¼ WHITE ONION, DICED

1 TEASPOON SALT

1 TABLESPOON MINCED CILANTRO

Serving Ideas: This salsa is fantastic on eggs, tacos, quesadillas, or grilled meats, or added to rice or soup. Use it as a base for spicy chicken tinga (stew) or a shrimp sauté.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Line a large cast-iron skillet with a piece of aluminum foil and set over high heat. Place the tomatillos, tomatoes, garlic, and chiles directly on the foil and roast without moving too often until the garlic is just softened, the chile has streaks of char and is softened,

the tomatoes have good char on all sides, and the tomatillos are soft and starting to bubble. As each is cooked, remove from the pan and set aside to cool. The garlic will be done first, and the tomatoes will take the longest. When the tomatoes are well blackened and begin to slump, return the tomatillos to the pan if need be, wrap the tomatoes and tomatillos in the foil, lift out of the pan, and set aside until cooled. Transfer to a food processor, along with any juices that run out as they cool. (Leave the black bits—they add flavor.) Peel the garlic, stem the chile, and add to the food processor along with the onion and salt. Pulse until well combined and mostly smooth—you want a bit of texture. Add the cilantro last, pulse briefly, and taste for salt again.



[Salsa Casera](#)

SALSA CASERA

(Simmered Fresh Tomato Salsa)

MAKES ABOUT 2¼ CUPS

Quick to make and infinitely useful, this very typical salsa is made in every home in every region of Mexico in some form or another. You can use salsa casera as an all-purpose table salsa, and it is ideal for all kinds of basic, home-style cooking (see [Serving Ideas](#)). I consider this a very mild salsa, but to throttle back the heat even more, substitute chiles such as Anaheim and dried guajillo for the jalapeño and chile de arbol. Conversely, double the chiles for more kick.

2 CUPS WATER

3 TEASPOONS KOSHER SALT

6 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED AND WASHED

3 MEDIUM ROMA TOMATOES

½ WHITE ONION, DICED

1 WHOLE CLOVE (OPTIONAL)

4 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC

1 JALAPEÑO, STEMMED

1 CHILE DE ARBOL, STEMMED

1 TABLESPOON MINCED CILANTRO (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: Use this salsa to make chilaquiles or a version of enchiladas called entomatadas. A dash adds flavor to homemade chicken soup or fried or scrambled eggs. Stir it into cooked beans, or sauté it with onions as a flavoring for rice. Pour it over a burrito, mix it into cooked diced nopales with a little cotija cheese, or simmer it with shredded beef and diced onions.

In a 2-quart saucepan, combine the water, 2 teaspoons of the salt, and the tomatillos, tomatoes, onion, clove, garlic, and chiles. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and cook gently for about 10 minutes, until the tomatillos are just softened. Be careful not to boil vigorously, or the ingredients may fall apart. With a slotted spoon, transfer the vegetables to a food processor, draining well. Discard the cooking liquid. Add the remaining 1 teaspoon of salt and pulse the salsa until it is very smooth, with specks of chile de arbol. Cool completely. Stir in the cilantro, then taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

YUCATECAN TOMATO SALSA

with Habanero

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

The Yucatán Peninsula has a completely unique cooking style. It began with the Mayans and developed in isolation from “the neighbor” (as the locals refer to Mexico), influenced more by France and the Caribbean than by the Spanish. The most common table salsa in the Yucatán is this plain, smooth, and unassuming tomato salsa, which usually packs quite a wallop from a habanero or two. Habaneros are used green in the Yucatán, so they are not quite as spicy as the ripe orange ones—a green habanero has about the same kick as a very spicy serrano chile. Some cooks add a few epazote leaves to the blender along with the cooked tomatoes.

1 HABANERO CHILE (GREEN, IF POSSIBLE) OR SERRANO CHILE

4 ROMA TOMATOES

1 CLOVE GARLIC

1 TEASPOON SALT
3 CUPS WATER

Serving Ideas: In addition to the typical uses listed in the preceding recipes, this salsa is excellent with any kind of tamale.

Stem the chile. Place all the ingredients in a 2-quart saucepan and bring to a fast simmer over medium-high heat. Cook until the tomatoes are very soft, about 7 minutes. Drain, reserving a little of the cooking water. Place in a blender and puree until very smooth. Add the reserved cooking water to thin the salsa if you like. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

SALSA FEA

(Charred Chunky Salsa with Red Chile)

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

El Califa is a well-regarded chain of taco restaurants in Mexico City, famous for a couple of tacos but legendary for their table salsa, which inspired this salsa. Fea means “ugly,” and this salsa is certainly that—charred, weirdly chunky, and somehow unfinished looking, like a salsa that the cook rushed through and forgot to finish. Part of the charm of this unusual salsa is its uncompromisingly rustic look; use a wooden paddle or the end of a whisk to break up the roasted vegetables into an uneven texture, rather than a machine. I love this salsa on everything.

6 CHILES DE ARBOL, STEMMED AND SEEDED

2 GUAJILLO CHILES, STEMMED, SPLIT DOWN ONE SIDE, AND SEEDED

½ CUP HOT WATER

1 POUND TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED

2 MEDIUM ROMA TOMATOES

4 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

¼ WHITE ONION, FINELY DICED

LEAVES FROM ½ BUNCH CILANTRO

2 FRESH EPAZOTE LEAVES, FINELY SHREDDED

1 TEASPOON KOSHER SALT

Serving Ideas: This salsa is great on tacos, of course, but is also excellent with grilled steaks or chicken, mixed into queso fundido, or tossed with kernels of fresh-roasted or grilled corn, lime, and a bit of cotija cheese.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Heat a large cast-iron skillet or heavy griddle over high heat. Press the chiles de arbol and guajillo chiles onto the hot skillet on both sides until blackened in places. Remove to a bowl. When they are cool, break into small (½-inch) pieces and pour the hot water over the chiles to soften them.

Line the skillet with aluminum foil and char the tomatillos, tomatoes, and garlic until well blackened and very soft. Remove the garlic. Lift the foil from the pan, fold it over the vegetables, and set aside to cool.

Peel the garlic and mince finely. Place in a serving bowl along with the cooled tomatillos and tomatoes and any juices. Add the onion, cilantro leaves, epazote, and salt. Drain the chiles and stir them. Use the end of a spatula (preferably wooden) to break up the salsa in the bowl. Chop away until it is blended but still has recognizable pieces of chile and vegetable. Add water to thin, taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

Variation: The salsa may be made as smooth as you wish in a food processor—I don’t recommend using a blender. You may also like to make this borracha by adding a teaspoon or two of blanco tequila, mezcal, or pulque.



[Northern-Style Tomato Salsa](#)

NORTHERN-STYLE TOMATO SALSA

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

This very tasty salsa is typical of northern cooking, with a touch of cumin and oregano and not too much heat—a classic “chips and salsa” salsa. The slow simmering brings out the flavors of the spices and chile. If you want it thinner, stir in a little water at the end, then adjust the seasoning.

4 ROMA TOMATOES

3 CUPS WATER

1½ TEASPOONS SALT

2 TEASPOONS VEGETABLE OIL (NOT OLIVE OIL)

2 TABLESPOONS MINCED SEEDED JALAPEÑO CHILE

3 TABLESPOONS MINCED WHITE ONION

1 SMALL CLOVE GARLIC, FINELY MINCED

½ TEASPOON WHOLE MEXICAN OREGANO

½ TEASPOON GROUND CUMIN

⅛ TEASPOON BLACK PEPPER

Serving Ideas: Use the variation of this salsa to make classic huevos rancheros or as a base for spicy charro beans—long-simmered pinto beans with chunks of meat and whole chipotles.

Place the tomatoes, water, and 1 teaspoon of the salt in a 2-quart saucepan and bring to a fast simmer over medium-high heat. Cook for about 5 minutes, then drain. Place the tomatoes in a bowl to cool and then peel, reserving all the juices.

Wipe out the saucepan then return it to the stove over medium-high heat and add the oil. Add the chile, onion, garlic, oregano, and cumin and cook, stirring, until the vegetables are soft and translucent. Add the tomatoes and their juices and break up with a potato masher or the end of a whisk until fairly smooth. Cook at a low simmer, stirring, until slightly thickened. Add the pepper and the remaining ½ teaspoon of salt, then taste and adjust seasoning as desired.

Variation: Cook an additional ¼ cup finely diced green chile (such as Anaheim or Hatch, or even green bell pepper) with the onion and garlic.

SALSA DIABLA

(Fresh Tomato Salsa with Chipotle)

MAKES ABOUT 2½ CUPS

The ever-useful chipotle in adobo is a ripe red jalapeño that is smoked, dried, and then cooked in a flavorful sauce with garlic, tomatoes, and vinegar. All those subtle tastes enhance this salsa, while a hint of epazote adds an unusual savory note. Epazote is a large-leaved herb that grows wild all over North and Central America. The strong, distinctive flavor is a little like mint and a little like oregano or marjoram.

This fresh-tasting salsa has just a bit of smoky heat from the chipotles and is an outstanding all-around table salsa. Like all great table salsas, this one is great to have on hand for other uses, especially if you like some complexity and a little heat in your food. It is particularly good with seafood.

4 ROMA TOMATOES

4 TOMATILLOS, HUSKED AND WASHED

1½ TEASPOONS KOSHER SALT

1 CHILE DE ARBOL, STEMMED AND SEEDED

LEAVES FROM 1 SPRIG EPAZOTE, OR ¼ TEASPOON MEXICAN OREGANO

2 CLOVES GARLIC

¼ WHITE ONION, CHOPPED

3 PIECES CHIPOTLE CHILES IN ADOBO

Serving Ideas: Chill the salsa then mix a generous amount with cooked shrimp, fresh lime juice, and [Pico de Gallo](#) to make a perfect coctel de camarone. Or swirl a little butter into the hot salsa (see [the variation](#)) and serve with garlic-sautéed shrimp, fish, or chicken.

In a 2-quart saucepan, combine the tomatoes, tomatillos, 1 teaspoon of the salt, chile de arbol, and the epazote. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer for 5 to 7 minutes, until the tomatoes are soft but not falling apart.

Drain in a colander. Use a spoon to lightly crush the tomatoes so they release their seeds and liquid, then drain a few minutes more. Place everything in a blender with the garlic, onion, chipotles, and remaining ½ teaspoon salt. Pulse to form a smooth puree then transfer to a serving bowl. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

Note: This salsa thickens as it stands. Stir well before serving, and taste again for seasoning.

Variation: To intensify the flavor and thicken the sauce, heat a 10-inch sauté pan over medium-high heat. Put 1 teaspoon of vegetable oil in the pan, then pour in the sauce. It will splatter a bit, so have a splatter screen ready. Cook and stir the sauce until thickened and fragrant, 3 to 5 minutes. If you stir in a little butter, it makes a lovely sauce for sautéed seafood or chicken.

SOL'S TOMATILLO CHIPOTLE SALSA

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

I've made versions of this table salsa for years, adapting the recipe a little here and there to incorporate the perfect balance of all my favorite flavors: tart tomatillos, charred tomatoes, sweet roasted garlic, and, of course, just enough heat in the form of chipotles in adobo. These smoked, dried jalapeños in sauce have a smooth, smoky kick that is completely addictive. This is one of our everyday table salsas at SOL Cocina, and we serve it with large tostada-style white corn chips dusted with two kinds of freshly ground chiles, ground pepitas, and sea salt.

ABOUT 12 TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED

2 ROMA TOMATOES (8 OUNCES)

½ WHITE ONION, PEELED BUT WITH ROOT END INTACT

6 CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

¼ CUP CHIPOTLES IN ADOBO

2 TEASPOONS SALT

½ BUNCH CILANTRO, ROUGHLY CHOPPED

Serving Ideas: This is one of the best salsas for eggs or cheese. I love it stirred into cooked rice. This salsa also makes unusually delicious chilaquiles.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Line a large cast-iron skillet or heavy griddle with aluminum foil and set over high heat.

Roast the tomatillos and tomatoes on all sides until well charred and soft, turning as few times as possible. Roast the onion, cut side down, until it begins to soften and has a few black spots, turning it several times. Roast the garlic, in skins, turning a few times, until black spots appear.

Cut the onion into several pieces. Peel the garlic. Place both in a blender along with the chipotles, roasted tomatillos and tomatoes (and any juices), and salt. Cover and let the vegetables steam for 5 minutes, to bring out the juices. Pulse to make a fairly smooth salsa with a little bit of texture. Add the cilantro and pulse a couple more times to combine.

Pour the salsa into a serving bowl. For a thinner salsa, stir in water, up to 1 cup, a little at a time. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

Note: If you use the salsa the next day, adjust the seasoning again if desired.

BLACK BEAN SALSA BORRACHA

MAKES ABOUT 3½ CUPS

This is my hugely popular table salsa from SOL Cocina—we go through buckets of it every day, served warm and sprinkled with a few toasted pepitas. The salsa is mostly scooped up on our giant tostadas, but I've seen it spooned liberally on everything else I serve, including grilled steak. It is among my most-requested recipes. The flavor is smoky, complex, and delicious, and as a bonus, the salsa is vegan and extra healthy, made with high-fiber and protein-rich black beans and roasted tomato salsa. The borracha (drunken) refers to a small amount of Mexican beer, which cooks off while the salsa simmers.

This salsa is easy to make. It tastes best if you use freshly made Salsa Quemada and your own home-cooked black beans, but canned black beans (rinsed well) work fine too.

2 TABLESPOONS VEGETABLE OIL

¼ CUP MINCED WHITE ONION

1 TABLESPOON MINCED GARLIC
1 TABLESPOON SOY BACON BITS
1 TEASPOON CRUSHED RED PEPPER FLAKES
½ CUP DARK OR AMBER MEXICAN BEER (DOS XX, BOHEMIA, OR MODELO NEGRO)
2 CUPS COOKED [BLACK BEANS](#)
10 FRESH EPAZOTE LEAVES, CHOPPED
2 CUPS [SALSA QUEMADA](#)
1½ TO 2 TEASPOONS SALT
¼ BUNCH CILANTRO, CHOPPED
TOASTED PEPITAS, FOR SERVING

Serving Ideas: Use this salsa on sopes or huaraches (masa cakes), inside a torta, alongside tamales, or as a side dish with black beans. Make the salsa thick and sprinkle with cotija cheese or crema.

In a 2-quart saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, bacon bits, and crushed chiles and cook, stirring, for several minutes, until soft and fragrant but not browned.

Add the beer, cooked black beans, and epazote leaves. Bring to a simmer, then cook slowly for about 20 minutes to combine the flavors.

Remove from the heat. Add the salsa and puree with an immersion blender until the mixture is mostly smooth but still has a little texture from the beans. Stir in the salt and cilantro. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired. Serve slightly warm with a few pepitas sprinkled on top.

Black Beans for Salsa Borracha

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

1 CUP DRIED BLACK BEANS, RINSED, DRAINED, AND PICKED OVER

8 TO 10 CUPS WATER

2 TEASPOONS KOSHER SALT

¼ TEASPOON BLACK PEPPERCORNS

½ TEASPOON CRUSHED RED PEPPER FLAKES

1 CLOVE GARLIC, CUT IN HALF

1 BAY LEAF OR ¼ TEASPOON MEXICAN OREGANO

1 SLICE WHITE ONION

Combine all the ingredients in a large pot, bring to a boil over high heat, and then reduce the heat to medium. Cover and simmer until the beans are very soft, about 3 hours, adding more water if necessary. Cool the beans in their cooking liquid. Discard the bay leaf.



[Salsa Verde](#)

SALSA VERDE

(Cooked Tomatillo Salsa with Cilantro and Jalapeño)

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

Native green tomatillos are the most widely used base for salsas throughout Mexico. They have a tart-sweet taste that greatly enhances other flavors. The most common is the green tomatillo, but cooks love to use tiny purple tomatillos de milpa (milperas), and yellow tomatillos are prized and expensive.

This typically simple salsa verde will become a staple in your repertoire. At the store, choose firm tomatillos with their papery husks intact. Before using, remove the husks and wash off the sticky film under cold running water.

6 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED AND WASHED

1 CLOVE GARLIC

½ WHITE ONION, CUT INTO 1-INCH CHUNKS

1 LARGE JALAPEÑO OR SERRANO CHILE, STEMMED AND CUT INTO 1-INCH PIECES

1 TEASPOON KOSHER SALT

10 SPRIGS CILANTRO, STEMMED

Serving Ideas: Spoon this salsa onto anything and everything—eggs, simmered or grilled meats, tacos, quesadillas, or huaraches (masa cakes) with beans and cheese. This is the salsa used to make classic chilaquiles verdes as well as elegant, rich enchiladas suizas: corn tortillas stuffed with chicken and cheese and bathed in tart salsa verde and rich Mexican-style crema. Salsa verde is also the base for chicken or pork chile verde.

Place the tomatillos, garlic, onion, jalapeño, and salt in a 1½-quart saucepan. Add just enough water to barely cover the tomatillos and quickly bring to a boil over high heat. Boil the vegetables until the tomatillos have softened and the tip of a knife can be inserted, about 5 minutes; do not overcook.

Drain off the cooking water and transfer the contents of the saucepan to a blender, along with the cilantro leaves. Pulse the salsa until smooth. You will still be able to see some seeds, along with flecks of cilantro. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.



SALSAS DE TOMATILLO DE MILPA

Tiny, purple-dappled tomatillos de milpa (field tomatillos or milperas) are the closest thing to the original wild tomatillo, a staple of Mesoamerican cooking since ancient times. They have a unique tangy-sweet taste that is much more pronounced than regular tomatillos and are prized for use in certain salsas and moles despite costing twice as much.

At the store, choose small, very firm tomatillos de milpa that are still in their husks. At home, spread them out in a single layer on a cookie sheet and dry them in a bright, airy place for several days, stirring daily, until they are mostly purple and the husks have dried to crisp, tan flakes. This ripens them and brings out their natural sweetness.

Recipes for the two main methods of cooking follow, and they produce very different results. Roasting the tomatillos de milpa produces a purplish salsa with a slight crunch and a sweet-sour edge. The simmered recipe yields a thick, olive green salsa with mouthwatering but perfectly balanced acidity and plenty of seeds.

Roasted Salsa Milpera

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

12 OUNCES TOMATILLOS DE MILPA, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED

2 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

1 LARGE SERRANO CHILE

¼ SMALL WHITE ONION

½ TEASPOON SALT

1 TEASPOON FINELY MINCED FRESH CILANTRO

Serving Ideas: Use this salsa in the same ways as [Salsa Verde](#).

Line a large cast-iron skillet with aluminum foil and set over medium heat. Roast the tomatillos, garlic, chile, and onion until just softened, turning occasionally removing each as it is done. The tomatillos should be barely soft, with a few black spots; don't overcook them.

Peel the garlic. Stem and seed the chile. Place both in a food processor along with the tomatillos, onion, and salt. Pulse to form a chunky puree. Scrape into a bowl and stir in the cilantro. The salsa will thicken as it stands. If you thin it, be sure to taste and adjust the seasoning as desired afterward.

Simmered Salsa Milpera

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

12 OUNCES TOMATILLOS DE MILPA, HUSKED AND WASHED

½ WHITE ONION, DICED

4 CLOVES GARLIC

5 BLACK PEPPERCORNS

1 WHOLE CLOVE

5 LARGE FRESH EPAZOTE LEAVES

1 TEASPOON SALT

1 SMALL JALAPEÑO, STEMMED AND SEEDED (OPTIONAL)

2½ CUPS WATER

In a 2-quart saucepan, combine the tomatillos, onion, garlic, peppercorns, clove, epazote, salt, and jalapeño. Cover with 2 cups of the water and simmer gently over medium heat until the tomatillos are just tender, about 7 minutes. Don't let them break apart.

Drain well. Place the vegetables in a blender and puree. Rinse the blender with the remaining ½ cup of water and add to the salsa. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

GREEN CACTUS PEAR SALSA VERDE

MAKES ABOUT 3½ CUPS

Beavertail cactus (nopal) is a common food in Mexico, thought to have all sorts of healthful properties and surprisingly tasty despite the formidable spines. Green (unripe) cactus fruits, or pears, taste just like the paddles. Small ones are often cooked whole in soups; larger fruits are used to make an intriguing variation on a typical salsa verde. Choose very firm, bright green cactus pears for this salsa. They must be boiled for a very long time to soften. For an authentic presentation, the hard seeds may be left in; however, I recommend straining the salsa through a sieve or food mill to remove them.

