

Tostadas

Today, 5:26am [By Laura Anhalt](#)

Authentic Mexican food is a true culinary



experience! Growing up in Mexico City, I had the pleasure of being immersed in the delights of this astounding cuisine: refried beans, tacos, tostadas, soups, salads, stuffed chiles, moles, rice dishes, meats and seafood, meringues, candies, cookies and cakes. It is certainly a fine reflection of the heritage and culture that we've inherited from this majestic land and its previous civilizations.

This cuisine has been captivating people's palates for decades and because of this, it has captured international attention making it one of the most renowned and appreciated cuisines in the world.

Unfortunately, Mexican food also tends to be very misrepresented- at least it is this far north. Ever since moving to Buffalo, I've been on a quest to hunt down a place where I can eat authentic Mexican food. I've been able to find places that serve relatively good food, but not necessarily Mexican and certainly not authentic. So what do we do when we are craving real authentic Mexican food? We prepare it at home!

What makes this cuisine fabulous and unique, aside from the aromas and flavors, is the vast history behind it. And just to stir more fun and confusion into the history pot, each Mexican state has its own recipes and culinary traditions, making Mexican cuisine immensely abundant and diverse.

Happily, the European food influences that came with the Spanish Invasion never replaced this ancient gastronomy- it only enhanced it. The result of this cultural diffusion proved to be a very rich interchange of foods, spices and cooking techniques, which set forth the foundations of what Mexican cuisine is today.

Moving forward in time, we arrive at modern day Mexico where we can see that the nation's cuisines are still strongly influenced by the raw foods and food prepping techniques that were being used over two thousand years ago.

An excellent example is the tortilla. Tortillas have been used in the diet of Mexicans since remote times and we Mexicans consider them a culture all by themselves. They provide essential nutrients to our daily diet and we use them in limitless creations.

I am, of course, referring to the authentic tortillas, those made with maize dough, pressed by hand or special machinery like those in “tortillerías” (tortilla shops) that appear to be on every street corner throughout the whole Mexican nation; north to south, east to west. Without a doubt, the tortilla is a staple of the Mexican culinary arts.

Almost anything can be prepared or eaten with tortillas. Personally, I’ve never tried using them to prepare desserts but I’m sure some very creative people out there have.

All this talk of tortillas has inspired me to share one of the most loved and traditional dishes made with tortillas: Tostadas. Tostadas can be prepared in a flash (once you have the ingredients ready), they are easy to make and fun to eat, though they can also be a little messy. They can be served as an appetizer or as the main dish and they can be as elaborate or as simple as you’d like them to be.

I am a great advocate of preparing food from scratch, but I do understand that you may not have the time to wait around for the beans to cook or the initiative to hand make your own tortillas, so I’ll provide you with some quick tips & cheats that will deliver the exact same wonderful results, I promise.

Let’s get started.

About the tortillas... since we don’t have “tortillerías” here, where we can get them nice, fresh and warm, we have to make due with what we have. My favorite pick is a particular brand called Banderita. They are the “real thing”. You can purchase them at

your local Wegmans (I haven't seen them in any other grocery store). You'll need to get the corn tortillas; the flour ones will just not do this time. They are hard to find within the store (usually in the bottom shelf in the 'so called' Mexican food section) but they are there, I promise... and they are worth it.

If after all you're hard efforts you can't find them, Goya or any other kind will do. I encourage you to not buy the frozen ones, but again, if you have no choice, by all means get them, thaw them, and prepare this dish!

Now the beans... If you refuse to cook & mash them yourself which is what I would suggest, then absolutely get a can of Goya red or black refried beans. You can purchase them at almost any grocery store, they have a great flavor to them and you can always "dress them up" by frying some chopped onion in a bit of olive oil and adding the refried beans from the can and mixing it well. This also allows the beans to heat up. Don't try to eat them cold, you'll be quite disappointed.

Enjoy!

Chef's suggestion: If you are making the beans from scratch, have them cooked before starting on the rest of the food preparation.

Tostadas (*serves 6 to 8*)

To prepare beans from scratch:

1 small package of black or red beans uncooked and rinsed • **1/2** medium onion • **1/2** medium onion, very finely chopped • **1** garlic clove, whole • **4** cilantro sprigs • **2** pkgs of chicken bouillon • **2** tbsp olive oil • salt and pepper • water

In a large, heavy saucepan, bring salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the uncooked beans, cilantro, garlic clove and onion (reserve the finely chopped onion for the mashing process). Make sure the beans are well covered with water, place the cover over the saucepan and reduce heat to medium. Cook fully covered until beans are very tender and water has a very rich dark color. Check frequently. Once most of the water has evaporated, add the chicken bouillon, cover and cook for an additional 10 minutes. Once cooked, drain the beans in a colander. Discard most of the liquid but reserve some in case the beans get somewhat dry over the mashing process.

Fry the chopped onion in olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Once the onions are fried, reduce the heat to low. Add the beans and mash them (as you would potatoes) until you have a uniform, smooth paste. Taste, and then add salt & pepper to your liking.

Note: Keep the heat on low while you are mashing the beans or they might become dry. If the beans start becoming dry, add some of the reserved liquid.

To prepare the tortillas:

12 to 16 corn tortillas • **1** cup of corn or olive oil (to fry the tortillas)

Heat corn or olive oil in skillet and once it is hot, start dipping and frying the tortillas one at a time flipping them until they become golden brown on both sides. To get rid of excess oil after frying, place the tortillas on a plate covered by a paper towel. Set aside until ready to assemble the dish.

Suggestion of ingredients to be used as toppings (feel free to add your own):

Tomatoes, diced • Onions, sliced • Sour cream • Chorizo, cooked • Chicken breasts, cooked and finely chopped • Cheese, shredded • Lettuce, finely chopped • Avocado, slices or guacamole

To assemble the tostadas:

Top the fried tortillas with the refried beans and then add the rest of the toppings in any order you want. For this particular recipe, add the chicken and/or chorizo, then top with sour cream, tomatoes, onions, and sliced avocado or guacamole.

Chef's cool tip: If you are serving tostadas for a lunch or dinner party, have everything cooked and chopped for each guest to prepare their own!

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Ive said it before - there just arnt enough mexicans here! Though our canuck friends have bring us beer and hockey, im not sure i want to eat at a canadian restaurant. I think we've got the raw end of the border deal gastrotmy wise.

I told you not to get me started.

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