CHRISTMAS EVE (NOCHEBUENA) · DECEMBER 24

Nochebuena tamales (rajas con queso)

Prep 1 hr 30 min **Cook** 1 hr 15 min **Rest** 15 min **Total** 3 hr **Makes** About 24 tamales **Level** Medium

ADULT SUPERVISION REQUIRED

Cooking is for children and grown-ups together. An adult should supervise at all times and handle the oven, stovetop, knives, and anything hot. Roasting peppers, boiling water, and steam can burn. A grown-up roasts the peppers, adds water to the pot, and lifts the lid away from their face. Wash hands after handling peppers and keep them away from eyes. Corn husks are not eaten: unwrap tamales for young children and let them cool.

ALLERGY INFORMATION

Contains milk (cheese). Masa harina is made from corn and has no wheat, but check the labels on broth, salsa, and red sauce: some canned enchilada sauces and broths contain wheat, and some contain soy or milk. Always read ingredient labels, since brands vary, and ask about food allergies before you cook or share.

INGREDIENTS

Masa

- 4 cups (480 g) masa harina for tamales
- 1⅓ cups (260 g) lard or vegetable shortening
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1½ tsp salt
- 3 cups (720 ml) warm chicken or vegetable broth, plus more as needed

Wrappers

- About 30 dried corn husks, plus extras to line the pot

Rajas con queso filling

- 4 poblano peppers
- 12 oz (340 g) Oaxaca or Monterey Jack cheese, cut into 24 sticks
- 1 cup (240 ml) salsa verde (optional)

Or chicken in red sauce

- 3 cups (about 400 g) shredded cooked chicken
- 1½ cups (360 ml) red chile sauce or red enchilada sauce

METHOD

1. Soak the corn husks in a large bowl of hot water, weighed down with a plate, for 30 minutes, until soft.
2. Roast the poblanos under the broiler, turning, until blackened. Cover in a bowl for 10 minutes, then peel, seed, and cut into strips. (For chicken, stir it into the red sauce.)
3. Beat the lard or shortening until fluffy, about 2 minutes. Mix the masa harina, baking powder, and salt, and beat it in a little at a time with the broth until the masa is soft and spreadable, like thick hummus.
4. Pat a husk dry and lay it smooth side up, wide end toward you. Spread about ¼ cup of masa in a thin layer over the wide half, leaving a ½-inch (1 cm) border at the sides.
5. Lay a few poblano strips, a cheese stick, and a spoonful of salsa (or 2 tablespoons of chicken) down the middle. Fold one side over the filling, then the other, and fold the narrow end up.
6. Set a steamer rack in a large pot with water just below it, and line it with husks. Stand the tamales up, open end up, close together, and cover with more husks and the lid.
7. Steam over medium heat 60 to 75 minutes, adding boiling water when low, until the masa pulls away cleanly from the husk. Rest 15 minutes, and unwrap before eating.

LITTLE HELPERS CAN (WITH A GROWN-UP)

- Pull the soaked husks apart and pat them dry
- Spread the masa with the back of a spoon
- Lay in the cheese and poblano strips
- Fold the tamales and stand them in the pot

GOOD TO KNOW

- Canned whole green chiles, cut into strips, can stand in for roasted poblanos.
- Tamales keep 5 days in the fridge or 3 months frozen. Steam them in their husks for 15 to 20 minutes to reheat.

A BLESSING BEFORE WE EAT

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen. Child Jesus, born on this good night, come and stay in our home.