1 POUND GREEN CACTUS PEARS

6 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED AND WASHED

1 JALAPEÑO OR SERRANO CHILE, STEMMED AND SPLIT

¼ WHITE ONION, CUT INTO THICK SLICES

1 CLOVE GARLIC

3 TEASPOONS SALT, PLUS MORE TO TASTE

½ BUNCH CILANTRO, FINELY CHOPPED

Serving Ideas: Use this unique salsa as you would a typical salsa verde; it is particularly good with bean-topped huaraches or sopas (masa cakes), with pork or chicken, or spooned over crisp-fried taquitos.

Cook the cactus pears in a 2-quart saucepan with cold water to cover and 2 teaspoons of the salt. Bring to a boil, then simmer over medium heat for 30 minutes, until slightly softened (they will never become completely soft). Drain well and cool. When cool, trim off the tops and bottoms. Use a sharp knife to peel off the skin and scrape any flesh from the skin. Place the flesh, including the seeds, in a blender.

Meanwhile, in a 2-quart saucepan, place the tomatillos, chile, onion, garlic, and the remaining 1 teaspoon of salt. Barely cover with water. Bring to a boil over medium heat, then reduce the heat and simmer for 5 to 7 minutes, or until the tomatillos are just tender. Do not overcook. Drain well, and transfer to the blender.

Pulse the blender to make a smooth puree, with seeds. (The seeds will not break down in the blender, no matter how long you run it.) Pass the salsa through a food mill or coarse sieve, then stir in the cilantro. Thin with water if desired. Taste and adjust the seasonings as desired.

JOSE'S MOTHER'S RED CACTUS PEAR SALSA

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

This unusual table salsa would be considered a very special treat in Mexico. The recipe came through Jose Vargas, a great cook who has worked for SOL and Solita, off and on, for a number of years. This recipe came about when the restaurant was gifted with a case of red ripe cactus pears, and Jose offered to call his mother in Mexico to get the recipe for the cactus pear salsa he remembered from childhood. I hope his mom will forgive me for the few liberties I took with her careful directions. This is a slightly more complicated recipe than some, but the results are uncommonly good, and unlike anything else I have ever tasted.

Ripe, juicy cactus pears (called tuna) make an unusual and delicious table salsa, with a beautiful fuchsia color and sweet-tangy taste. They are seasonal, appearing in the late summer. The fruit contains a number of very hard seeds, which most Mexican cooks leave in, but they are an acquired taste. I recommend you strain them out with a coarse sieve, or push the salsa through a food mill to remove them.

10 GUAJILLO CHILES, STEMMED, SPLIT DOWN ONE SIDE, AND SEEDED

5 TO 10 CHILES DE ARBOL, STEMMED AND SEEDED

2 CUPS HOT WATER

3 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

4 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED

1 POUND RED CACTUS PEARS

1½ TEASPOONS SALT

½ CUP WATER

¼ BUNCH CILANTRO, FINELY MINCED

¼ WHITE ONION, FINELY MINCED

Serving Ideas: Because of the uniqueness of this salsa, it is best served in ways that highlight its unusual flavors: with tostadas or drizzled over enchiladas or quesadillas.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Line a large cast-iron skillet or heavy griddle with aluminum foil and set over high heat.

Open up the guajillo chiles and, working with one piece at a time, press each side firmly against the hot pan until blistered and curling; do not burn. Place in a small bowl. Toast the chiles de arbol until they begin to blacken and then add to the guajillos. Break all the chiles into 1-inch pieces, pour the hot water over them, and let soak for 30 minutes.

Lower the heat to medium-high and roast the garlic, tomatillos, and cactus pears on all sides until soft, with some black spots. Remove each as soon as it is soft and slightly charred. Peel the garlic. Set the tomatillos aside in a small bowl. The cactus pears will take the longest to cook—maybe as long as 30 minutes; when the outsides feel soft, they are done. They will never get as soft as the tomatillos.

Drain the soaked chiles and put them in a blender, along with the peeled garlic and salt and the ½ cup water. Puree the chiles on high speed, scraping down often, until smooth.

Heat a 10-inch skillet over medium heat, add the chile puree, and cook under a splatter screen until thickened, stirring often. Do not rinse the blender.

While the chiles cook, puree the tomatillos in the same blender jar. When the chile puree is thick and dry, turn off the heat and stir in the tomatillos. Scrape into a bowl. Do not rinse the blender.

Trim the bottoms of the cooled cactus pears and cut into quarters. Set a piece on a cutting board, skin side down. Using a thin, sharp knife held parallel to the board, cut off the flesh of the cactus pear as close to the skin as possible, leaving only a thin wafer of skin behind to discard. When all the pieces are skinned, put them in the blender along with any juices. Puree (the seeds will not break up), then stir into the chiles and tomatillos. Pass through a food mill or coarse sieve. Stir in the minced cilantro and onion. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired. This salsa tastes best when served cool or chilled.



[Hatch Chile Salsa](#)

HATCH CHILE SALSA

(Roasted New Mexico Chile Salsa)

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

I look forward every year to Hatch chile season, which runs from late summer through fall. Hatch chiles are a specialty of New Mexico and the surrounding states; similar chiles are grown in the bordering Mexican states, especially Chihuahua. Though they look like their mild cousins (Anaheim or California chiles), Hatch chiles must be roasted to bring out their exceptionally fine taste. If you can, choose chiles with a little orange color on the tips. Out of season, use light green Anaheim chiles instead. This is a good, all-purpose table salsa and a nice change from tomato-based salsas.

½ WHITE ONION, PEELED BUT WITH ROOT END INTACT

3 LARGE HATCH CHILES

2 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

4 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED, OR 2 ROMA TOMATOES

1½ TEASPOONS FINE KOSHER SALT

Serving Ideas: I particularly like this salsa on anything fried or with cheese (or both!) and with pork of any kind—carnitas, chicharrón, chorizo, or longaniza sausage. It's delicious with grilled meat and exceptional stirred into a bowl of tender pinto beans. If you have any leftovers, which is unlikely, you can simmer chunks of chicken and onion in the salsa to make a quick chile verde; top it with rich Mexican crema and more onions—there is nothing better.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Line a large cast-iron skillet with aluminum foil and set over high heat.

Place the onion, cut-side down, and the chiles, garlic, and tomatillos in the pan. Allow the vegetables to blacken in spots before turning. Roast evenly on all sides until the garlic is softened, the tomatillos are beginning to bubble, and the onion is beginning to soften on the outside, 5 to 7 minutes. The chiles should be cooked until they just begin to soften. Remove the vegetables as they are done and set aside to cool.

Peel the garlic and dice the onion. Place in a food processor along with the tomatillos. Peel away as much skin as possible from the chiles and remove the stems and seeds (do not wash!). Tear or cut into small pieces and add to the food processor. Add the salt and pulse a few times; the salsa should be chunky. If you wish, thin the salsa with a little water. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

Variation: Some cooks add a dash of white or apple cider vinegar to this salsa.



[Salsa Xoconostle](#)

SALSA XOCONOSTLE

with Morita Chile

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

Two exotic ingredients come together in this pretty, coral-colored salsa, which pairs the wicked smoky heat of dried morita chiles with the fruity, tart flavor of the xoconostle cactus pear. Xoconostle (cho-ko-NOST-ley) are small, pale pink and green fruit, delicately frosted with white. They have a lovely tangy/sour taste, rather like tamarind, and are more expensive than the common red cactus pear. Buy very firm and fresh-looking fruit, which is available during the summer at Mexican markets. The morita chile is a smoked, dried serrano chile. It is quite spicy and lightly smoky, with a distinct berry taste. You may substitute chile de arbol or even a fresh serrano chile, though the color won't be as pretty.

1 SMALL MORITA CHILE OR 5 CHILES DE ARBOL, STEMMED AND SEEDED

1 POUND XOCONOSTLE CACTUS

2 CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

½ TEASPOON SALT

¼ CUP WATER

Serving Ideas: This salsa is for special occasions. Highlight the exotic nature of the salsa by serving it as a simple botana (snack), with tostadas, or drizzled over jicama and sliced oranges. With its wonderful combination of smoke, fruit, and heat, it would make an interesting addition to a tart, icy margarita made with a touch of agave nectar and lots of fresh-squeezed lime.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Line a large cast-iron skillet or heavy skillet with aluminum foil and set over medium heat. Toast the dried chile, pressing down firmly, until blistered but not burned. Remove the stem.

Slowly roast the cactus pears and garlic, turning often. Remove the garlic when it has black spots and has begun to soften. Cool, peel, and place in a blender.

Cook the cactus pears for about 20 minutes, turning often, until the outside yields slightly to pressure; the inside will remain firm. Cool, then trim the ends, quarter, and place skin down on a cutting board. With a small knife held parallel to the board, cut carefully toward you to skin the cactus pear. Discard the skin and place the flesh in the blender. Add the chile, salt, and water. Pulse until the salsa is a smooth consistency, with seeds. (The seeds will not break down no matter how long you run the blender.)

In Mexico, the hard seeds are left in the salsa, but I recommend you strain them out. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired, though I tend to use less salt in this salsa.

Variation: Add lime juice to bring out the fruit's sweetness.





One day while testing recipes for this chapter, I dropped a habanero on the floor at my feet. Before I could stop him, Beauregard (my nine-pound Chihuahua, who has a problem with impulse control) pounced and gobbled the whole chile, stem and all. He then trotted off, without so much as a flick of his oversized ears, and curled up for a nap. The moral of this tale is that “hot” is, at best, a relative description. A salsa that makes you cry might not even register for your dining partner.

Some chile lovers are addicted only to the endorphin rush brought on by extreme capsaicin consumption and care little about actual taste. “Mine is hotter than yours” are fighting words in the tiny, macho world of competitive chile growing, eating, and hot sauce making. Even so, I believe it takes more culinary skill to tease out flavors with the judicious use of spicy heat.

Mexican cooking is based on mastery of the chile, in both its fresh and its dried forms. In most recipes, heat is only one subtle part of a balanced whole, used like salt or acidity to enhance other flavors. It is unheard of to intentionally make a whole dish inedibly spicy. Everyone knows that extra heat, if desired, may be added in the form of a separate hot salsa.

It is these fiery hot, add-to-taste salsas that are explored in this chapter. Hot salsas should be used in small quantities to enhance other foods, much as you would use salt. Adding a few drops of the [Salsa de Chile Pequin](#) and a squeeze of lime to a Sinaloa-style shrimp soup lifts it from pretty good into the sublime, with the heat of the chiles playing off the sweetness of the shrimp, all balanced by the acidity of the lime. As you will note in all these recipes, very hot chiles play extremely well with lime, acidity, and salt.

All hot salsas are based on chiles, fresh or dried, alone or in various combinations. Each type of chile brings its own level of heat as well as a distinct complex of other flavors—fruity, herbal, bitter—that underlie the heat. A great hot sauce will showcase the heat and the unique flavor and nature of the starring chile.

In addition to their flavor and heat, chiles affect the palate and the body, with each type acting in slightly different ways. For example, orange (ripe) habaneros have a lingering heat that makes your lips burn and obliterates all ability to taste for several minutes; ghost chiles slowly bring on a minutes-long full-body sweat; serranos have a sharp, grassy heat that dissipates quickly.

This chapter includes salsas made with common dried chiles and those based on fresh chiles, such as serrano, habanero, and manzana. Dried chile salsas have the advantage of being (somewhat) predictably spicy, while the heat level of a fresh chile may vary depending on the time of year and where it was grown; chiles grown in hot climates or at high altitudes will be hotter than the same variety grown elsewhere.

This chapter barely scratches the surface of hot sauce possibilities; there are many new and even hotter chiles out there to play with, and I wish you well! I have suggested a relative heat ranking for the salsas within this chapter, but remember, my 5 may be your 10, or vice versa. Also, as previously noted, the heat of chiles will vary. Assume that any salsa in this chapter will be very hot, possibly extremely hot or even way too hot.

COOK’S NOTES ON HOT SAUCES

- Dried chiles are grown all over the world, with wide variations in quality, heat, and character. Whenever possible, please source and use Mexican-grown chiles for the best flavor and predictable results.
- Handle chiles with care. Wear disposable gloves, and take care not to touch your eyes (or anything else you care about, such as children or attentive dogs). Make sure your work area is well ventilated; the fumes from toasting or blackening chiles can be very strong. I often blacken chiles on my outdoor gas grill while standing upwind. Thoroughly scrub knives and cutting boards after use.
- Seasoning is the last essential step with each of these salsas. In order to resonate with food, and stand up to its own heat, a salsa’s salt and acidity need to be taken right to the edge. When you taste it, the sauce should seem to be almost over seasoned. (After all, you won’t be eating it off a spoon ... will you?) Balance is the key. Heat is well complemented by salt, acidity (lime, sour orange, or vinegar), sweetness, and sometimes the judicious use of alcohol as a buffer. Taste your salsa when it is done, then fearlessly make it sharp with acidity (usually vinegar) and bump up the salt to enhance the chile’s other flavors.
- Most salsas can be modified to your comfort level. If you like the flavor of a salsa but it is just too darned hot, next time try removing some or all of seeds and ribs; this will diminish the heat while preserving the nature of the salsa. If it is still too hot, try dropping down the scale, for example, substituting a less spicy jalapeño for a habanero, or a dried California chile for a guajillo.



[Habanero Salsa](#)

HABANERO SALSA

Heat: 8+

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

One of my “secret” salsas from SOL Cocina, this salsa is so hot that we don’t dare put it on the table for fear a child will stick a chip in it. Instead, guests ask the waiter for “something hotter” and we fix them up with this fiery, bright orange salsa, which is plenty hot enough for all but the most masochistic. Tellingly, it is a favorite of the kitchen crew.

Habanero chiles bring an intense lingering heat to everything they touch—be sure to wear gloves when handling them. The small amounts of agave nectar, vinegar, and salt enhance the fruity nature of the chile. Habaneros will set your lips on fire, and too much will ruin your palate, so use it in small drops. The salsa will keep, refrigerated, for a week to 10 days. Be sure to stir before use and reseason if necessary.

2 TEASPOONS VEGETABLE OIL

¼ CUP DICED WHITE ONION

2 CLOVES GARLIC

2 CUPS WATER

2 TEASPOONS SALT

1 ROMA TOMATO, CHOPPED

8 FRESH HABANERO, STEMMED CHILES

1 TABLESPOON WHITE VINEGAR

1 TABLESPOON AGAVE NECTAR

Serving Ideas: The salsa has a natural affinity with all kinds of seafood, as well as anything made with lots of fresh lime, so shrimp coctel, ceviche, and fish soups are natural pairings. It’s unusual and delicious with fruit, especially orange or watermelon. The heat and salt work wonders with starchy, fried, or salty foods, such as jicama, onion rings, or fried potatoes.

In a 1-quart saucepan, heat the oil and sauté the onion and garlic until just softened. Add the water, salt, tomato, and habaneros and simmer for 12 to 15 minutes, until the chiles are soft. Transfer to a blender, add the vinegar and agave nectar, and blend until fairly smooth, with a little texture.

Variation: If this salsa is too hot, reduce the number of habaneros by half next time.

EVIL GREEN HOT SAUCE

Heat: 8

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

This green salsa is one of the house-made hot salsas I serve at my Solita restaurants. With its combination of serrano and habanero chiles, it has a heat level well into the realm of the diabolical, but it is a favorite of guests and cooks alike.

8 TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND QUARTERED

¼ WHITE ONION, DICED

3 CLOVES GARLIC

4 HABANERO CHILES, STEMMED

2 SERRANO CHILES, STEMMED AND SPLIT

4 TEASPOONS SALT

¼ BUNCH CILANTRO, LOWER STEMS REMOVED, ROUGHLY CHOPPED

3 TABLESPOONS WHITE VINEGAR

Serving Ideas: Use this sauce in small droplets on enchiladas, or drizzle it on bubbling queso fundido to complement the richness of the melted cheeses. It is also sensational on chicharrón—those addictive bits of crunchy pork skin—and anything simmered or fried.

Place the tomatillos, onion, garlic, and chiles in a 2-quart saucepan. Barely cover with water and add the salt. Bring to a simmer and cook until the tomatillos are soft but not falling apart, about 7 minutes. Turn off the heat and cool for 5 minutes, then transfer the vegetables and their cooking liquid to a blender. Add the cilantro and vinegar and puree until completely smooth. Thin with a small amount of water if you wish; then taste and adjust the seasoning with vinegar and salt.

VOLCANO SALSA

(Roasted Green Chile Salsa) Heat: 6

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

Chiles aren't just about heat; each chile also has its own distinct flavor. Both elements are found in this deliciously smoky, spicy, dark green salsa made of roasted green chiles, jalapeños, and serranos. I named this salsa to honor the volcano Popocatepetl, which looms over Mexico City, but variations on this kind of salsa can be found everywhere in Mexico. This recipe is one of the easiest to modify for heat: just reduce the number of hot chiles and increase the amount of mild green Anaheim chiles. It will still be delicious. Volcano Salsa is best made fresh and served warm or at room temperature.

6 LARGE SERRANO CHILES

4 JALAPEÑO CHILES

2 ANAHEIM CHILES

4 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED

4 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

¼ WHITE ONION, DICED

1 TEASPOON SALT

½ TO ¾ CUP WATER

1 TEASPOON WHITE VINEGAR (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: This is fantastic on steaks, fried fish tacos, and even grilled sausages and hamburgers.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Line a large cast-iron skillet or heavy griddle with aluminum foil and set over high heat. Roast the chiles, tomatillos, and garlic until blackened on all sides but still somewhat firm. Remove from the heat and let cool. Remove the stems from the serranos and jalapeños (do not remove the seeds). Stem and seed the Anaheim chiles. Peel the garlic.

Place the roasted vegetables in a food processor along with the onion and salt and pulse until smooth but not pureed. Place in a serving bowl and stir in ½ cup of the water, adding more if needed. (The sauce should be thick, but not so thick that a spoon stands up in it.) Stir in the vinegar.

Taste and adjust the seasoning, adding more salt as desired; I like this salsa to be highly seasoned.

SALSA DE CHILE MANZANA

Heat: 8+

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

This unusual salsa is made with the manzana chile, which looks like a small golden bell pepper—innocent and rather attractive. The flesh of the manzana is thick yet soft, distinguished by a round bump around its tough stem and a ball of large triangular seeds that are as black as coal, as if they had been burned up by the chile's heat. It is used in central Mexico to make exquisitely flavored salsas and has an edge of fruitiness and searing heat that rivals that of the habanero. When I make this salsa, I set aside a few of those unusual black seeds to sprinkle on top of the salsa, which is quite lovely with flecks of gold and pink and green mixed with the black seeds. This salsa is best used fresh.

3 CUPS WATER

2½ TEASPOONS SEA SALT

2 LARGE ROMA TOMATOES

2 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED AND WASHED

1 LARGE CHILE MANZANA

2 CLOVES GARLIC

3 SPRIGS CILANTRO, FINELY MINCED

1 TABLESPOON FINELY MINCED WHITE ONION (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: I like this on anything with melted cheese, such as quesadillas; with pork carnitas; or stirred into a chicken sopa Azteca with tortillas, avocado, chicken, and cheese. Mix a little with diced mango and serve on grilled fish.

Bring the water and 2 teaspoons of the salt to a boil in a saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the tomatoes and tomatillos and boil for 3 minutes. Remove the tomatoes with a slotted spoon and let cool. Simmer the tomatillos for 2 minutes longer, or until tender but not falling apart. Transfer to a food processor with a slotted spoon. Reserve the cooking water, in case it is needed to thin the salsa. Peel the tomatoes and add to the food processor.

Use tongs to hold the manzana chile directly in the flames of a gas burner, turning until it is blistered all over. (If you don't have a gas range, the chile can either be cooked in a dry, foil-lined cast-iron pan, as for the [Hatch Chile Salsa](#)—or set very close to a preheated electric broiler and broiled on all sides.) Wrap in a paper towel and cool for a few minutes. Wearing gloves, use the paper towel to rub off as much of the skin as possible. Carefully open the chile and remove the seeds. Set a few aside for garnish, if you like. Use a small knife to remove the tough stem from the chile. Add the flesh to the food processor, along with the garlic and the remaining ½ teaspoon of salt.

Pulse until the salsa has a pleasing texture then scrape into a serving bowl. Stir in the cilantro and onion, then taste for salt—you may want to add as much as ½ teaspoon more, since salt brings out the fruity nature of the chile. Scatter the black seeds over the top of the salsa just before serving.

Variation: Add 1 teaspoon of apple cider vinegar or a squeeze of lime juice to the finished salsa.



[Chile Güero Salsa](#)

CHILE GÜERO SALSA

(Salsa Amarilla) Heat: 5

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

This salsa reminds me of late summer and the height of chile season, when spicy small peppers such as pale yellow güero chiles are at their peak of heat and flavor, and a quick, simple salsa like this can even be made using an outdoor grill. Güero means light colored, or fair. These chiles have their own distinctive citrusy tangy flavor, plus a heat level that falls somewhere between a jalapeño and a serrano. The finished salsa is thick and light green, speckled with bits of charred skin. This salsa is best served fresh and warm.

6 LARGE GÜERO CHILES

4 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED

2 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

¼ CUP WATER

1 TEASPOON SALT

Serving Ideas: This salsa is excellent on grilled meats, tacos, carnitas, and quesadillas.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Line a large cast-iron skillet with aluminum foil and set over high heat. Roast the chiles, tomatillos, and unpeeled garlic on all sides until soft and blackened in places, turning occasionally. Remove each vegetable from the pan as it is cooked and set aside to cool.

Peel the garlic. Split the chiles along one side and remove the stems and seeds. Place the chiles in a food processor along with the tomatillos, garlic, water, and salt, and pulse to form a fairly smooth salsa with some texture. Scrape into a bowl. Thin the salsa with a bit of water if you wish. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

CHARRED CHILE DE ARBOL SALSA

Heat: 7

MAKES ABOUT 3½ CUPS

Long and narrow, with many seeds, the chile de arbol attacks the tongue with quick stabbing heat, which then just as quickly dissipates. This very traditional salsa uses toasted or blackened chiles de arbol to add a smoky depth of flavor. I suggest you do the blackening step in a well-ventilated area; the fumes are very strong. If this is not possible or if you are very sensitive to chiles, omit the blackening step and simply sauté the chiles with the other vegetables; the salsa will still taste great. To boost the heat of the salsa, add the optional habaneros. It will keep in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

1 ROUNDED CUP (FIRMLY PACKED) STEMMED CHILES DE ARBOL

2 TABLESPOONS VEGETABLE OIL

¼ WHITE ONION, CUT INTO 1-INCH PIECES

6 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC

2 ROMA TOMATOES, CUT INTO QUARTERS

2 HABANERO CHILES, STEMMED (OPTIONAL)

2 CUPS WATER

1 TO 2 TABLESPOONS SEA SALT

1 TO 2 TABLESPOONS WHITE VINEGAR

Serving Ideas: This is a great all-purpose (very) hot sauce that is good on everything, and a little goes a long way. It is a must on beer-battered fish or shrimp tacos, seafood cocktail, and ceviches.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Set a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chiles de arbol and cook and stir for several minutes, until they are blackened in spots.

Quickly add the oil, onion, and garlic and cook, stirring often, until the onion is golden. Add the tomatoes, habanero chiles, water, and 1 tablespoon of the salt. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Turn off the heat and let cool for 30 minutes.

Transfer the contents of the skillet to a blender along with the vinegar and puree to make a smooth sauce with flecks of black. Add a small amount of water to thin the sauce, then taste and adjust the salt and vinegar as desired. Although the salsa will be very spicy, it should also be highly seasoned with salt and vinegar to balance the heat.

FRUITY MORITA AND ANCHO CHILE SALSA

Heat: 5

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

Two dried chiles with berry flavors form the base of this salsa, which has a near perfect balance of fruit, complex flavors, and heat. The morita chile is a dried serrano chile. Its unique combination of natural sweetness and heat tastes like a smoky strawberry with an intense punch of heat, and is wonderfully complemented by the fruity, rich flavor of the ancho chile, a handful of raisins, and other savory elements. This salsa keeps well, covered and refrigerated, for up to 2 weeks.

3 LARGE ANCHO CHILES

4 MORITA CHILES

2 TABLESPOONS VEGETABLE OIL

½ WHITE ONION, DICED

4 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, SLICED

¼ CUP SEEDLESS RAISINS

1 ROMA TOMATO, CUT INTO 8 PIECES

1 MEDIUM TOMATILLO, HUSKED, WASHED, AND CUT INTO 6 PIECES

3 CUPS WATER

2 TEASPOONS SALT

1 TEASPOON WHOLE MEXICAN OREGANO

5 BLACK PEPPERCORNS

Serving Ideas: This unusual salsa is perfect for pork but would go just as well on roast duck or lamb, smoked turkey dark meat, or as a condiment with a selection of buttery cheeses and hard sausage.

Wearing gloves, stem and split the ancho chiles and remove the seeds. Stem the morita chiles. Tear all the chiles into small pieces.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Heat the oil in a heavy sauté pan over heat. Add the chiles and cook, stirring, until fragrant and soft. Add the onion, garlic, and raisins and cook and stir for several more minutes, until the onion is soft. Add the tomato, tomatillo, water, salt, oregano, and peppercorns. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook until the tomatoes are very tender, about 10 minutes. Cool, then transfer to a blender. Puree until smooth. Add more water to thin, if you wish. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

Note: If the salsa seems too sweet, you may opt to add a teaspoon or two of white vinegar. On the other hand, you may want to enhance the sweetness of the salsa by adding a small amount of agave nectar, but no more than 1 tablespoon. Always taste for salt before serving.



[Chipotle Chile and Garlic Salsa](#)

CHIPOTLE CHILE AND GARLIC SALSA

Heat: 6

MAKES ABOUT 3½ CUPS

Chiles mecos, best known as chipotles, are smoke-dried ripe jalapeños. This salsa is smoky, with a subtle garlic kick and medium heat, and it's good with anything and everything. You can adjust the amount and character of the garlic in this salsa. As the recipe is written, the cooked garlic will have a mellow, retiring character in the salsa, while substituting raw garlic would give it a definite edge. Important: Be patient while toasting these chiles. Cook them slowly, because they burn easily. Be sure to work in a well-ventilated area.

6 LARGE DRIED CHIPOTLES (CHILES MECOS), STEMMED

3 CUPS WATER

2½ TEASPOONS SEA SALT

1 ROMA TOMATO

4 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC

¼ WHITE ONION, DICED

2 TEASPOONS WHITE VINEGAR

Serving Ideas: The smoky chipotle heat is great with grilled foods—vegetables, fish, steak, or chicken. Mix with an equal amount of mayonnaise or butter to make a baste for grilled corn.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Set a large cast-iron skillet or heavy griddle over medium heat. Wearing gloves, remove the stems from the chipotles, split down one side, and remove the seeds (see [Note](#)).

Toast the dried chipotles slowly, turning often and pressing down with tongs, until they begin to blacken in spots. Remove and let cool.

Meanwhile, bring the water and salt to a boil in a 1-quart saucepan. Add the tomato, garlic, and onion, and cook for 1 minute. Remove the tomato with a slotted spoon, then peel and place in a blender. Remove the garlic and onion from the pan with a slotted spoon and add to the blender, reserving the cooking liquid.

Soak the toasted chipotles for 20 minutes in the reserved cooking liquid, then strain them and add to the blender. Puree until smooth. Do not strain.

Place in a bowl and stir in the vinegar. Keep the sauce thick for spooning, or thin with water. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired, adding more salt and vinegar if necessary.

Note: To make the salsa hotter, reserve the seeds, blacken them in a dry pan, add to the soaking water, and puree with the rest of the ingredients.

GHOST CHILE SALSA “VIPER”

(“Gasolina”) Heat: 8

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

I was fascinated by this pitch-black salsa the first time I tasted it, at the wonderful El Bajío restaurant in Mexico City. I knew only that it was a traditional salsa from the south, made with blackened chipotle chiles. I made many attempts to duplicate the salsa, but it still wasn't hot enough for our customers. I took the plunge and added a few dried bhut jolokia (Indian ghost chile, at the time the hottest chile on earth) and a couple of habaneros, which did the trick.

The heat of the resulting sauce will creep up on you. The burnt-black chiles give flavor (and oddly, much of the sweetness) to this salsa, while the habaneros burn and the ghost chiles bring on a full-body sweat. Making this salsa is quite a project, but definitely worth it. I strongly suggest that you blacken the chiles away from other people, preferably outside in a pan on an outdoor grill. The choking fumes have cleared my kitchen more than once.

10 DRIED CHIPOTLES

2 TABLESPOONS VEGETABLE OIL

1 WHITE ONION, DICED

2 HABANERO CHILES, STEMMED

4 DRIED GHOST CHILES,* STEMMED
2 CUPS WATER
¼ CUP AGAVE SYRUP
¼ CUP WHITE WINE VINEGAR
3 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC
2 TEASPOONS SALT
2 TABLESPOONS BLANCO TEQUILA

Serving Ideas: This thick, all-purpose hot sauce is on the sweet side, and has a particular affinity for chicken and cheese. But some people put it on everything.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Spread the dried chipotles in an even layer on a baking sheet and bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until lightly browned. Cool the chiles and remove the stems.

Heat a cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat and toast the chipotles on all sides, pressing down gently, until as black as possible. The chiles should be more than half black. (Yes, black.) Set aside to cool, then crumble into a blender, including the seeds.

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a sauté pan over medium heat and cook the onion, habaneros, and ghost chiles slowly, stirring often, until the onion is soft, dark golden brown, and well caramelized. Add the contents of the pan to the blender, along with the water, agave nectar, vinegar, garlic, and salt. Puree for 2 minutes, scraping down the sides once or twice, until perfectly smooth.

Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil in a heavy, 2-quart saucepan over medium heat. Add the salsa from the blender. (It may splatter, which is why you are using a saucepan instead of a sauté pan.) Add a little more water to the blender to rinse it out, then pour the water into the pan. Cook the salsa, stirring often, for 7 to 10 minutes, until it is a dark purple or black color and quite thick.

Remove from the heat, let cool, and add the tequila. The finished salsa should have the same consistency as ketchup. Taste the salsa for the correct balance of sweetness, heat, and vinegar. It should taste very spicy, with a hint of a sweet-and-sour finish.

* Ghost chiles (bhut jolokia) are sold dried in small packages in South Asian markets or in the specialty produce sections at well-stocked supermarkets. The Asian-grown chiles will be much hotter than those grown elsewhere.

SALSA DE CHILE PEQUÍN

Heat: 8+

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

The smaller the chile, the hotter, so the tiny chile pequín is bound to be a little monster, with a searing, lingering heat. This is definitely not a dipping salsa. Chiles pequín are widely used in northwest Mexico, especially in Sinaloa along the Pacific Coast around Mazatlán and Culiacán, where cooks will season a soup, stew, or salsa with just a couple of chiles. As is so often the case, a number of different small chiles—golden brown spheres or arrow-shaped—might be sold under the names of pequín, chiltepin, or tepín. A hot sauce made entirely from pequín chiles is a bright orange color and extremely hot. Very small drops will give all the heat you could ever want. If the salsa is just too darned hot, next time reduce the amount of chiles pequín in the salsa by half, and add another tomato. Refrigerated, this salsa seems to keep almost indefinitely.

2 TEASPOONS VEGETABLE OIL

¼ CUP DICED WHITE ONION

3 CLOVES GARLIC

1¾ CUPS WATER

1½ TEASPOONS SALT

¼ CUP DRIED CHILES PEQUÍN OR TEPÍN

1 ROMA TOMATO

½ TEASPOON WHITE VINEGAR

Serving Ideas: This is a classic salsa for fish soups, seafood coctel, ceviches, raw oysters, and fish tacos.

Heat the oil in a 1-quart saucepan and sauté the onion and garlic until softened. Add the water and salt. Bring to a boil, then add the chiles and tomato. Simmer for 7 minutes.

Remove the tomato, peel it, and place in a blender along with the contents of the pan. Puree until perfectly smooth, then stir in the vinegar. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

AGUACHILE VERDE

(Salsa for Raw Seafood) Heat: 5

MAKES ABOUT ¾ CUP, ENOUGH FOR 4 OUNCES OF SEAFOOD

Aguachile verde is a beautiful, bright green salsa used to make a kind of quick ceviche with raw seafood such as fresh-caught shrimp, sliced meaty scallops, or slivers of raw fish (tiradito). Spicy, tart, fresh-flavored, and in-your-face raw, aguachile verde is a powerful experience. It should be made and consumed immediately.

1 MEDIUM TOMATILLO, HUSKED, WASHED, AND QUARTERED

1 SERRANO CHILE, STEMMED

¼ TO ½ TEASPOON SALT

JUICE OF 1 LIME

JUICE OF 1 LEMON

1 TABLESPOON MINCED CILANTRO

Serving Ideas: The basic agauachile recipe is given at the end of this recipe, but you can also stir the salsa into your favorite ceviche, or spoon it onto any kind of seafood taco or tostada. It's especially nice on grilled fish.

Combine all the ingredients in a blender and pulse until a smooth, bright green sauce is formed. Taste for seasoning; the aguachile verde should be spicy hot, citrusy, and highly seasoned.

To make an aguachile: Mix the finished salsa with an equal quantity of thinly sliced raw or lightly cooked shrimp, fish, or scallops, and a bit of shredded red onion and cucumber. Top with diced avocado and a drizzle of extra-virgin Baja California olive oil, and pile onto crisp tostadas to eat.

FOUR MAYAN HOT SALSAS

(for Seafood) Heat: 5

The Yucatán Peninsula has some of the finest seafood in the world. The following recipes are typically served alongside fish and shrimp preparations, but they are just as good on other foods, such as pork pibil. The juice of the tart and fragrant lima agria would be used in the Yucatán—it tastes a bit like a very sour lime, with a hint of bitter orange—but Key limes or Mexican limes are a perfectly acceptable substitute. Green habaneros are the chile of choice for these salsas, but they can be difficult to find, so I have suggested substitutions. If a finished salsa seems too sweet, add a couple drops of white vinegar—these salsas are supposed to be zingy.

Serving Ideas: Use these condiments generously on fried fish, fish or shrimp tacos, seafood coctel, ceviches, raw oysters, seafood tostadas, and pork pibil.

1 Lime and Chiles

A simple way to add zip to anything made with seafood, this sauce will get hotter as it sits. MAKES ABOUT ¼ CUP

⅓ cup fresh-squeezed lime juice

1 small green habanero chile, 2 serrano chiles, or 3 Thai bird chiles, sliced paper-thin, with seeds

Stir all the ingredients together in a small bowl and let stand for 30 minutes or so. Drizzle small spoonfuls of the lime juice on your food, avoiding the chiles if possible.

2 Col (Cabbage)

Col adds crunch as well as heat. It's fantastic on fish tacos, of course, but try stirring a bit into a serving of shrimp ceviche or substituting it for shredded lettuce on any tostada. MAKES ABOUT ½ CUP

1 cup finely chopped green cabbage

¼ cup fresh-squeezed lime juice or sour orange juice

1 teaspoon white vinegar

¼ teaspoon sea salt or kosher salt

1 green habanero chile, or 2 serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped

Stir all the ingredients together in a small bowl. Use immediately, or let stand for 30 minutes to soften the cabbage.

3 Xni-Pec

This sauce is a simple way to add zip to anything made with seafood. It will get hotter as it sits. MAKES ABOUT ⅓ CUP

½ cup minced white onion

½ cup diced Roma tomato

½ cup roughly chopped cilantro leaves

1 green habanero chile, or 2 serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and minced

Juice of 2 limes (about ¼ cup)

½ to 1 teaspoon white vinegar

½ to 1 teaspoon sea salt

Combine all the ingredients in a small bowl and use very fresh. You can adjust the proportion of onion and tomato to your liking.

4 Habanero & Garlic Salsa

The hottest of the group, this salsa can be roasted instead of simmered. Put it in a food processor with a little water to thin. MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

6 green habanero, or 5 small serrano chiles plus 1 habanero chile, stemmed

2 cups water

¼ cup diced white onion

2 large cloves garlic

1 teaspoon salt

½ to 1 teaspoon white vinegar

In a saucepan over medium heat, simmer the habaneros in the water until tender, about 7 minutes. Puree in a blender with the cooking liquid, onion, garlic, salt, and vinegar.





Dried chiles are one of the foundations of Mexico's ancient cuisine. When green chiles are allowed to ripen fully and dry, a whole complex of other flavors blooms into being. It is these ripe, dried chiles that are used to make the vast array of chile salsas and moles that are the pride of Mexican cuisine.

This chapter is designed to ease you into the art of mole by first making simpler salsas, such as enchilada sauce. This will acquaint you with the basics of chile handling and some of the specific steps and techniques used in both the salsas and the moles, such as frying the salsa. Through the chapter, the recipes become more and more complex until you are ready to tackle your first mole.

The difference between a dried chile salsa and a mole lies mostly in the number of ingredients and steps involved. A basic chile sauce can be made from start to finish in a half hour and has only a very few ingredients, whereas a classic mole may take you the better part of an afternoon to make. I should point out here that "simple" is not the same as "easy." The simpler the recipe, the more important the technique. The fewer the ingredients, the more important it is to handle them correctly. You will learn a great deal from working with the chiles in the simpler salsas.

Mole recipes are lengthy, with many ingredients, but they are not difficult. A mole is built one step at a time. The various techniques bring out the specific flavors of a group of ingredients, then that step is set aside until the end, when all those little bowls of roasted, toasted, ground, and pureed ingredients are simmered together to create a flavor that is greater than the sum of its parts.

I have to admit I didn't really "get" moles for a long time, or understand why such reverence is attached to them. Most restaurant moles I tasted, even in Mexico, were weak disappointments, and the stuff in jars is just awful. Then I taught myself to make mole slowly and painstakingly, from scratch. I learned how to handle dried chiles to get flavor instead of bitterness, and I learned that each careful step, each long session of soaking, grinding, pureeing, frying, and stirring, turns a hard-won mole into a triumph. What amazes me now is the skill, the culinary brilliance, of those cooks of ancient Mexico, who created this using the simplest of ingredients, a couple of rocks (moli means "ground paste"), and a clay pot.

Watch the changes in the ingredients as they are transformed by you. Don't rush your mole. Toast the chiles slowly, and sauté them over medium heat. The point is this: take the time to pay attention with your senses to every ingredient and every step. This will make you a more observant cook, and a better one.

SIMPLEST ENCHILADA SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

I love listening to my older Mexican friends recount stories about growing up in tiny country villages in the outlying rural states of Mexico, where daily life has changed very little over the centuries. In those days, most food was grown in the family milpa (field), while children and elders foraged in the surrounding countryside for wild herbs and greens, or even insects like chapulines (grasshoppers) to round out meals. Everyday cooking was extremely basic, embodying the purity and simplicity that is at the heart of Mexican cooking—enchiladas, for example, would simply be corn tortillas dipped in a salsa of dried chiles, rolled up with a tiny sprinkle of gamy cotija cheese, and eaten with beans. But however you like your enchiladas—simple or elaborately stuffed with meat and cheese, drenched in sauce, and smothered with more cheese and cream—this easy salsa will bring that same true taste to your plate, wherever you are. Leftovers may be frozen.

2 ANCHO CHILES

6 GUAJILLO OR DRIED CALIFORNIA CHILES

3 CUPS HOT WATER

2 CLOVES GARLIC

1 TEASPOON SALT

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH LARD OR VEGETABLE OIL

1½ TABLESPOONS VERY FINELY MINCED WHITE ONION

Serving Ideas: This is a true all-purpose salsa. It is the classic sauce for enchiladas of all types: cheese, chicken, and especially beef. It is also used to make chilaquiles, cooked into beans, stirred into nopalitos (prickly pears), and added to many types of soups and stews. Mixed with shredded meats, it is a tamale filling and sauce. The uses are infinite.

Heat a large cast-iron skillet over high heat. Remove the stems from the chiles, cut a slit up one side of each, and remove the seeds. Open up flat. One at a time, press the opened chiles flat onto the hot skillet until blistered and light brown. Turn and repeat, being careful not to burn.

Place the chiles in a small, deep bowl and add 2 cups of the hot water. Soak the chiles for 45 minutes, occasionally pressing them down into the water. Place the chiles and soaking liquid in a blender. Add the garlic and salt and run the blender on high speed for 2 to 3 minutes, until very smooth.

In a 2-quart saucepan, heat the lard over medium heat. Add the onion and cook and stir until soft. Add the chiles. It will splatter, so have a lid or splatter screen ready. Fry the sauce for 7 minutes, stirring occasionally. Rinse the blender with the remaining 1 cup of hot water, add it to the salsa, and simmer for 10 minutes. If desired, strain through a food mill or coarse sieve. I like the salsa to be thick enough to cling, but you may thin with more water if desired.

GUAJILLO CHILE SALSA WITH TOMATO

MAKES ABOUT 2½ CUPS

This bright red variation on enchilada sauce uses only guajillo chiles, which have an almost berrylike flavor, and tomatoes. This salsa will be "one note" and slightly sweeter than the preceding recipe and can be mildly spicy. The chiles should be shiny-skinned, flexible, and leathery and still look and smell fresh. Dry, crumbly chiles are old and will be bitter. It is essential to strain this sauce—it changes the flavor completely. Go easy on the salt and let the natural chile sweetness shine through.

2 ROMA TOMATOES, QUARTERED

¼ WHITE ONION, SLICED

3 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC

2 TEASPOONS SALT

3¼ CUPS WATER OR STOCK

6 LARGE GUAJILLO OR DRIED CALIFORNIA CHILES

½ TEASPOON WHOLE MEXICAN OREGANO

Serving Ideas: In addition to enchiladas, this salsa may be used as a sauce for shredded beef or chicken or as a table salsa. It is delicious stirred into beans or as a base for a simple masa-thickened soup.

Place the tomatoes, onion, garlic, salt, and 2 cups of the water in a 2-quart saucepan. Bring to a simmer and cook until the tomatoes are just soft, about 4 minutes. Remove the tomatoes with a slotted spoon, reserving the water, and turn off the heat.

Heat a large cast-iron skillet over high heat. Remove the stems from the chiles, cut a slit up one side of each, and remove the seeds. Open up flat. One at a time, press the opened chiles flat onto the hot skillet until blistered and light brown. Turn and repeat, being careful not to burn. As each is toasted, add it to the saucepan and press down into the hot liquid. Soak for 20 minutes.

Drain thoroughly. Place the tomatoes and the contents of the saucepan in a blender, along with the oregano and 1 cup of the remaining water, and puree for several minutes until completely smooth. Strain the sauce through a sieve or food mill to remove all the skins. Rinse out the blender with the remaining ¼ cup of water and stir the water into the salsa. The salsa can be thinned with more water, if desired.

CHILE ROJO AND TOMATILLO SALSA

MAKES ABOUT 3½ CUPS

Another of my go- to salsas, this slightly more complex version of the preceding dried chile salsas balances the sweetness of the chiles and tomato with the addition of acidic green tomatillos, fresh herbs, and (if you like) a little spicy kick from chile de arbol. It is also one of the easiest salsas to make, with all the action happening in one pan. I don't even strain it.

2 ANCHO CHILES

3 DRIED CALIFORNIA OR GUAJILLO CHILES

1 CHILE DE ARBOL (OPTIONAL)

2 TABLESPOONS VEGETABLE OIL

½ WHITE ONION, DICED

2 CLOVES GARLIC, SLICED

2 ROMA TOMATOES, CUT INTO 1-INCH PIECES

6 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND CHOPPED

2 SPRIGS FRESH MARJORAM; OR 4 FRESH EPAZOTE LEAVES, SHREDDED; OR ½ TEASPOON DRIED MEXICAN OREGANO

3 CUPS WATER OR LIGHT VEGETABLE OR CHICKEN STOCK

1 TEASPOON SALT

½ TEASPOON FRESHLY GROUND BLACK PEPPER

2 TABLESPOONS MINCED CILANTRO

Serving Ideas: This is an excellent all-purpose salsa with many uses: as a table salsa, to make enchiladas or a layered pastel (a lasagna-like dish), in soups or beans, or as a base for a quickly sautéed tinga (shredded meat stew). I love this salsa for chilaquiles, with lots of cheese—its slight tartness and heat cut the richness.

Remove the stems from the chiles, cut a slit up one side of each, and remove the seeds. Tear into 1-inch pieces.

Heat the oil in a heavy 10-inch sauté pan. Add the chiles, onion, and garlic and cook, stirring, until the onion is soft.

Add the tomatoe, tomatillos, and marjoram and cook, stirring often, until the tomatoes are soft and the pan looks dry, about 7 minutes.

Add the water, salt, and pepper, and simmer gently for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Cool slightly, then pulse in a food processor until smooth. If the sauce is very thick, thin it with a small amount of water. Stir in the cilantro and taste for salt.



[Angela's Pasilla Chile Sauce](#)

ANGELA'S PASILLA CHILE SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

When I visit Mexico City, I always stay at the Red Tree House in Colonia Condesa, where every day starts with a magnificent Mexican breakfast. On a recent visit the cook, Angela, spooned this heavenly, near-black salsa over handmade corn masa quesadillas filled with cubes of queso fresco and topped each with a perfectly fried egg. I'd gladly eat those quesadillas every day, but this salsa has many other uses.

Pasilla and ancho chiles are often confused, but they are very different. Try to source Mexican-grown pasilla (dried poblano) chiles. Their rich flavor is delicate, fruity, and earthy all at once, with hints of tobacco, herb, and dark chocolate. In a pinch you can use the more common ancho chiles, but the salsa will be reddish in color, instead of dark brown, and may be spicy. Straining out the skins removes any bitterness and improves the flavor and texture of the salsa.

4 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED AND WASHED

¼ WHITE ONION, SLICED

2 CLOVES GARLIC
1 TEASPOON SALT

4 CUPS WATER OR LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

6 LARGE DRIED PASILLA CHILES, IMPORTED FROM MEXICO

⅛ TEASPOON MEXICAN OREGANO

Serving Ideas: This sauce is especially good with cheese quesadillas and eggs, or use it to make enchiladas. Slow-simmer shredded beef or pork in the salsa, or add a tiny dash of tequila and serve with grilled lamb.

Place the tomatillos, onion, garlic, salt, and 2 cups of the water in a 2-quart saucepan. Bring to a simmer and cook until the tomatillos are barely soft, about 7 minutes. Turn off the heat.

While the tomatillos cook, heat a large cast-iron skillet over high heat. Remove the stems from the chiles, cut a slit up one side of each, and remove the seeds. Open up flat. One at a time, press the chiles flat onto the hot skillet until blistered and light brown. Turn and repeat. As each is toasted, add it to the saucepan with the tomatillos and press it down into the hot liquid. Soak for 20 minutes.

Place the contents of the pan, including the cooking water, in a blender. Add the oregano and puree for several minutes, until completely smooth.

Add 1½ cups of the remaining water to the salsa. Strain the sauce through a sieve or food mill to remove all skins. Rinse out the blender with the remaining ½ cup of water and stir the water into the salsa.

CASCABEL CHILE SALSA

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

Cascabel chiles look like large sour cherries and have a fruit-leather texture and rattling seeds (thus their name, which means “bell” or “rattle”). For a small chile, the cascabel’s chile flavor is surprisingly rich, with a touch of berry sweetness balancing a slight acidity. The addition of a single smoky chipotle or morita chile adds a subtle layer of flavor and complexity.

The first steps in this recipe use the techniques of a mole. The ingredients are processed separately: first the tomatoes and tomatillos are boiled, then they are fried to concentrate the flavors and drive off water. In another step, the chiles are toasted and soaked. Next, they are pureed and fried with the vegetables before the final simmer. Frying the salsa is an important step in making certain salsas, as it helps bring out the distinctive flavors of each type of dried chile, and their many subtle nuances.

4 CUPS WATER

2 TEASPOONS SEA SALT

3 LARGE ROMA TOMATOES

2 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED AND WASHED

12 DRIED CASCABEL CHILES

1 SMALL DRIED CHIPOTLE OR MORITA CHILE

3 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC

¼ CUP DICED WHITE ONION

Serving Ideas: With its tangy edge, this dark purplish-red salsa is sensational with slow-roasted duck, dark-meat chicken or turkey, or lamb. It will play well with salty or creamy cheeses, eggs, or shredded beef.

Place the water and salt in a 2-quart saucepan and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Add the tomatoes and tomatillos and simmer for a couple of minutes. With a slotted spoon, remove the tomatoes to a bowl and peel them. Continue to simmer the tomatillos for 2 minutes longer, then drain and reserve the cooking water.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Set a large cast-iron skillet over medium heat. Carefully toast the chiles on all sides until they begin to soften and change color slightly—be very careful not to burn them, or they will be bitter.

Remove from the pan, cool briefly, then remove the stems and seeds. Tear into smaller pieces, place in a small bowl, and pour 2 cups of the reserved cooking water over the chiles. Soak for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

While the chiles soak, place the tomatoes in a blender along with the tomatillos, garlic, and onion. Puree until smooth.

Heat a heavy 10-inch sauté pan over medium-high heat. Pour the tomato puree into the hot pan. Do not rinse the blender. (The puree may splatter, so have a lid or splatter screen ready.) Cook and stir for 5 minutes, until thickened and fragrant. Remove from the heat.

When the chiles have softened, puree them in the same blender along with their soaking liquid, for several minutes, until very smooth. Place the sauté pan and its contents back over medium heat and add the chile puree. Cook, stirring, for about 15 minutes, until the sauce has bubbles all across its surface and has thickened slightly. If you want a thinner sauce, add small amounts of the reserved cooking water. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired, but go easy on the salt.



[Three Chile Salsa Borracha](#)

THREE CHILE SALSA BORRACHA

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

Borracha means “drunk,” and sometimes refers to food that contains a small amount of alcohol, in this case mezcal or tequila, which are natural partners with powerful chile salsas. This particular salsa developed out of a recipe I came up with for a lamb birria, a kind of soup or stew rich with chiles, spices, and garlic. It is strong and intense.

3 PASILLA CHILES

3 GUAJILLO CHILES

3 CASCABEL CHILES

5 CUPS HOT WATER

6 CLOVES GARLIC

2 TABLESPOONS MINCED WHITE ONION

1 TEASPOON SALT

6 BLACK PEPPERCORNS

2 ALLSPICE BERRIES

1 WHOLE CLOVE

¼ TEASPOON GROUND CINNAMON

1 TEASPOON CUMIN SEEDS

2 TABLESPOONS VEGETABLE OIL

1 TEASPOON MEZCAL OR TEQUILA

Serving Ideas: I simmer chunks of beef, lamb, or chicken in stock, then shred the meat and finish with some of this salsa to make a thick stew, or you can simply spoon it over roasted or grilled meats.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over high heat. Remove the stems from the chiles, cut a slit up one side of each, and remove the seeds. Open up flat. One at a time, press the opened chiles flat onto the hot skillet until blistered and light brown. Turn and repeat, being careful not to burn.

Place the chiles in a small, deep bowl and add 2 cups of the hot water. Soak the chiles for 45 minutes, pressing down occasionally into the water.

Drain the chiles and place in a blender. Discard the soaking liquid. Add 2 cups of the remaining water and the garlic, onion, salt, peppercorns, allspice, clove, cinnamon, and cumin. Blend on high speed for 3 minutes, until very smooth.

In a heavy sauté pan, heat the oil. Add the chile puree. It will splatter, so be ready with a splatter screen. Cook the chile puree for 10 minutes, stirring several times. Rinse the blender with the remaining 1 cup of water and add the water to the pot along with the mezcal. Simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Strain through a food mill or sieve.

TIPS FOR MOLE SUCCESS

Don't be daunted by the long list of ingredients and steps—moles are really very simple to make once you understand the sequence. For best results:

- Read the recipe all the way through before starting.
- Measure out separately the ingredients for each step, and organize them by step. You will find that within a step, you are cooking ingredients separately and in a specific sequence. This is important.
- Keep each step separate. At the end, you will combine these many bowls in a specific sequence—slowly, with much attention and stirring.
- These salsas can scorch and burn easily. Be patient and stir, stir, stir.
- If a recipe calls for straining, it is recommended that you do this for best results, even though it means one more thing to wash. Straining (or putting through a food mill) can completely change the flavor of a salsa.



QUICK MOLE

MAKES ABOUT 8 CUPS

Not all moles require an all-day investment. If you are short on time, try this very creditable quick “mole.” Though not as flavorful as a true mole, you can knock this one out in an hour. If you have time, the flavor is greatly improved by frying the salsa before simmering, as described in the Optional Method at the end of the recipe. Once you have made a real mole and compared it to this one, you will appreciate how much all those finicky steps and hard work add to the real thing, but this is pretty good.

I learned this recipe from Jesús González, former chef at Rancho La Puerta’s cooking school La Cocina Que Canta, who in turn learned it from his mother, a native of Mexico City.

STEP 1

½ CUP SKINNED RAW PEANUTS OR PECANS

½ CUP RAW WHOLE ALMONDS

¼ CUP RAW SESAME SEEDS

1 WHOLE CLOVE

1 CEYLON (MEXICAN) CINNAMON STICK

1 CORN TORTILLA, QUARTERED

STEP 2

4 GUAJILLO CHILES

3 LARGE PASILLA CHILES

2 TABLESPOONS VEGETABLE OIL OR FRESH LARD

½ WHITE ONION, DICED INTO ½-INCH PIECES

2 CLOVES GARLIC, SLICED

2 ROMA TOMATOES, CUT INTO 1-INCH PIECES

⅓ CUP SEEDLESS RAISINS

8 CUPS LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

1 TEASPOON SALT

¼ TEASPOON GROUND PEPPER

1 TABLESPOON SEMISWEET CHOCOLATE CHIPS OR ¼ IBARRA MEXICAN CHOCOLATE DISK

Serving Ideas: This mole is excellent with simmered chicken or turkey pieces, or pork.

STEP 1: TOAST THE NUTS AND SPICES— Preheat the oven to 350°F. Spread out the nuts, sesame seeds, spices, and tortilla on a baking sheet and toast for 10 minutes, until the sesame seeds are a pale gold. Be very careful not to burn the ingredients—turn and shake the pan once or twice if necessary.

STEP 2: SAUTÉ THE CHILES AND TOMATOES— Stem and seed the chiles, then tear them into 1-inch pieces. Heat a heavy sauté pan over medium heat. Add the oil, and then add the chiles, onion, and garlic. Cook and stir until the onion begins to turn golden.

Add the tomatoes and raisins, and cook and stir until the tomatoes are soft. Add the toasted ingredients, 6 cups of the chicken stock, and the salt and pepper. Lower the heat and simmer for 30 minutes.

Add the chocolate chips and stir until they melt. In 2 batches, puree the contents of the pan. Run the blender for several minutes, processing until very smooth, and adding the remaining 2 cups of chicken stock as needed.

For a smoother texture, pass the mole through a food mill or press it through a sieve.

Optional Method: Puree the sauce without the chocolate. Heat 2 tablespoons of lard in a heavy 4-quart saucepan. Add the blended sauce and fry it (it will splatter, so use a splatter screen), stirring often, for 10 minutes. Rinse out the blender with the remaining 2 cups of chicken stock and add to the pot, along with the chocolate, and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring often. Pass through a food mill or sieve.

RED CHILE MOLE

MAKES ABOUT 5 CUPS

This classic red mole is about as simple as a true mole gets. Think of it as a training mole: learn the basic steps here and you can confidently go on to recipes such as the more complex [Mole Poblano](#). Review the introduction and sidebars so you are familiar with the unusual techniques required to make an excellent mole. And most important, if this is your first mole, read the recipe through from start to finish before beginning, pairing the groups of ingredients with the steps.

The red color of the mole comes from the reddish ancho and guajillo chiles. Using the smallest possible amount of stock to puree the chiles and other ingredients will result in a deeper color. And don't wonder where the chocolate is. Not all moles include chocolate. If you prefer not to use lard, vegetable oil (not olive) may be substituted.

STEP 1

6 GUAJILLO CHILES

4 ANCHO CHILES (THE REDDEST ONES YOU CAN FIND)

1 DRIED CHIPOTLE (CHILE MECO)

3 CUPS HOT WATER

1 CUP LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

STEP 2

½ WHITE ONION, PEELED BUT WITH ROOT END INTACT

6 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

STEP 3

¼ CUP RAW SESAME SEEDS

¼-INCH CEYLON (MEXICAN) CINNAMON STICK

2 WHOLE BLACK PEPPERCORNS

1 WHOLE CLOVE

STEP 4

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH LARD

1 CORN TORTILLA, QUARTERED

¼ RIPE PLANTAIN, OR ½ FIRM BANANA, SLICED

2 TABLESPOONS RAW ALMONDS

2 TABLESPOONS SKINNED RAW PEANUTS

STEP 5

1 TABLESPOON FRESH LARD

4 ROMA TOMATOES, CUT INTO EIGHTHS

1 SPRIG FRESH MARJORAM

1 SPRIG FRESH THYME

STEP 6

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH LARD

1 CUP LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

STEP 7

1 CUP LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

2 TEASPOONS SALT

2 TABLESPOONS SUGAR

Serving Ideas: Serve this mole with lighter meats—roasted, simmered, or grilled chicken, turkey, duck, or quail. Leftovers make terrific enchiladas (known as enmoladas).

STEP 1: PREPARE THE CHILES—Turn on the fan over the stove. Split the dried chiles up the side with a sharp knife. Remove the stems, seeds and veins. Open up the chiles. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over medium-low heat. Toast the chiles inside and out, pressing down gently, until blistered and soft. Be very careful not to burn the chiles.

Place the toasted chiles in a bowl and pour the hot water over them. Soak for 30 minutes, pushing down several times. When soft, drain (reserve the soaking liquid) and place in a blender with the chicken stock. Puree for several minutes, scraping down the sides, until perfectly smooth.

STEP 2: ROAST THE ONION AND GARLIC—Line the skillet with aluminum foil and set the pan over medium-low heat. Slowly roast the onion and garlic, turning often, until the onion is soft and translucent and the garlic skin has some black spots, about 5 minutes for the garlic and 15 minutes for the onion. Peel the garlic and trim the root end from the onion. Set aside in a small bowl.

STEP 3: PREPARE THE SESAME SEEDS—Remove the foil from the skillet and reduce the heat to low. When the skillet is cooled, add the sesame seeds and stir continuously until a pale gold color—be careful not to burn them. When they are almost done, add the whole spices to the pan and slowly toast for 1 minute. Add to the bowl with the onion.

STEP 4: FRY THE TORTILLA, PLANTAIN, AND NUTS—Increase the heat to medium. Add the 2 tablespoons lard to the skillet and fry the tortilla until crisp and golden. Remove and add to the bowl with the onion. Fry the plantain slices until golden and add to the onion. Fry the almonds and peanuts separately until light golden brown in spots, adding them to the onion as they are done.

STEP 5: ROAST THE TOMATOES AND HERBS—Add the 1 tablespoon lard to the pan. Add the tomatoes, marjoram and thyme sprigs. Cook and stir for 5 to 7 minutes, breaking up the tomato pieces with the end of a wooden spatula, until the tomatoes are quite dry and very well cooked. Set aside in a separate bowl. If the herb stems are large and woody, pick them out and discard; otherwise, they may be pureed along with the rest of the salsa.

STEP 6: FRY THE MOLE—Heat the 2 tablespoons lard in a deep, heavy 4-quart pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the chile puree to the pot. It will splatter, so cover with a splatter screen. Do not rinse the blender. Cook and stir for 20 minutes, until thickened.

When the chile paste is cooked, puree the tomatoes in the same blender. Add to the chile puree and cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Do not rinse the blender.

When the tomatoes have cooked, in the same blender puree the onion, garlic, sesame seeds, spices, and the fried tortilla, plantain, and nuts with the chicken stock until very smooth, scraping down the sides several times. Add to the pot and cook for 15 minutes, stirring often, until thickened.

STEP 7: SIMMER THE MOLE—Use the chicken stock to rinse the blender, then add the stock to the pot. Add the reserved chile soaking liquid, and the salt and sugar. Simmer the sauce for 30 minutes, stirring often and scraping the bottom. Pass the mole through a food mill.



[Mole Poblano](#)

MOLE POBLANO

MAKES ABOUT 8 CUPS

Probably Mexico's most famous dish, classic mole poblano is renowned for its fabulous dark color, velvety richness, and sweet, complex flavor. The dish is a bit over-the-top, especially considering that it supposedly originated in a convent, but the sweetness is enjoyable as long as it is balanced with the chiles and other flavors. Mole poblano is a time-consuming project. As you stir (and stir, and stir) be sure to admire how lovely it is, as thick and shiny as chocolate ganache.

That sweetness, and the lush spicing, is a clue to the dish's colonial origins. The mole poblano of today is probably very close to what rich Spaniards in Puebla served in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when sweet sauces heavily dosed with exotic Eastern spices were the sign of a wealthy and sophisticated table. Even under the colonial bling of over-the-top spicing, one can still see the origins of this mole in the ancient, pre-Conquest salsa made with the native dried poblano, the chile pasilla.

The pasilla chile is often confused with the ancho chile, which it resembles; both chiles look like giant flattened raisins on a stem. To some extent they are interchangeable, but for this grand mole, you want to hunt down true Mexican pasillas. The difference is in the color and flavor. If you hold the chiles against a light, the ancho will show reddish colors, while the pasilla has a deep brown-black color. Anchos tend to be sweeter and spicier, while pasillas have a whole range of subtle flavors.

When adding the sugar, start with the smallest amount. Sometimes it can be left out altogether. The fresh lard adds wonderful richness to the mole, and I highly recommend using it.

STEP 1

7 LARGE PASILLA CHILES

1 MORITA CHILE

3 CUPS HOT WATER

1 CUP LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

STEP 2

3 ROMA TOMATOES

STEP 3

½ CUP SESAME SEEDS

2 TABLESPOONS RAW PEPITAS

⅛ TEASPOON ANISE SEEDS

⅛ TEASPOON CORIANDER SEEDS

¼-INCH CEYLON (MEXICAN) CINNAMON STICK

2 ALLSPICE BERRIES

1 WHOLE CLOVE

STEP 4

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH LARD

1 CORN TORTILLA, QUARTERED

2 PLAIN COOKIES OR GINGER SNAPS OR ¼ SLICE WHITE BREAD

½ WHITE ONION, DICED

2 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, SLICED

¼ CUP SEEDLESS RAISINS

½ CUP RAW ALMONDS

STEP 5

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH LARD

1 CUP LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

STEP 6

2 CUPS LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK
6 TABLESPOONS SEMISWEET CHOCOLATE CHIPS
¼ CUP SUGAR
2 TEASPOONS SALT

Serving Ideas: This mole is traditionally served with simmered or roasted turkey pieces, corn tortillas, and plain white rice.

STEP 1: PREPARE THE CHILES—Split the dried chiles up the side with a sharp knife. Remove the stem, seeds and veins. Open up the chiles. Turn on the fan over the stove. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over medium-low heat. Toast the chiles inside and out, pressing down gently, until blistered and soft. Be very careful not to burn the chiles.

Place the toasted chiles in a bowl and pour the hot water over them. Soak for 30 minutes, pushing down several times. When soft, drain (reserve the soaking liquid) and place in a blender with the chicken stock. Puree for several minutes, scraping down the sides, until perfectly smooth.

STEP 2: ROAST THE TOMATOES—Line the skillet with aluminum foil and set over medium heat. Roast the tomatoes on all sides until blackened and soft. Place in a small bowl and set aside.

STEP 3: TOAST THE SEEDS AND SPICES—Remove the foil from the pan, and reduce the heat to low. When the pan has cooled, toast the sesame seeds, stirring constantly, until light golden brown. Scrape into a medium bowl. Put the pepitas in the the skillet and stir until toasted and pale olive color, then add to the sesame seeds. Put the spices in the skillet and toast, stirring, for 1 minute. Add to the sesame seeds.

STEP 4: FRY THE TORTILLA, COOKIES, AND OTHER INGREDIENTS—Add the 2 tablespoons lard to the skillet and increase the heat to medium. (During this step, you may need to add a little more lard.) Fry the tortilla and cookies until golden and crisp, then add to the bowl with the sesame seeds.

Fry the onion and garlic until soft and golden brown, stirring often, add to the sesame seeds.

Fry the raisins, stirring, until plump, then add to the sesame seeds.

Fry the almonds, stirring, until browned, then add to the sesame seeds. Set aside.

STEP 5: FRY THE MOLE—Heat the 2 tablespoons lard in a deep, heavy 4-quart pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the chile puree to the pot. It will splatter, so cover with a splatter screen. Do not rinse the blender. Cook and stir for 20 minutes, until thickened.

When the chile paste is cooked, puree the tomatoes in the same blender. Add to the chile puree and cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Do not rinse the blender.

When the tomatoes have cooked, puree the sesame seed mixture with the chicken stock, scraping down the sides several times, until perfectly smooth. This may take several minutes. Add to the pot, and cook, stirring often, for 15 minutes.

STEP 6: SIMMER THE MOLE—Rinse the blender with the chicken stock and add to the pot, along with the reserved chile soaking liquid, stirring until well combined. Add the chocolate, sugar, and salt and stir as the mole comes to a simmer to make sure the chocolate does not stick to the bottom of the pot.

Once simmering, reduce the heat slightly. Simmer the mole, stirring often and scraping the bottom, for 30 minutes; do not allow it to boil. Strain the finished mole through the fine screen of a food mill.

Note: To make the mole less spicy, discard the chile soaking liquid and substitute 3 more cups of chicken stock.



[Mole Pipian](#)

MOLE PIPIAN

MAKES ABOUT 6 CUPS

If you want to get your greens, try this healthy mole pipian, which is packed with herbs and vegetables. Like all moles, the sauce itself is the meal and everything else is just garnish. I adapted this recipe from one of Diana Kennedy's early books for use in my restaurant, where we served the pipian in a whole roasted squash stuffed with roasted root vegetables, shredded pork, and some queso fresco; the dish is also excellent with chicken—or with no meat at all.

This green mole is thickened with ground pumpkin seeds and sesame seeds. The body of the mole is made from pureed greens, so it has a slightly coarser texture than the [Mole Verde](#), with a more complex flavor and a bit of heat. For best flavor, I recommend that you serve this mole immediately after it is made.

STEP 1

¾ CUP RAW SESAME SEEDS
5 WHOLE CLOVES
½ TEASPOON WHOLE BLACK PEPPERCORNS
½ TEASPOON CORIANDER SEEDS OR 4 ALLSPICE BERRIES
1 TEASPOON CUMIN SEEDS
½ CUP RAW PEPITAS

STEP 2

2 LARGE POBLANO CHILES
1 CUP LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK
5 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED
3 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC
4 TO 6 SERRANO CHILES, OR 2 TO 3 JALAPEÑO CHILES, STEMMED AND CHOPPED (LEAVE THE SEEDS IN FOR A SPICIER MOLE)
1 BUNCH KALE, STEMMED AND FINELY SHREDDED
1 BUNCH SPINACH, STEMMED AND FINELY SHREDDED
½ BUNCH FLAT-LEAF PARSLEY, STEMMED AND ROUGHLY CHOPPED
1 BUNCH FRESH EPAZOTE (ABOUT 12 SRIGS), STEMMED AND SHREDDED

STEP 3

⅓ CUP FRESH LARD OR VEGETABLE OIL
2 CUPS LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK
1 TABLESPOON SALT

Serving Ideas: As noted, the pipian is great with roasted vegetables, such as yam, potato, chayote, onion, and squash; with pork carnitas; or with roasted chicken or turkey.

STEP 1: FRY THE SESAME SEEDS AND SPICES—Heat a heavy skillet over medium-low heat. Add the sesame seeds and toast, stirring, until golden. Pour onto a plate to cool completely, then grind into a smooth paste in a spice grinder, which may take several minutes. Scrape into a small bowl.

Add the cloves, peppercorns, coriander seeds, and cumin seeds to the skillet and toast over medium-low heat, stirring, for 1 minute, being careful not to burn them. Place in the spice grinder and grind to a fine texture, which may take several minutes, scraping down the sides often. Add to the bowl with the sesame seeds.

Place the raw pepitas in the spice grinder and grind to a very fine texture or paste, which may take several minutes, scraping down the sides often. Add to the sesame seeds.

STEP 2: ROAST THE CHILES AND GREENS—Roast the poblano chiles, either directly on a gas burner or under a hot broiler, until the skin is charred and blackened. Let cool, rub off the skin with a paper towel, and remove the seeds and stem. Tear into small pieces and place in a blender along with the chicken stock. Cut the tomatillos into quarters and add to the blender along with the garlic and serranos. Puree completely. Place the shredded greens and herbs in a food processor (in batches, if necessary) and run the machine until the greens are well broken down. Add the chopped greens to the blender and run until the mixture is very smooth and bright green.

STEP 3: FRY THE MOLE—Heat the lard in a deep, heavy 4-quart pot or Dutch oven over medium-low heat. Add the sesame seed mixture and cook slowly, stirring constantly, until fragrant and golden brown, being very careful not to burn the paste.

Add the contents of the blender all at once. It will splatter, so use a splatter screen. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Turn off the heat and stir in the chicken stock and the salt. The flavor will change as the mole cools and thickens, so taste and adjust the seasoning as desired after 30 minutes.

Note: For a smoother texture, the sauce can be reblended when cooled. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired afterward.

MOLE NEGRO

MAKES ABOUT 8 CUPS

The chile negro is the dried form of the chile chilaca, which hails from central Mexico. The dried chile is long, shiny, and deep black. While mole negro (black mole) incorporates chile negro, the deep color actually comes from the careful charring, blackening, and grinding of certain ingredients to create a very dark mole with an almost coffee-like taste. The process of slowly blackening salsa ingredients and even burning dried chiles and their seeds is not confined to this mole; there are famous salsas from southeastern Mexico and Yucatecan rellenos that are made in this way (see the [Ghost Chile Salsa “Viper”](#) for another example).

Charring brings out the sweetness and flavor of some ingredients, as well as creating the deep color. The salsa will not be bitter, but the complex result sometimes needs a bit of sugar for balance. Mole negro should be less sweet than mole poblano. You don’t want to actually taste the chocolate, but it makes a difference if you leave it out. If you decide to make the mole sweeter, add the sugar a little at a time, tasting after each addition, until a good balance of flavor is achieved. You will need an electric spice grinder or a heavy mortar and pestle to grind the blackened seeds into a fine paste.

STEP 1

1 LARGE DRIED CHIPOTLE (CHILE MECO)
5 LARGE CHILES NEGRO
2 LARGE PASILLA CHILES
3 LARGE GUAJILLO CHILES
3 CUPS HOT WATER

1 TO 1½ CUPS LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

Step 2

SEEDS FROM THE CLEANED CHILES

½ CUP LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

STEP 3

½ WHITE ONION, PEELED BUT WITH ROOT END INTACT
5 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED
2 LARGE TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED
2 ROMA TOMATOES, WASHED AND DRIED
2 SPRIGS FRESH MARJORAM

STEP 4

¼ CUP RAW SESAME SEEDS
¼-INCH CEYLON (MEXICAN) CINNAMON STICK
4 WHOLE BLACK PEPPERCORNS
3 WHOLE CLOVES
1 TEASPOON ANISE SEEDS

STEP 5

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH LARD
1 CORN TORTILLA, QUARTERED
½ BANANA, SLICED
2 TABLESPOONS RAW ALMONDS OR PECANS
2 TABLESPOONS SKINNED RAW PEANUTS
3 TABLESPOONS SEEDLESS RAISINS

STEP 6

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH LARD
1 CUP LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

STEP 7

1½ TO 2 CUPS LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK
1 TABLESPOON SEMISWEET CHOCOLATE CHIPS, OR ¼ IBARRA MEXICAN CHOCOLATE DISK
2 TEASPOONS SALT
2 TO 4 TABLESPOONS SUGAR (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: One of the best moles I ever had was used on wild venison. Likewise, this mole would be perfect for wild game, dark-meat turkey, chicken, duck, or pork.

STEP 1: TOAST THE CHILES—Turn on the fan over the stove. In a heavy frying pan set over medium heat, slowly toast the dried chipotle until it turns black, turning often so it blackens evenly.

Meanwhile, split the other chiles and remove the stems, veins, and seeds. Reserve the seeds in a small bowl. In the same pan, toast the chiles inside and out, pressing down gently, until the chiles are blistered and fragrant. Be careful not to burn the chiles. Place the chiles in a medium bowl. When the chipotle is black, remove stem and add its seeds to the bowl with the seeds from the other chiles and put the chile in the bowl with the other chiles. Pour the hot water over the chiles. Soak for 40 minutes pushing down several times. Drain and reserve the soaking water. Puree the chiles in a blender with the chicken stock until completely smooth, scraping down the sides several times.

STEP 2: BLACKEN THE SEEDS—Turn the kitchen fan on high. Put the chile seeds in the skillet over medium-high heat. Blacken the seeds completely, stirring often, then pour into a small bowl. Add the chicken stock and soak for 40 minutes. Drain, reserving the stock, and grind into a very smooth paste in a small spice grinder or mortar and pestle, scraping down the sides. This may take several minutes. Add the chile paste and soaking liquid to the blender and blend to combine.

STEP 3: CHAR THE VEGETABLES—Line the skillet with aluminum foil and set over medium-high heat. Cut the onion into 2 quarters. Roast the garlic, turning occasionally, for about 5 minutes. Remove from the skillet. Next, roast the onion, turning as little as possible, until well charred on all sides. Roast the tomatoes and tomatillos until well charred and soft. This will take 15 to 20 minutes.

When the vegetables are cooked and well blackened, lift the foil right out of the pan, add the marjoram, garlic, and onion, and enfold the vegetables in the foil to steam and cool.

STEP 4: TOAST THE SESAME SEEDS AND SPICES—Turn the heat down to low and allow the pan to cool down. Add the sesame seeds and shake and stir them until golden. When the sesame seeds are almost done, add the spices to the pan and toast for 30 seconds. Scrape the contents of the pan into a medium bowl.

STEP 5: FRY THE TORTILLA, BANANA, AND OTHER INGREDIENTS—Turn the heat up to medium. Add the 2 tablespoons fresh lard to the skillet. (During this step, you may need to add a little more lard.) When it is hot, fry the tortilla pieces until crisp and golden, then transfer to the bowl with the sesame seeds. Fry the banana slices until golden, then add to the sesame seeds. Add the almonds to the pan, and cook and stir until lightly browned. Add to the sesame seeds. Do the same with the peanuts and raisins, cooking each separately, then adding to the sesame seeds.

STEP 6: FRY THE MOLE—In a heavy, deep 4-quart pot or Dutch oven, heat the 2 tablespoons fresh lard over medium heat. When the pot is hot, add the chile puree from the blender. It will splatter, so use a splatter screen. Do not rinse out the blender. Cook the puree for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

When the chile puree is cooked, peel the garlic and place the garlic, onion, tomatillos, tomatoes, and marjoram, along with any juices, in the blender. With a rubber spatula, scrape the black char from the foil, adding it to the blender. Puree until smooth, add to the pot, and combine well. Do not rinse the blender. Cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

When the tomatoes are cooked, put the sesame seed mixture in the blender. Add the chicken stock and puree for several minutes, scraping down a couple of times, until very smooth. Add the sesame seed mixture to the pot and stir to combine well. Do not rinse the blender. Cook for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

STEP 7: SIMMER THE MOLE—After 15 minutes have passed, rinse the blender with the chicken stock. Add the stock to the pot, along with the reserved chile soaking liquid, chocolate, salt, and 2 tablespoons of the sugar. Stir until the chocolate has melted and the sauce has begun to simmer. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook for 30 minutes, stirring often and scraping the bottom of the pot. Strain the sauce through the fine screen of a food mill. Taste and, if desired, stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons of sugar.



[Mole Verde](#)

MOLE VERDE

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

Purists might say that this mole is not really a mole at all, but just a supercharged salsa verde. Whatever it is, it is delicious. The real key to the flavor is the use of fresh herbs: sweet marjoram and epazote, that essential Mexican herb for which there is, unfortunately, no substitute.

10 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED AND WASHED

4 TEASPOONS SALT

1 WHOLE CLOVE, CRUSHED

2 LARGE POBLANO CHILES

8 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC

½ WHITE ONION, CUT INTO 1-INCH PIECES

2 OR 3 JALAPEÑO CHILES, STEMMED AND SEEDED

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH LARD

1 BUNCH FRESH EPAZOTE (ABOUT 12 SPRIGS), STEMMED AND SHREDDED

½ BUNCH FLAT-LEAF PARSLEY, ROUGHLY CHOPPED

1 SMALL BUNCH CILANTRO, ROUGHLY CHOPPED

2 SPRIGS FRESH MARJORAM

1 SPRIG FRESH THYME

3 CUPS CHICKEN OR PORK STOCK

1 LARGE YELLOW CORN TORTILLA, TORN INTO SMALL PIECES

¼ TEASPOON FRESHLY GROUND BLACK PEPPER

Serving Ideas: An obvious companion for pork, this mole is also delicious with shredded chicken; with grilled fish, shrimp, or other seafood; or with anything made with cheese. Stir it into rice, or spoon it generously onto sopas or huaraches (masa cake) topped with refried beans and sprinkled with cotija cheese.

Place the tomatillos in a pan just large enough to hold them, and barely cover with cold water. Add 2 teaspoons of the salt and the clove. Bring to a boil quickly, reduce the heat, and simmer for 5 to 7 minutes, until just tender. Drain well and place in a blender.

Roast the poblano chiles, either directly on a gas burner or under a hot broiler, until the skin is charred and blackened. Let cool, rub off the skin with a paper towel, and remove the seeds and stem. Tear into small pieces and place in the blender with the tomatillos. Add the garlic, onion, and jalapeños and puree until smooth.

Heat the lard in a heavy 4-quart pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. When it is hot, add the contents of the blender (it will splatter, so use a screen). Do not rinse the blender. Cook the tomatillo mixture for 15 minutes, stirring often.

Add all the herbs to the blender, along with 1 cup of the chicken stock and the tortilla. Puree until smooth. When the tomatillos have cooked for 15 minutes, add the herb puree to the pot and stir to combine. Rinse the blender with the remaining 2 cups stock and add to the pot, along with the remaining 2 teaspoons of salt and the pepper. Simmer for 15 minutes, stirring often.





The night streets of Mexico are punctuated on every block by many golden-lit, smoky pools of light and life, which form around the tiny taco stands that unfurl at nightfall into instant sidewalk kitchens. Very late into the night, it seems that half the country is clustered around these stands, moving in an elaborate (and mostly silent) sidewalk dance, angling for speed and position. The point here is not to socialize; it is simply to eat.

A taco stand is always a narrowly focused shoestring operation: stripped to basics, often trailer portable, offering a few simple items cooked by one or two guys with one of their kids out front to keep order and take the money at peak hours. The salsas at this kind of casual stand might appear simple and basic, but that doesn't mean they are ordinary. Every taco stand has its own distinct set of salsas that may look the same but are always slightly (or very!) different from those of their neighbors. Salsas are there to enhance the food of this stand, and like all good salsas, they are made fresh once or twice a day.

Salsas for tacos tend to be thick (less likely to drip) and powerful, so a little bit goes a long way, making the taco experience quick and neat. Depending on what's cooking, grilled meat, stewed meat, fried meat, or sausage stands offer variations on avocado with cilantro, salsa verde (cooked tomatillo salsa), and some kind of red chile salsa. Fish or shrimp stands might offer several mayonnaise-based salsas and hot sauce as well as a fresh salsa, such as pico de gallo. At every stand there's a clutch of bottled hot sauces, and perhaps some edibles to tuck into a taco or munch between bites, such as onions, either raw or pickled in lime juice, grilled green onions, pickled or grilled jalapeños, shredded cabbage, radishes, and, of course, limes and salt. What you never, ever see are cheese and sour cream, which obscure and muddy the clean flavors of meat and salsa.

While this chapter is specifically about tacos, these salsas will be great on all classic street foods, such as empanadas, gorditas, tortas, sopes, and quesadillas. For a more modern and fusion-y take on salsas for tacos, check out [chapter 5](#)'s collection of unusual fruit and vegetable salsas. These are more likely to be found on restaurant menus than on street corners, but every now and then as you explore the taco stands of Mexico, you will find a taquero with a wild streak, busily concocting unique salsas for his customers.

TACO STAND BASICS

Typically, taco stands succeed by doing one or two things very well. And they do either meat or seafood, never both, for the simple reason that the salsas are so different!

Alongside are the typical salsas found at each type of stand. However, I would never presume to lay out iron-clad rules about which salsa goes on which taco (always a highly individual decision!), but I would point out that a few strong flavors and textural contrasts are all you really need.

Simpler is better—too many salsas turn into culinary confusion, and everything starts to taste the same.

For any kind of taco salsa spread, you will include a hot salsa, salt, and limes (and cabbage for seafood tacos). Offer a creamy salsa (such as Salsa Mestiza Avocado or Creamy Lime Mayonesa for seafood), something crunchy (onions or pico de gallo), and a really flavorful salsa, such as a salsa verde or a salsa roja. After that, if you like, have fun with optional salsas and garnishes specific to whatever you're cooking: cilantro, grilled jalapeños, or chimichurri, for example.

Tacos are all about immediacy and freshness and are meant to be consumed within seconds of being put in your hand. Have your tortillas hot and salsas ready before you start cooking, and allow guests to garnish their tacos themselves from your array.

FOR MEAT TACOS

[Salsa Mestiza](#) or [Salsa Taquero](#) or sliced avocado

[Salsa Verde](#) or [Raw Tomatillo Salsa](#)

[Red Chile Salsa](#), moderately spicy

Hot salsa, red or green

Onions: plain or pickled in lime juice

Salt shaker

Limes

Cilantro (optional)

[Chimichurri](#) or [Mojito Salsa](#) (for grilled beef or chicken)

[Pickled Jalapeños and Carrots](#), [Chiles Toreados Y Cebollitas](#), Radishes

FOR SEAFOOD TACOS

[Pico de Gallo](#)

[Creamy Lime Mayonesa](#) or [Secret Sauce](#) or [Chipotle Garlic Salsa](#) or [Salsa Gobernador](#)

Hot salsa, especially red ones such as [Charred Chile de Arbol Salsa](#)

Limes

Cabbage (never lettuce)

Salt shaker

[Salsa Mestiza](#)

COOK'S NOTES ON TACO SALSAS

- Salsas should be well seasoned, but not salty or too limy.
- In the interests of neatness, salsas should be thick, not drippy or runny.



[Salsa Taquero](#)

SALSA TAQUERO

(Spicy Avocado Sauce)

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

This more complicated salsa is creamy, spicy, and tart, so it's as good on less assertive taco meats, such as shredded or grilled chicken, as it is on fried and fatty meats.

2 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND QUARTERED

¼ CUP DICED WHITE ONION

½ SERRANO CHILE, STEMMED

½ TEASPOON SALT

1 TABLESPOON WATER

FLESH FROM 1 RIPE MEDIUM HASS AVOCADO

2 SPRIGS CILANTRO, CHOPPED (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: This salsa is good on any taco.

Pulse all the ingredients in a food processor until fairly smooth, scraping down the sides frequently. If you are using cilantro, add it at the very end and pulse a couple of times to combine. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.



[Basic Guacamole](#)

BASIC GUACAMOLE
MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

Guacamole is an appetizer, not a salsa. But Americans seem to like to put it on tacos, so here is a good basic recipe. Go easy on the salt and lime, the better to appreciate the flavor of the avocado. Guacamole must always be mashed by hand, never made in a food processor or blender!

1 RIPE MEDIUM HASS AVOCADO
1 TABLESPOON FRESH-SQUEEZED LIME JUICE
½ TEASPOON SALT
1 TEASPOON MINCED SERRANO CHILE
1 TABLESPOON MINCED WHITE ONION
½ ROMA TOMATO, SEEDED AND DICED (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: Use this guacamole in the same ways as [Salsa Mestiza](#) or [Salsa Taquero](#).

Split, peel, and pit the avocado, then cut it into 1-inch cubes. Place in a small bowl, then stir in the lime juice and salt. Add the serrano and onion and mash roughly with a fork. It should be fairly chunky. Add the tomato and stir to combine.

SALSA MESTIZA
(Avocado-Cilantro Sauce)
MAKES ABOUT ¾ CUP

The very simplest of all the avocado sauces, this pale green salsa with cilantro is often made in Mexico with tiny native avocados, which are no bigger than an egg and have an amazing flavor. I love this salsa spooned onto rich taco meats—sausages, pork al pastor, fried tripa (intestine), or, best of all, suadero, big chunks of deep-fried fatty beef. The water makes the avocado creamy and pale; add enough so that the salsa is like soft whipped cream. The cilantro should be in largish pieces, and there should be lots of it. The taste should be rather bland and creamy. I prefer it without the lime, but you may add it if you like. A sprinkle of onion is the perfect finishing touch to your taco.

FLESH FROM 1 VERY RIPE MEDIUM HASS AVOCADO
2 TO 3 TABLESPOONS WATER
⅛ TEASPOON SALT
6 SPRIGS CILANTRO, STEMMED AND ROUGHLY CHOPPED
½ TEASPOON FRESH SQUEEZED LIME JUICE (OPTIONAL)

SERVING IDEAS: THIS SALSA IS GOOD ON ANY TACO.

Pulse the avocado, water, and salt in a food processor until smooth, scraping down frequently. Stir in the cilantro and lime juice.

CHIPOTLE-GARLIC SALSA
MAKES ABOUT ¾ CUP

This salsa is a testament to the universal appeal of both chipotles in adobo and mayonnaise. I developed the recipe to enhance one taco in particular (my legendary Vampiro) but my restaurant guests enthusiastically slather it on everything. Of all my salsas, this is the recipe most requested, and it is very handy to have in the refrigerator to add some excitement to a ho-hum fridge browse. Canned chipotles in adobo are readily available in well-stocked supermarkets and Mexican markets; leftovers can be frozen.

1 LARGE CLOVE GARLIC
2 CHIPOTLES IN ADOBO, OR TO TASTE
½ CUP THICK MAYONNAISE
1 TEASPOON FRESH-SQUEEZED LIME JUICE
½ TEASPOON SALT

Serving Ideas: This salsa is good on any taco, but especially seafood tacos. Also good on quesadillas, tortas, brunch dishes, and even ceviches. Place the garlic and chipotles in a small food processor and pulse to chop finely, scraping down as needed. Add the mayonnaise, lime juice, and salt and puree until smooth.



[Pico de Gallo](#)

PICO DE GALLO

(for Seafood or Grilled Meat)

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

The name of this salsa refers to the little pico, or “peck,” of hot chile heat, which combines so effectively with sweet onion and tomato. To vary, substitute habanero chile and a dash of vinegar for the jalapeño and lime juice to make Yucatecan xni-pec, or add a bit of diced mango. This salsa is excellent on grilled meat or seafood tacos, and it’s a classic base for ceviche.

3 ROMA TOMATOES, SEEDED AND DICED INTO ¼-INCH PIECES

¼ WHITE OR RED ONION, DICED INTO ¼-INCH PIECES

¾ TEASPOON SALT, OR TO TASTE

1 TABLESPOON FRESH SQUEEZED LIME JUICE

1 SMALL JALAPEÑO OR SERRANO CHILE, FINELY MINCED

1 TABLESPOON MINCED CILANTRO

Serving Ideas: In Mexico, pico de gallo is reserved for seafood tacos, but also it’s good on grilled steak tacos.

Combine all the ingredients in a serving bowl. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

Note: To reduce the spiciness, seed the chiles before mincing.

MOJITO SALSA

(Citrus Garlic Salsa)

MAKES ABOUT ¾ CUP

This is a brightly flavored garlic and citrus salsa that is especially good on chicken. The tiny dash of tequila or mezcal is just for fun and can be left out. This salsa is best used immediately after you make it.

¼ CUP FRESH-SQUEEZED LEMON JUICE

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH-SQUEEZED ORANGE JUICE

2 TEASPOONS MINCED WHITE ONION

½ SERRANO CHILE

8 CLOVES GARLIC

⅛ TEASPOONS SALT

12 SPRIGS CILANTRO, STEMMED AND CHOPPED

½ TEASPOON BLANCO TEQUILA OR MEZCAL

Serving Ideas: This salsa is great with grilled chicken, pork carnitas, and grilled or fried seafood.

Place everything in a blender or small food processor and puree until very smooth. Use immediately.

RAW TOMATILLO SALSA

(for Carnitas or Sausage)

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

Green tomatillos are usually cooked to tame their tartness, but here they are used raw and their acidity lends a welcome jolt to this spicy, oniony, bright green raw salsa that is an intriguing option to the more common cooked salsa verde. The salsa should be strong, highly seasoned, and fairly juicy. You can whip it up in less than 2 minutes. I always serve it with more diced onion.

5 MEDIUM TOMATILLOS, HUSKED, WASHED, AND DRIED

½ WHITE ONION, CUT INTO 1-INCH PIECES

1 OR 2 SERRANO CHILES, STEMMED

6 SPRIGS CILANTRO, STEMMED AND CHOPPED

1¼ TEASPOONS SALT

Serving Ideas: This bright, fresh salsa is good with anything rich and fatty, such as pork chorizo, longaniza sausage, or simmered juicy carnitas. In Mexico, it’s served with deep-fried tripa (intestine) or suadero (fried beef chunks).

Pulse all the ingredients together in a food processor until fairly smooth. Taste and adjust seasoning as desired. It should be spicy and well-seasoned.

Variation: After the salsa is processed, stir in more finely chopped serrano chile and ¼ cup minced ripe pineapple.

RED CHILE SALSA

(for Meat Tacos)

MAKES ABOUT 2½ CUPS

A typical salsa served with sausages and suadero (deep-fried beef chunks) as well as tripa (intestines), this simple sauce should have a little heat but not blow you away. The color will be bright red, and the chile seeds are often left in for more heat. The salsa should be thick, rather than thin, the better to spoon onto a taco.

2 CUPS WATER

2 ROMA TOMATOES

10 DRIED PUYA, JAPONES, OR DE ARBOL CHILES

3 LARGE GUAJILLO CHILES

3 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC

1 TEASPOON SALT

Serving Ideas: This salsa is good with fried meats and sausages.

Bring the water to a boil in a small pot over medium heat, add the tomatoes, and simmer for 5 minutes. Transfer the tomatoes to a bowl to cool.

Reserve the cooking water.

While the tomatoes are cooking, stem the chiles. Remove the stem and seeds from the guajillo chiles and tear into small pieces. Soak all of the chiles in the tomato cooking water for about 45 minutes, or until soft.

When the chiles are soft, drain them (reserve the soaking water) and place in a blender, along with the garlic and salt. Peel the tomatoes and add them and any juices to the blender. Puree the salsa until smooth; some chile seeds will still be visible. The salsa will be thick, so you may want to add up to ¼ cup of the reserved soaking water.

Variation: Substitute charred tomatoes for the boiled tomatoes.

Variation: Puree the chiles, garlic, and salt with 2 tablespoons of raw pepitas until creamy smooth. Add the tomatoes last.

SPICY SLAW

(for Fish Tacos)

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

In Baja California, the traditional garnish for fried fish or shrimp tacos is shredded green cabbage—lettuce wilts too quickly and is mostly served in tourist restaurants. This spicy slaw looks great and adds loads of flavor to seafood tacos. It is remarkably good on carnitas, grilled fish, and chicken tacos. Let the flavors mellow for half an hour before serving.

2 CUPS FINELY SHREDDED GREEN CABBAGE

⅓ CUP JULIENNED RADISHES

¼ CUP FINELY SLICED WHITE OR GREEN ONION

¼ SMALL SERRANO CHILE, MINCED

¼ TEASPOON SALT

2 TABLESPOON FRESH-SQUEEZED LIME JUICE

Serving Ideas: This slaw is great on any seafood taco, but some people put this on everything.

Stir all the ingredients together in a small bowl. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.



[Chimichurri](#)

CHIMICHURRI

(Garlic Salsa for Carne Asada)

MAKES ABOUT ¾ CUP

Emerald-green and unapologetically garlicky, chimichurri is South American in origin and fabulous on meat. I prefer this salsa minced and mixed

by hand so it is chunky, but you can also toss everything in a mini food processor or blender and puree it to a mostly smooth salsa with flecks of emerald green and bits of garlic. The flavor improves with a little mellowing, so make it about an hour before you want to serve.

½ CUP LIGHT-FLAVORED OLIVE OR VEGETABLE OIL

1 TABLESPOON FRESH-SQUEEZED LIME OR LEMON JUICE

8 CLOVES GARLIC, VERY FINELY MINCED

1 TABLESPOON VERY FINELY MINCED WHITE ONION

½ TEASPOON SALT

½ TEASPOON CRUSHED RED PEPPER FLAKES

⅛ TEASPOON FRESHLY GROUND BLACK PEPPER

12 LARGE SPRIGS FLAT-LEAF PARSLEY, STEMMED AND FINELY CHOPPED

12 LARGE SPRIGS CILANTRO, STEMMED AND FINELY CHOPPED

Serving Ideas: Chimichurri is great with any grilled meat taco, especially carne asada or steak.

Combine all the ingredients in a small bowl and mix thoroughly. Or place all the ingredients in a food processor or blender and pulse until smooth, scraping down often.



[Salsa Gobernador](#)

SALSA GOBERNADOR

(for Seafood Tacos)

MAKES ABOUT ¾ CUP

Salsa gobernador is a phenomenon of Mexico's Pacific Coast: a thick, creamy salsa that can best be described as a sort of Mexican tartar sauce, most often seen on rich seafood tacos made with shrimp, smoked fish, or fish and liberal amounts of melted cheese.

½ CUP THICK MAYONNAISE

4 TEASPOONS KETCHUP

3 TABLESPOONS MINCED WHITE ONION

3 TABLESPOONS MINCED PICKLED JALAPEÑOS

2 TEASPOONS FRESH-SQUEEZED LIME JUICE

½ TEASPOONS SALT

1 TEASPOON MINCED SERRANO (OPTIONAL)

1 TEASPOON MINCED CILANTRO (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: This sauce is a step up from ordinary lime-spiked mayonnaise (see [this page](#)) and enhances any kind of seafood.

Stir all the ingredients together in a small bowl. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

CREAMY LIME MAYONESA

(for Seafood Tacos)

MAKES ABOUT ¼ CUP

Every fish taco stand in Baja California offers this condiment in a squeeze bottle or gallon pump dispenser. It is an absolute must on fried fish or shrimp tacos.

¼ CUP THICK MAYONNAISE

½ TEASPOON SALT

1 TEASPOON FRESH-SQUEEZED LIME JUICE

1 TEASPOON WHITE VINEGAR

Serving Ideas: This condiment is perfect for fried or grilled seafood tacos.

Stir all the ingredients together in a small bowl. Thin with water if you wish. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.

TACO STAND ONIONS

1 Raw

I can't eat a taco without the crunch and flavor of raw onion, so I definitely know who my friends are. Taco stands usually just put out plain diced

white onion for their customers, but I like to mix red and white and add a little bit of minced cilantro. MAKES ABOUT ½ CUP

½ cup diced white or red onion or a mixture

ADD ONE (OPTIONAL):

Pinch of salt and 2 sprigs cilantro, stemmed and minced

½ teaspoon fresh-squeezed lime juice or white vinegar

½ serrano chile, cut into paper-thin rings

1 teaspoon freshly toasted and ground guajillo, ancho, or [dried chipotle chile](#)

Serving Ideas: These onions are excellent on any meat taco.

Choose one of the optional add-ins and stir it together with the onion in a small bowl.

2 Habanero

Though simple, this spicy condiment from the Yucatán (known as cebolla curtida) really kicks up the flavor and heat on a taco. MAKES ABOUT ¾ CUP

½ red onion, diced small

1 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons minced cilantro

¼ habanero chile, minced

juice of ½ lime (about 1 tablespoon)

½ teaspoon white vinegar

1 teaspoon fresh-squeezed orange juice (optional)

Serving Ideas: These spicy onions are an excellent addition to any seafood taco, and also good on pork carnitas.

Stir all the ingredients together in a small bowl. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired.



[Pickled Jalapeños and Carrots](#)

PICKLED JALAPEÑOS AND CARROTS

MAKES ABOUT 4 SERVINGS

No chapter on taco stands would be complete without the essential pickled jalapeños, which are eaten alongside the taco in alternating bites. It's true that the heat migrates from the jalapeños to the carrots, which often end up hotter than the chile. For extra heat, add the habanero chile, which will definitely make you sit up and take notice.

¼ CUP VEGETABLE OIL

½ WHITE ONION, CUT INTO 1-INCH PIECES

4 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, THINLY SLICED

4 JALAPEÑOS WITH STEMS, SPLIT IN HALF LENGTHWISE

1 HABANERO CHILE, STEMMED AND THINLY SLICED (OPTIONAL)

4 CARROTS, PEELED AND CUT INTO ½-INCH-THICK SLICES

10 BLACK PEPPERCORNS

3 WHOLE CLOVES

1 BAY LEAF

4 ALLSPICE BERRIES

½ TEASPOON WHOLE MEXICAN OREGANO

1 TABLESPOON SALT

1¾ CUPS WHITE VINEGAR

¼ CUP WATER

Serving Ideas: These pickled chiles are typically available at carne asada stands, but are universally appreciated. For an unusual botana (snack), slice some of the cooked jalapeños and carrots into strips. Mix with the pickling juice and some cubed cooked orange sweet potato or white potato and a generous sprinkling of chopped cilantro.

Heat the oil in a 2-quart saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic, and cook and stir until slightly softened but not brown, about 2 minutes. Add the jalapeños, habanero, carrots, and spices. Cook and stir for 2 minutes longer. Add the salt, vinegar, and water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer gently, stirring occasionally, until the carrots are just barely tender, about 10 minutes. Turn off the heat. Let cool, then refrigerate in the cooking liquid in a covered container. It will keep, refrigerated, for up to 2 weeks.



[Chiles Toreados Y Cebollitas](#)

CHILES TOREADOS Y CEBOLLITAS

(Grilled Jalapeños and Green Onions)

SERVES 6

Classic accompaniments to any grilled meat taco, these can be grilled over a wood fire (best) or gas grill, or cooked in a hot cast-iron grill pan. Eat them with a squeeze of lime and a sprinkle of salt, and alternate with bites of crunchy radish. In Baja, toreados (roasted jalapeños) are drizzled with soy sauce and lemon juice. Choose firm, medium-size jalapeños. For the onions, in Mexico cooks use young or “bunching” onions, which have a small bulb and thick green stems.

6 JALAPEÑOS

1 BUNCH GREEN ONIONS

ABOUT 1 TABLESPOON VEGETABLE OIL

PINCH KOSHER SALT

1 LIME, CUT INTO 8 PIECES, FOR SERVING

Serving Ideas: These grilled jalapeños and onions are typically served with carne asada.

Prepare a medium-hot grill or fire, or put a cast-iron grill pan over medium-high heat. Wash and dry the jalapeños, but do not stem. Trim the root ends and the top several inches from the stems of the green onions. Lightly coat the jalapeños and onions with vegetable oil and sprinkle lightly with kosher salt.

Grill the jalapeños and onions on a rack over the grill or fire, or on the grill pan if using, turning so they cook evenly and char slightly. They are ready when they are just soft but still have some crunch. Place on a platter, sprinkle lightly with the salt, and serve with the lime.





Some of my favorite salsas (both collected and created) feature unexpected and colorful combinations of ingredients, tastes, and textures. Although they are clearly salsas, they don't quite fit in any of the preceding categories—they're chunky, like little salads, and often have multiple uses. Unique combinations of unusual ingredients create vibrant flavors that explode with every bite, in a way that goes far beyond the typical salsa.

While some of these salsas might appear to be modern fusion recipes, all are typically Mexican combinations (some are very ancient) that are more likely to use regional fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and cheeses than the usual chiles and tomatoes. All are flavorful and interesting enough to stand on their own as a botana (snack) or to complement an antojito, which can either be a little on-the-go snack between meals (tacos are actually an antojito, not a real meal) or an appetizer served at the outset of a long, leisurely meal—both are great ways to showcase an unusual salsa. Botanas are the bite-size version, Mexico's answer to the amuse-bouche, the tapa, and the canapé. A botana is just a simple, flavorful bite, usually delivered on a small, crisp tostada or warm tortilla and best enjoyed with drinks.

Any of the salsas in this chapter may be served with an antojito or alone as a botana, with tostadas, tortillas, or some of the other ideas listed below. Inventive cooks will find many other uses for them as well: to dress up a simple grilled chicken breast or a piece of fish, to make a simple taco modern and different, or mixed into greens to make a sensational salad.

COOK'S NOTES ON CHUNKY SALSAS

- You only have one bite to make your point, so everything has to pack a wallop. Color, texture, flavor, and seasoning all come into play. When you season, adjust the balance of heat, sweet, salt, lime, and acidity to the exploding point.
- Because these salsas take center stage, how they look is as important as how they taste. Use your best dicing technique—small and careful—to make neat, uniform cubes of the correct size. Dicing is not the same as chopping; practice with a sharp knife until you have perfected your technique. Not only will your salsa look beautiful, but it will taste even better.
- Choose colorful, very fresh ingredients. Color and texture are paramount. Soft, sweet fruit, crunchy vegetables, and spicy chiles ... that sounds delicious.
- As a botana, serve your salsa with flair: on crisp tostadas, warm corn tortillas, endive spears, cucumber rounds, butter lettuce cups, slices of fruit, thin jicama rounds, zucchini rounds ... whatever you can think up.





[Peanut and Chile de Arbol Salsa](#)

PEANUT AND CHILE DE ARBOL SALSA

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

Salsas made with various combinations of nuts and chiles are not unusual in Mexico. I had this salsa at Punta del Mar restaurant in Mérida, where it was served in a tiny mason jar to spoon on top of thin, crisp, warm tostadas. The mellow flavors of roasted peanuts and sesame complement the subtle taste of the chile de arbol, which is meant to be eaten—it is not especially spicy. To make the salsa spicier, use fiery chiles pequín instead of chiles de arbol.

5 TABLESPOONS PLUS 1 TEASPOON GOOD OLIVE OIL OR NEUTRAL-FLAVORED VEGETABLE OIL

¼ CUP SKINNED RAW PEANUTS, CHOPPED INTO LARGE PIECES

6 CHILES DE ARBOL, STEMMED, SEEDED, AND BROKEN INTO ½-INCH PIECES

1 TABLESPOON RAW SESAME SEEDS

2 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, FINELY MINCED

½ TEASPOON SEA SALT

Serving Ideas: Serve this salsa on tostadas, with slices of fruit or vegetables. It's also amazing with shrimp.

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a small skillet over medium heat. Add the peanuts and chiles. Cook, stirring, until the peanuts start to take on a pale golden color. Add the sesame seeds and continue to cook and stir until they and the peanuts are golden. (Be patient—this step can take 5 minutes or longer, and you must be very careful not to burn the ingredients.)

Add the remaining 4 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon of oil, the garlic, and the salt, and continue to cook, stirring slowly, until the garlic is golden and fragrant. Remove from the heat and let cool. The flavors develop over the next hour or so—resist the urge to add more salt.

ALMOND SALSA WITH GARLIC

MAKES ABOUT ½ CUP

This unusual botana was introduced to me by a coworker, Jose Molina. I have since seen many variations on the basic idea. The salsa may be served chunky, chopped to a spoonable, thick paste, or even pureed.

¼ CUP SLIVERED ALMONDS, ROUGHLY CHOPPED

6 CHILES DE ARBOL, STEMMED, SEEDED, AND CHOPPED

¼ CUP GOOD OLIVE OIL

2 TABLESPOONS FINELY MINCED WHITE ONION

1 TABLESPOON FINELY MINCED FRESH GARLIC

¼ TEASPOON SEA SALT

Serving Ideas: Try it on a simple quesadilla with queso fresco, on toasted bread, with pan-roasted fish or shrimp, or, very simply, on warm, thin, very crisp tostadas.

Place the almonds and chiles in a small dry skillet. Set over medium heat and cook, stirring, until the almonds are golden, about 5 minutes. Add the oil, onion, garlic, and salt and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes, until the garlic is golden. The salsa may be used as is, or pulse it in a food processor for a finer texture.

Variation: Add 2 roasted (charred) Roma tomatoes, and puree in a blender.

ROASTED CORN AND BLACK BEAN SALSA

MAKES ABOUT 1¾ CUPS

This salsa is proof that ideas flow both ways, as it is probably more “New” Mexican than Mexican. Wherever it originated, it is a popular combination in Mexico; I have even seen it on pizza in Mexico City! You may use canned black beans for the salsa, but your own home-cooked beans will always taste better.

1 EAR FRESH SWEET CORN

½ TEASPOON VEGETABLE OIL

½ CUP COOKED BLACK BEANS, RINSED AND DRAINED

1 ROMA TOMATO, CORED, SEEDED, AND DICED ¼-INCH PIECES

¼ CUP DICED RED ONION, IN ¼-INCH PIECES
1 OR 2 CHIPOTLE CHILES IN ADOBO, FINELY CHOPPED
10 SPRIGS CILANTRO, STEMMED AND CHOPPED
2 TEASPOONS FRESH-SQUEEZED LIME JUICE
½ TEASPOON SALT
1 TABLESPOON CRUMBLED COTIJA CHEESE (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: This salsa is colorful and delicious on tostadas or tostones (fried plantain slices) as a botana (snack), tossed in a salad, served alongside grilled meats, or added to a gooey quesadilla. Substitute ¾ cup of cooked diced orange sweet potato for the corn for an equally delicious seasonal variation.

Lightly coat the corn with oil. Heat a heavy skillet or griddle over medium-high heat. When hot, place the corn in the pan. Rotate it every few minutes until it is well browned on all sides. Remove from the skillet and allow to cool. Cut the corn from the cob and place the kernels in a bowl. Stir in the beans, tomato, onion, chipotles, cilantro, lime juice, and salt, and sprinkle the cotija cheese on top.



FRUIT SALSAS

Nearly infinite variations of colorful salsas can be made by combining bits of ripe, seasonal fruit with spicy chiles, crunchy vegetables, and sweet-tart lime juice. The combination of natural sweetness and heat is both refreshing and exotic, and complements a wide range of foods, from rich pork carnitas to grilled shrimp to cheeses. Even alone, as a botana, such a boldly flavored salsa holds your attention. (Try serving on a little plantain chip or tostone, a fried plantain slice.) The extremes of flavor in these salsas need to be carefully balanced with judicious use of fresh-squeezed lime juice (both sweet and acidic), white vinegar (acidic), salt, and perhaps a little bit of sugar. Taste and taste again, adding more lime, vinegar, salt, or sugar in tiny increments until the salsa is almost too strong.



MANGO-HABANERO SALSA MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

The sweeter the fruit in a salsa, the hotter the chile has to be, and honey-sweet ripe mango is best matched with searing-hot habanero. But if habaneros are too hot for you, try substituting a minced serrano chile. I sometimes vary this salsa by including a couple of small mint leaves or a leaf of basil, minced and stirred in at the last moment.

½ RIPE MANGO, PEELED, PITTED, AND DICED INTO ¼-INCH PIECES
1 TABLESPOON FINELY DICED RED BELL PEPPER
1 TABLESPOON FINELY DICED RED ONION
¼ TEASPOON VERY FINELY MINCED HABANERO CHILE
1½ TEASPOONS FRESH- SQUEEZED LIME JUICE
2 TEASPOONS WHITE VINEGAR
⅛ TEASPOON SALT
1 SPRIG CILANTRO, STEMMED AND MINCED
½ ROMA TOMATO, DICED INTO ¼ INCH PIECES (OPTIONAL)
¼ TEASPOON SUGAR (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: This classic salsa is good by itself, but it is a perfect complement to seafood of any kind. Try adding it to a green salad along with some diced cucumber and a light vinaigrette.

Combine all the ingredients in a bowl and taste. Season strongly; if the mangoes are not too sweet, you may want to add the ¼ teaspoon of sugar. If you happen to have any leftovers, stir then taste and adjust the seasoning as desired before serving.

PINEAPPLE-CUCUMBER SALSA
MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

This crunchy, tart salsa is a hands-down favorite of mine during the heat of summer, when its cool freshness is most appealing. The jalapeño adds a wonderful “green” flavor. If you want to reduce the heat, remove the seeds and white ribs from the jalapeño.

¾ CUP DICED RIPE PINEAPPLE, CUT INTO ¼-INCH PIECES
½ CUP PEELED, SEEDED, AND DICED CUCUMBER IN ¼-INCH PIECES
3 TABLESPOONS MINCED RED ONION
1 JALAPEÑO, STEMMED AND MINCED
½ TEASPOON SALT
2 TEASPOONS FRESH- SQUEEZED LIME JUICE
2 TEASPOONS WHITE VINEGAR
½ TEASPOON SUGAR (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: The salsa is an excellent botana (snack) for serving with tostadas and drinks—ideally, a tart, icy margarita. It’s particularly good as a base for a ceviche or on grilled fish.

Combine all the ingredients in a small bowl. Taste and adjust the seasonings. The seasoning should be strong; if the fruit is not too sweet, you may want to add the ½ teaspoon of sugar. If you happen to have any leftovers, stir and reseason before serving.

GREEN APPLE AND JICAMA SALSA
MAKES ABOUT 1¼ CUPS

Tart green apples and crunchy, juicy jicama may be a geographic mismatch (jicama is subtropical), but the combination makes for an unusual, not-too-sweet salsa with a particular affinity for seafood and anything smoked. If you can’t find fresh jicama, peeled and seeded cucumber can be substituted. The salsa should be juicy with lime.

½ GREEN APPLE, PEELED AND DICED, IN ¼-INCH PIECES
¼ CUP PEELED AND DICED JICAMA, IN ¼-INCH PIECES
1 TABLESPOON MINCED RED BELL PEPPER
⅛ TEASPOON MINCED SERRANO CHILE
2 TEASPOONS WHITE VINEGAR
1 TABLESPOON FRESH-SQUEEZED LIME JUICE
PINCH OF SALT (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: This is great with grilled or smoked salmon or chicken.

Combine all the ingredients in a small bowl. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired. I don’t usually add salt to this salsa, but you may want to add a tiny pinch.



[Jicama and Radish Salsa](#)

JICAMA AND RADISH SALSA

with Orange and Chile

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

This combination is sometimes called a pico de gallo because of the chile con limón sprinkled over the top. Jicama is a crunchy, juicy root vegetable with white flesh and an affinity for both citrus juice and chiles. For more heat you can substitute ground chile pequin or chile de arbol for the chile con limón. Radishes are another much-loved vegetable in Mexico, and they bring both color and another kind of zip to this salsa.

1 CUP PREPARED JICAMA, DICED INTO ¼ -INCH PIECES OR CUT INTO MATCHSTICKS

2 RADISHES, DICED OR CUT LIKE THE JICAMA

1 TABLESPOON FRESH-SQUEEZED ORANGE JUICE

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH- SQUEEZED LIME JUICE

⅛ TEASPOON SALT

¼ TEASPOON CHILE CON LIMÓN*

¼ CUP ROASTED, SALTED PEANUT HALVES (OPTIONAL)

2 SPRIGS CILANTRO, STEMMED AND ROUGHLY CHOPPED (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: This is like a little salad. It is terrific served alone, with tostadas, and on pork carnitas.

Combine the jicama, radishes, juices, and salt in a bowl and mix well. Place on a small plate and sprinkle with the chile con limón. Sprinkle with the peanuts and cilantro.

* Chile con limón is a mixture of dried lime juice, ground chiles, and sometimes salt. It is sold in shakers at all Mexican markets.

SPICY FRUIT SALSA

with Chia Seeds

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

A little bit different, this fruit “salsa” is another kind of pico de gallo. I like to make it with coral-colored Mexican papaya, but you could also use (alone or combined with other fruit) watermelon, peaches or apricots, kiwifruit, pineapple, or ripe melon, all enlivened with fresh lime, a dash of chile con limón, and a sprinkle of crunchy chia seeds, which will slightly thicken the juices as the salsa sits.

1½ CUPS PEELED, SEEDED, AND CUBED VERY RIPE FRUIT, CUT INTO ½-INCH PIECES

1 TABLESPOON FRESH- SQUEEZED LIME JUICE

½ TEASPOON CHIA SEEDS

1 TEASPOON SEEDED AND FINELY MINCED HABANERO CHILE (OPTIONAL)

¼ TO ½ TEASPOON CHILE CON LIMÓN

Serving Ideas: Serve with tostadas or grilled fish or chicken, or add to a salad or shrimp ceviche.

Combine the fruit, lime juice, chia seeds, and minced habanero in a serving bowl and let stand for 30 minutes. Just before serving, sprinkle the chile con limón over the top.

Note: To de-fang the habanero, wear gloves and use a small sharp knife to carefully slice the orange flesh from between the white ribs and seeds.

Try not to touch the seeds at all. This step considerably reduces the heat factor and enhances the chile’s naturally fruity taste.

AVOCADO AND CHERRY TOMATO SALSA

MAKES ABOUT 2½ CUPS

This is definitely not guacamole, but a kind of chunky avocado salad. I love it on a crisp tostada or rolled up in a warm corn tortilla. It must be served as soon as it is made.

1½ RIPE AVOCADOS, PEELED, PITTED, AND CUT INTO ½-INCH PIECES (ABOUT 1½ CUPS)

⅛ TEASPOON SALT

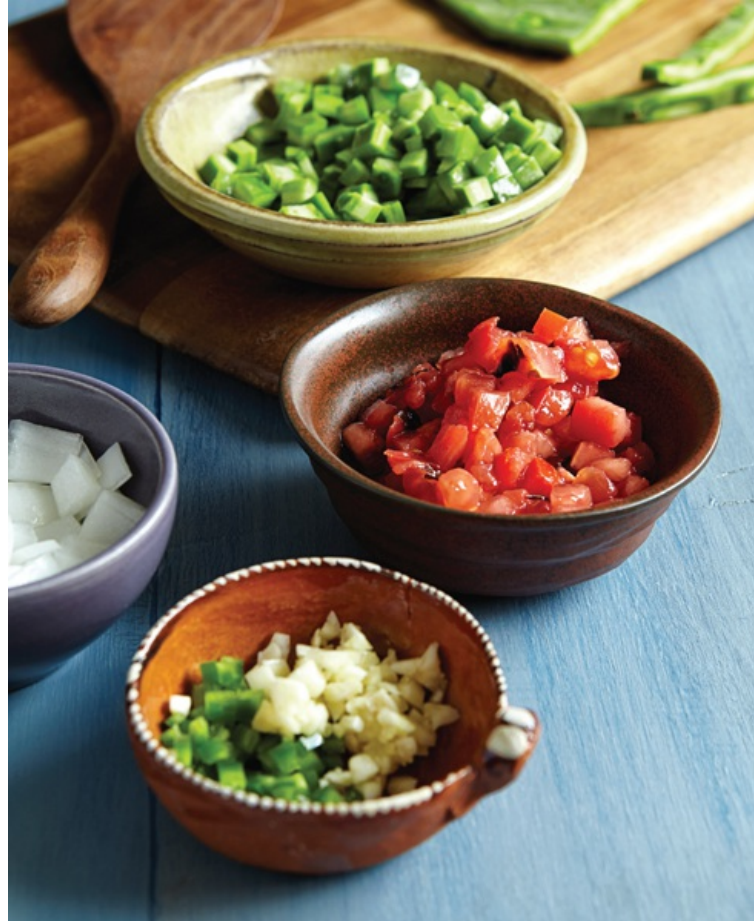
2 TEASPOONS FRESH-SQUEEZED LIME JUICE

¼ CUP DICED RED ONION, IN ¼-INCH PIECES

½ CUP HALVED SMALL CHERRY OR GRAPE TOMATOES
4 SPRIGS CILANTRO, STEMMED AND ROUGHLY CHOPPED

Serving Ideas: This is delicious heaped on a crisp tostada. At SOL, I toss it with baby arugula and pile it on top of warm chicken breast grilled with chipotle chiles and garlic.

Combine all the ingredients in a small bowl, toss gently, and use immediately.



[Nopal Salsa with Cotija Cheese](#)

NOPAL SALSA WITH COTIJA CHEESE

MAKES ABOUT 2¼ CUPS

Don't be afraid of cactus! Fresh nopales, which may be purchased without the spines, have a firm, almost squeaky texture when cooked and a mild vegetable flavor—there's nothing scary about them. In addition, they are nutritious, unusual, and quite delicious. The addition of salty cotija cheese and roasted tomatoes makes this salsa almost as good as a meal. Nopal salsa is best served slightly warm or at room temperature to enhance the squeaky crunch of the nopales.

1½ CUPS DICED NOPALES

4 CUPS WATER

1½ TEASPOONS SALT

1 TABLESPOON VEGETABLE OIL

¼ WHITE ONION, DICED INTO ½-INCH PIECES

1 TEASPOON CHOPPED GARLIC

½ SERRANO CHILE, MINCED

¼ TEASPOON FRESHLY GROUND BLACK PEPPER

¼ TEASPOON DRIED MEXICAN OREGANO OR MINCED FRESH MARJORAM LEAVES

⅓ CUP DICED FRESH TOMATOES (OR 2 ROMA TOMATOES, ROASTED AND ROUGHLY CHOPPED)

1 TABLESPOON CHOPPED CILANTRO

2 TABLESPOONS CRUMBLED COTIJA CHEESE OR QUESO FRESCO

Serving Ideas: To serve as a botana (snack), pile this salsa on tostadas. Add cooked shrimp for an even more delicious variation. It's also great as a side dish alongside grilled meats or pork carnitas.

Place the nopales in a 2-quart saucepan and add the water and 1 teaspoon of the salt. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, reduce the heat, and simmer for 20 minutes. Drain and rinse the nopales thoroughly.

Heat the oil in a large, heavy sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the onion, garlic, and serrano. Cook, stirring, until the onion is just starting to soften.

Add the cooked nopales and sauté until they are hot. Season with the remaining ½ teaspoon salt and the pepper and oregano. Add the tomatoes and cook, stirring, until the tomatoes are dry. Remove from the heat and stir in the cilantro. Let cool to room temperature then serve with the crumbled cheese on top.



[Shrimp and Salsa](#)

SHRIMP AND SALSA

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

Adding shrimp to salsa is such a great idea that you will immediately want to start adding shrimp to other salsas of your own invention. The idea is to combine the warm, cooked shrimp with the salsa, season with lime and salt, and serve immediately.

8 OUNCES SMALL SHRIMP (40/50 COUNT), PEELED AND DEVEINED (ABOUT 2 CUPS)

2 CUPS WATER

1 TEASPOON SALT

1 THICK SLICE WHITE ONION

1 CLOVE GARLIC, CUT IN HALF

½ LEMON

½ SMALL SERRANO CHILE, MINCED

1 CUP [PICO DE GALLO](#), [MANGO-HABANERO SALSA](#), [GREEN APPLE AND JICAMA SALSA](#), OR ANY OTHER FRESH, CRUNCHY SALSA

1 TABLESPOON FRESH-SQUEEZED LIME JUICE

1 TABLESPOON CHOPPED CILANTRO

Serving Ideas: Serve this dish on crisp tostadas, endive spears, lettuce cups, or whatever you like.

Place the shrimp, water, salt, onion, and garlic in a 2-quart saucepan. Squeeze the lemon juice into the pan, then drop the lemon in. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, stirring several times. When the shrimp are pink and firm, drain well. Discard the onion, garlic, and lemon. Let cool for 5 minutes. Cut the shrimp into 2 or 3 pieces, if you like.

Place in a bowl and combine with the serrano, salsa of your choice, lime juice, and cilantro. Taste, and season with a little more salt if desired.



[Salsa Fresca with Queso and Pintos](#)

SALSA FRESCA WITH QUESO AND PINTOS

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

This sounds odd but is quite delicious, and typically Mexican. Queso panela is a fresh cheese with a firm, rubbery texture. The flavor is mild and salty, a perfect contrast to the creamy cooked beans and the fresh taste of tomato salsa. The beans are the most important part of this salsa. Make sure they are cooked through but still firm. Canned beans may be used, but your home-cooked beans will taste infinitely better. This should be served as soon as it is made.

4 OUNCES PANELA CHEESE (ABOUT 1 CUP), CUT INTO ¼-INCH CUBES

¼ CUP COOKED PINTO BEANS, WELL DRAINED

1¼ CUPS [PICO DE GALLO](#) OR [SALSA QUEMADA](#)

1 TABLESPOON CHOPPED CILANTRO

⅛ TEASPOON SALT

1 TEASPOON FRESH SQUEEZED LIME JUICE (OPTIONAL)

Serving Ideas: This is delicious on a tostada or in a warm corn tortilla. It is very good tossed into a green salad with more lime juice and a dash of olive oil.

Combine all the ingredients in a small bowl. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired. Serve immediately.

HOMEMADE CHIPOTLES IN ADOBO

MAKES ABOUT 2½ CUPS

Canned chipotles in adobo are handy to keep around, but it's a worthwhile effort to make your own, and it's surprisingly easy!

20 CHILES MORAS

3 CUPS HOT WATER

1 TABLESPOON VEGETABLE OIL

½ WHITE ONION, SLICED ¼-INCH THICK

3 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, THINLY SLICED

1-INCH CEYLON (MEXICAN) CINNAMON STICK, OR ¼ TEASPOON GROUND CINNAMON

¼ CUP TOMATO PASTE

1 TABLESPOON WHITE VINEGAR

1 TEASPOON SALT

Serving Ideas: These can be used in any salsa calling for chipotles in adobo. I like to chop them up and tuck them inside a quesadilla. Try a few thin slices on cubes of queso panela or Chihuahua cheese, drizzled with the sauce, as a botana (snack).

Snap the stems off the chiles, leaving the rest of the chile intact, with its seeds. Place in a bowl and pour 2 cups of the hot water over the chiles.

Set a small plate on top to press them into the water and let them soak for about 30 minutes. Drain, reserving the soaking water.

In a 2-quart saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, and drained chiles and cook, stirring often, for about 5 minutes, until the onion is soft and golden. Add the reserved soaking liquid, cinnamon, tomato paste, vinegar, salt, and remaining 1 cup of water. Bring to a low simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened, 35 to 45 minutes. Remove the cinnamon stick before serving.

* The chile mora is a smoked ripe jalapeño that is shriveled and rosy, rather than light brown and flat as the chile meco is.

SECRET SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

Secret Sauce is one of those serendipitous and very useful salsas that seems to taste good on just about anything. There are two versions here, one using slow-roasted jalapeño and sweet roasted garlic, and a variation that uses pickled jalapeño instead.

2 LARGE FRESH JALAPEÑOS

2 CLOVES GARLIC, UNPEELED

2 ROMA TOMATOES, CORED, SEEDED, AND DICED ¼ INCH (ABOUT ¾ CUP)

⅓ CUP ¼-INCH DICED RED ONION

1 TEASPOON SALT

1 TEASPOON WHITE VINEGAR

¼ CUP THICK MAYONNAISE

6 SPRIGS CILANTRO, STEMMED AND CHOPPED

Serving Ideas: Use this sauce to top a seafood tostada or taco, or torta, hamburger, or Mexican hot dog. It makes a terrific base for a shrimp or chicken salad, or it may be used as a salad dressing by itself.

Turn on the fan over the stove. Line a large cast-iron skillet with aluminum foil and set over medium-high heat. Add the jalapeños and garlic and cook on all sides until soft. Remove from the heat. Stem the jalapeños, cut into 4 lengthwise strips, then dice finely. Peel the garlic and mash or mince it into a paste.

Place the jalapeños and garlic in a bowl. Add the tomatoes, onion, salt, and vinegar and stir well to combine. Add the mayonnaise and chopped cilantro and stir again until well combined.

Variation: Substitute 2 large pickled jalapeños, minced, for the roasted jalapeños and garlic.

resources

I live in San Diego, barely twenty minutes from Tijuana. Even so, when I first began cooking and writing about Mexican food, it was hard to find ingredients on this side of la linea. This forced me to cross frequently into Baja California to shop, and as a result I learned much more about Mexican cooking than I ever could have without taking that leap!

Fortunately, most Mexican salsas use basic ingredients that can be easily found in any store or ordered online. Mexican-grown chiles will probably be your biggest challenge, and they can be readily found online (see below).

Authentic Mexican ingredients have become ever easier to source in many parts of the country. If you live in or near a large city, you need only search for Mexican or Latin markets to stock up on all the basics.

It's essential to seek out a few produce vendors who are passionate about ripe, seasonal fruits and vegetables. Bear in mind that ripe, flavorful produce may not always be shiny and perfect.

If you garden, a patch (or a few pots) of Mexican herbs (oregano, marjoram, epazote, and cilantro) will add authentic flavor to your cooking.

And of course, there is always the Internet. Here are a few good online sources.

Dried chiles—Always choose Mexican-grown chiles for best results. The optimum source, hands down, for authentic Mexican-sourced chiles, spices, and herbs, is the Chile Guy, www.thechileguy.com.

Canned goods—Canned chipotles and tomatillos, Maseca masa, corn husks, cooking utensils, and more can be purchased from mexgrocer.com. Also, igourmet.com is a terrific site with more “gourmet” Mexican products such as artisanal chocolates and salsas, but note that many of their chiles are not Mexican.

Dried Beans—Check out Rancho Gordo, at www.ranchogordo.com.

Cheeses—Look for Mexican cheeses at www.igourmet.com, www.mexgrocer.com, and www.specialcheese.com.

index

A

[Aguachile Verde](#)

[Allspice](#)

Almonds

[Almond Salsa with Garlic](#)

[Mole Negro](#)

[Mole Poblano](#)

[Quick Mole](#)

[Red Chile Mole](#)

Anaheim (California) chiles, [itr.1](#), [itr.2](#)

[Volcano Salsa \(Roasted Green Chile Salsa\)](#)

[Ancho chiles](#)

[Chile Rojo and Tomatillo Salsa](#)

[Fruity Morita and Ancho Chile Salsa](#)

[Red Chile Mole](#)

[Simplest Enchilada Sauce](#)

[Anise seed](#)

[Apple, Green, and Jicama Salsa](#)

[Avocados](#)

[Avocado and Cherry Tomato Salsa](#)

[Basic Guacamole](#)

[Salsa Mestiza \(Avocado-Cilantro Sauce\)](#)

[Salsa Taquero \(Spicy Avocado Sauce\)](#)

B

Bananas

[Mole Negro](#)

[Red Chile Mole](#)

[Bay leaves](#)

Beans

[Black Bean Salsa Borracha](#)

[Roasted Corn and Black Bean Salsa](#)

[Salsa Fresca with Queso and Pintos](#)

[Beer](#)

C

[Cabbage](#)

[Col](#)

[Spicy Slaw](#)

[Cactus](#)

[Green Cactus Pear Salsa Verde](#)

[Jose's Mother's Red Cactus Pear Salsa](#)

[Nopal Salsa with Cotija Cheese](#)

[Salsa Xoconostle with Morita Chile](#)

California chiles. See [Anaheim chiles](#)

[Carrots, Pickled Jalapeños and](#)

[Cascabel chiles](#)

[Cascabel Chile Salsa](#)

[Three Chile Salsa Borracha](#)

Cheese

[Nopal Salsa with Cotija Cheese](#)

[Salsa Fresca with Queso and Pintos](#)

[Chile con limón](#)

Chiles

[blackened](#)

dried, [itr.1](#), [itr.2](#), [itr.3](#)

fresh, [itr.1](#), [itr.2](#), [itr.3](#)

[heat of](#)

[working with](#)

See also individual chiles

[Chiles de arbol](#)

[Almond Salsa with Garlic](#)

[Charred Chile de Arbol Salsa](#)

[Jose's Mother's Red Cactus Pear Salsa](#)

[Peanut and Chile de Arbol Salsa](#)

[Red Chile Salsa](#)

[Salsa Casera \(Simmered Fresh Tomato Salsa\)](#)

[Salsa Diabla \(Fresh Tomato Salsa with Chipotle\)](#)

[Salsa Fea \(Charred Chunky Salsa with Red Chile\)](#)

[Salsa Xoconostle with Morita Chile](#)

Chiles moras

[Homemade Chipotles in Adobo](#)

[Chiles negro](#)

[Mole Negro](#)

[Chiles pequín](#)

[Salsa de Chile Pequin](#)

[Chimichurri \(Garlic Salsa for Carne Asada\)](#)

[Chipotle chiles](#)

[in adobo](#)

[Chipotle Chile and Garlic Salsa](#)

[Chipotle-Garlic Salsa](#)

[Ghost Chile Salsa “Viper” \(“Gasolina”\)](#)

[Homemade Chipotles in Adobo](#)

[Mole Negro](#)

[Red Chile Mole](#)

[Roasted Corn and Black Bean Salsa](#)

[Salsa Diabla \(Fresh Tomato Salsa with Chipotle\)](#)

[Sol's Tomatillo Chipotle Salsa](#)

[Chocolate](#)

[Mole Negro](#)

[Mole Poblano](#)

[Quick Mole](#)

[Cilantro](#)

[Cinnamon](#)

[Cloves](#)

[Col](#)

[Coriander seed](#)

[Corn](#)

[Roasted Corn and Black Bean Salsa](#)

[Cucumbers](#)

[Pineapple-Cucumber Salsa](#)

[Cumin](#)

E

Enchilada sauces

[Angela's Pasilla Chile Sauce](#)

[Cascabel Chile Salsa](#)

[Chile Rojo and Tomatillo Salsa](#)

[Guajillo Chile Salsa with Tomato \(Enchilada Sauce 2\)](#)

[Simplest Enchilada Sauce](#)

[Three Chile Salsa Borracha](#)

[Epazote](#)

[Evil Green Hot Sauce](#)

F

Fruit salsas

[Fruity Morita and Ancho Chile Salsa](#)

[Green Apple and Jicama Salsa](#)

[making](#)

[Mango-Habanero Salsa](#)

[Pineapple-Cucumber Salsa](#)

[Spicy Fruit Salsa with Chia Seeds](#)

G

[Garlic](#)

[Almond Salsa with Garlic](#)

[Chimichurri \(Garlic Salsa for Carne Asada\)](#)

[Chipotle Chile and Garlic Salsa](#)

[Chipotle-Garlic Salsa](#)

[Habanero and Garlic Salsa](#)

[Mojito Salsa \(Citrus Garlic Salsa\)](#)

[Ghost chiles](#)

[Ghost Chile Salsa “Viper” \(“Gasolina”\)](#)

[Guacamole, Basic](#)

[Guajillo chiles](#)

[Chile Rojo and Tomatillo Salsa](#)

[Guajillo Chile Salsa with Tomato \(Enchilada Sauce 2\)](#)

[Jose's Mother's Red Cactus Pear Salsa](#)

[Mole Negro](#)

[Quick Mole](#)

[Red Chile Mole](#)

[Red Chile Salsa](#)

[Salsa Fea \(Charred Chunky Salsa with Red Chile\)](#)

[Simplest Enchilada Sauce](#)

[Three Chile Salsa Borracha](#)

[Güero chiles](#)

[Chile Güero Salsa \(Salsa Amarilla\)](#)

H

[Habanero chiles](#)

[Charred Chile de Arbol Salsa](#)

[Col](#)

[Evil Green Hot Sauce](#)

[Ghost Chile Salsa “Viper” \(“Gasolina”\)](#)

[Habanero and Garlic Salsa](#)

[Habanero Salsa](#)

[Lime and Chiles](#)
[Mango-Habanero Salsa](#)
[Pickled Jalapeños and Carrots](#)
[Spicy Fruit Salsa with Chia Seeds](#)
[Taco Stand Onions](#)
[Xni-Pec](#)
[Yucatecan Tomato Salsa with Habanero](#)
Hatch chiles. See [New Mexico chiles](#)
[Herbs](#)

J

[Jalapeño chiles](#)
[Chiles Tostados y Cebollitas \(Grilled Jalapeños and Green Onions\)](#)
[Green Cactus Pear Salsa Verde](#)
[Mole Pipian](#)
[Mole Verde](#)
[Northern-Style Tomato Salsa](#)
[Pickled Jalapeños and Carrots](#)
[Pico de Gallo](#)
[Pineapple-Cucumber Salsa](#)
[Salsa Casera \(Simmered Fresh Tomato Salsa\)](#)
[Salsa Gobernador](#)
[Salsa Verde \(Cooked Tomatillo Salsa with Cilantro and Jalapeño\)](#)
[Secret Sauce](#)
[Simmered Salsa Milpera](#)
[Volcano Salsa \(Roasted Green Chile Salsa\)](#)
[Japones chiles](#)
[Red Chile Salsa](#)
[Jicama](#)
[Green Apple and Jicama Salsa](#)
[Jicama and Radish Salsa with Orange and Chile](#)

L

[Lard](#)
[Limes](#)
[Aguachile Verde](#)
[Col](#)
[Creamy Lime Mayonesa](#)
[Lime and Chiles](#)
[Xni-Pec](#)

M

[Mangoes](#)
[Mango-Habanero Salsa](#)
[Manzana chiles](#)
[Salsa de Chile Manzana](#)
Marjoram, [itr.1](#), [itr.2](#)
[Mayonnaise](#)
[Chipotle-Garlic Salsa](#)
[Creamy Lime Mayonesa](#)
[Salsa Gobernador](#)
[Secret Sauce](#)
[Mojito Salsa \(Citrus Garlic Salsa\)](#)

Moles

[Mole Negro](#)
[Mole Pipian](#)
[Mole Poblano](#)
[Mole Verde](#)
[Quick Mole](#)
[Red Chile Mole](#)
[tips for](#)
[Morita chiles](#)
[Fruity Morita and Ancho Chile Salsa](#)
[Mole Poblano](#)
[Salsa Xoconostle with Morita Chile](#)

N

New Mexico (Hatch) chiles, [itr.1](#), [itr.2](#)
[Hatch Chile Salsa \(Roasted New Mexico Chile Salsa\)](#)
Nopales. See [Cactus](#)

Nuts

[purchasing](#)
[toasting](#)
See also individual nuts

O

[Oils](#)
[Onions](#)
[Chiles Tostados y Cebollitas \(Grilled Jalapeños and Green Onions\)](#)
[Taco Stand Onions](#)

[Oranges](#)
[Col](#)
[Jicama and Radish Salsa with Orange and Chile](#)
[Mojito Salsa \(Citrus Garlic Salsa\)](#)
[Oregano, Mexican](#)
P
[Parsley](#)
[Pasilla chiles](#)
[Angela's Pasilla Chile Sauce](#)
[Mole Negro](#)
[Mole Poblano](#)
[Quick Mole](#)
[Three Chile Salsa Borracha](#)
Peanuts
[Jicama and Radish Salsa with Orange and Chile](#)
[Mole Negro](#)
[Peanut and Chile de Arbol Salsa](#)
[Quick Mole](#)
[Red Chile Mole](#)
Pecans
[Mole Negro](#)
[Quick Mole](#)
Pepitas
[Mole Pipian](#)
[Peppercorns, black](#)
[Pico de Gallo](#)
[Pineapple-Cucumber Salsa](#)
Plantains
[Red Chile Mole](#)
[Poblano chiles](#)
[Mole Pipian](#)
[Mole Verde](#)
[Puya chiles](#)
[Red Chile Salsa](#)
R
[Radishes](#)
[Jicama and Radish Salsa with Orange and Chile](#)
Raisins
[Fruity Morita and Ancho Chile Salsa](#)
[Mole Negro](#)
[Mole Poblano](#)
[Quick Mole](#)
S
Salsas
[flavor and balance of](#)
[hot](#)
[myths about](#)
[role of, in Mexican cuisine](#)
[seasoning](#)
table, [1.1](#), [1.2](#)
[for tacos](#)
[uses for](#)
See also individual recipes
[Salt](#)
[Secret Sauce](#)
Seeds
[purchasing](#)
[toasting](#)
See also individual seeds
[Serrano chiles](#)
[Aguachile Verde](#)
[Col](#)
[Evil Green Hot Sauce](#)
[Green Cactus Pear Salsa Verde](#)
[Habanero and Garlic Salsa](#)
[Lime and Chiles](#)
[Mojito Salsa \(Citrus Garlic Salsa\)](#)
[Mole Pipian](#)
[Nopal Salsa with Cotija Cheese](#)
[Pico de Gallo](#)
[Raw Tomatillo Salsa](#)
[Roasted Salsa Milpero](#)
[Salsa Quemada \(Roasted Tomato and Tomatillo Salsa\)](#)
[Salsa Taquero \(Spicy Avocado Sauce\)](#)
[Shrimp and Salsa](#)
[Spicy Slaw](#)

[Volcano Salsa \(Roasted Green Chile Salsa\)](#)

[Xni-Pec](#)

[Sesame seeds](#)

[Mole Negro](#)

[Mole Pipian](#)

[Mole Poblano](#)

[Quick Mole](#)

[Red Chile Mole](#)

[Shrimp and Salsa](#)

[Slaw, Spicy](#)

[Soy bacon bits](#)

[Spices](#)

[Stock](#)

[Sugar](#)

[T](#)

[Tacos, salsas for](#). See also individual recipes

[Techniques](#)

[Tequila](#)

[Thyme](#)

[Tomatillos](#)

[Aguachile Verde](#)

[Angela's Pasilla Chile Sauce](#)

[Cascabel Chile Salsa](#)

[Chile Güero Salsa \(Salsa Amarilla\)](#)

[Chile Rojo and Tomatillo Salsa](#)

[Evil Green Hot Sauce](#)

[Fruity Morita and Ancho Chile Salsa](#)

[Green Cactus Pear Salsa Verde](#)

[Hatch Chile Salsa \(Roasted New Mexico Chile Salsa\)](#)

[Jose's Mother's Red Cactus Pear Salsa](#)

[Mole Negro](#)

[Mole Pipian](#)

[Mole Verde](#)

[Raw Tomatillo Salsa](#)

[Roasted Salsa Milpero](#)

[Salsa Casera \(Simmered Fresh Tomato Salsa\)](#)

[Salsa de Chile Manzana](#)

[Salsa Diabla \(Fresh Tomato Salsa with Chipotle\)](#)

[Salsa Fea \(Charred Chunky Salsa with Red Chile\)](#)

[Salsa Quemada \(Roasted Tomato and Tomatillo Salsa\)](#)

[Salsa Taquero \(Spicy Avocado Sauce\)](#)

[Salsa Verde \(Cooked Tomatillo Salsa with Cilantro and Jalapeño\)](#)

[Simmered Salsa Milpera](#)

[Sol's Tomatillo Chipotle Salsa](#)

[Volcano Salsa \(Roasted Green Chile Salsa\)](#)

[Tomatoes](#)

[Avocado and Cherry Tomato Salsa](#)

[Cascabel Chile Salsa](#)

[Charred Chile de Arbol Salsa](#)

[Chile Rojo and Tomatillo Salsa](#)

[Chipotle Chile and Garlic Salsa](#)

[Fruity Morita and Ancho Chile Salsa](#)

[Guajillo Chile Salsa with Tomato \(Enchilada Sauce 2\)](#)

[Habanero Salsa](#)

[Homemade Chipotles in Adobo](#)

[Mole Negro](#)

[Mole Poblano](#)

[Nopal Salsa with Cotija Cheese](#)

[Northern-Style Tomato Salsa](#)

[paste](#)

[Pico de Gallo](#)

[Quick Mole](#)

[Red Chile Mole](#)

[Red Chile Salsa](#)

[Roasted Corn and Black Bean Salsa](#)

[Salsa Casera \(Simmered Fresh Tomato Salsa\)](#)

[Salsa de Chile Manzana](#)

[Salsa de Chile Pequin](#)

[Salsa Diabla \(Fresh Tomato Salsa with Chipotle\)](#)

[Salsa Fea \(Charred Chunky Salsa with Red Chile\)](#)

[Salsa Quemada \(Roasted Tomato and Tomatillo Salsa\)](#)

[Secret Sauce](#)

[Sol's Tomatillo Chipotle Salsa](#)

[Xni-Pec](#)

[Yucatecan Tomato Salsa with Habanero](#)

[Tortillas](#)

V

[Vinegar](#)

[Volcano Salsa \(Roasted Green Chile Salsa\)](#)

W

[Water](#)

X

[Xni-Pec](#)

Y

[Yucatecan Tomato Salsa with Habanero](#)