

Mexican Tamal: a new gastronomic proposal

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Do Mexicans know the importance of the quantity and seasoning required for a tamal (or tamale) filling? Would a new form of tamal be accepted? How can the ingredients vary for a tamal? What would be the acceptance of a Gourmet tamal?

The aim of this series of articles is to make known new ways of making and eating tamal, with flavors that are extravagant and different from the traditional, incorporating stews, spices, sauces, etc. A proposal to serve it and to look more at a table, in an important event, as well as to achieve a style of eating it and enjoy a good quality tamal with different fillings that they like and enjoy, always using the main ingredient "El Maíz" .

To achieve the acceptance of a gourmet tamal, you need attractive and new fillings that awaken the diner's interest, as well as giving you something to eat that takes time to be known but improved, with a different flavor and an innovative and pleasant presentation.

The research that is dealt with in this article is the elaboration of gourmet tamales. The difference between the other known tamales and the influence of a new flavor in addition to a new way of presenting this dish. This research provides a new way of making and eating a different tamal; since from its pre-Hispanic origins, have not evolved much and trying to make a new proposal, new fillings and ways to present this dish, gives as a result something innovative

Introduction

The research that was carried out, proposes a variety of the traditional Mexican dish "El Tamal": a favorite dish throughout the length and breadth of the country that is elaborated with innumerable local variations of our extensive and varied regional cuisine, giving us a wide range of flavors and combinations

I propose a variant that modifies the flavor and variety of the tamales, both in the material with which they are wrapped and in their filling, innovating their flavor, with new and novel ingredients that attract the consumer's eye.

Preserving the traditional preparation and using gourmet haute cuisine, you get options with different flavors and a novel proposal to the palate of the diner.

The corn

It is originally from America. Prehistoric remains of tiny ears of corn have been found in the Valley of Tehuacán

Because of its importance, corn became an object of religious worship and various types of ceremonies were organized around it. Before eating it, they treated it with tenderness and delicacy. Before cooking it, they warmed it with the breath so that it would not suffer with the changes of temperature and if they found some grain in the ground they would pick it up and pray a prayer, to excuse the waste and prevent the gods from taking revenge by producing droughts and hunger.

The succulence and variety of Mexican cuisine have made it one of the most appreciated. Its origins go back to the prehispanic period, to the so-called Culture of the Corn, since around it and complemented with chilies, pumpkins,

rabbit meat, armadillo and turkey, the most varied dishes were elaborated, which would reach a ritual character at times. constitute one of the main offerings to the gods and dead. Excavations in the Valley of Tehuacán, in the state of Puebla, revealed the consumption, for more than seven thousand years, of the basic cereal par excellence in the Mesoamerican diet: a tiny wild ear, complement of hunts along with roots and fruits.

A taste of the history of tamales

The prehispanic origin of the tamales is documented, as an offering to the Goddess of Corn, especially by Sahagún, who offers a true recipe book about it. Many of the tamales that slogan had a ritual nature and there are many that were linked to funeral rites, custom inherited until today.

The offerings that are still made in towns in the states of Michoacán, Mexico, Puebla, the Valley of Mexico and other regions of the country, contain various foods and among them the tamales stand out.

For tamal (which comes from Nahuatl Tamalli) we understand a food based on the corn dough, filled with various ingredients, wrapped in a packet of vegetable leaves, and then cooked.

Although the most frequent tamales in Mexico are wrapped in corn husk leaf or banana leaf in the coastal and tropical zones, there are also varieties that are wrapped in leaves of other plants: reed, chilaca, papatla and milpa leaf, that is, of the corn plant.

The most widespread tamales on the cob are green (with tomato sauce and pork), mole poblano with turkey meat, rose-colored sweets with raisins and sweet corn, which can also be salted; now the poblano pepper or jalapeño rajas with cheese are added to the list.

Oaxacans of black mole and costeños with tomato sauce stand out in the genre of those wrapped in banana leaves. In different states of the altiplano, neutral tamales of butter are used to accompany some stew, and in the peasant communities bean tamales are common.

The origin of the tamal

The origin of the tamal dates back to pre-Columbian times and the custom of eating it is grown throughout Central America and part of Latin America including Mexico, since it is the most representative in terms of typical food.

Said dish is served in important celebrations and therefore in the most special meals: birthdays, Christmas, and Day of the Dead among others.

Currently the tradition has changed, and today is consumed every Saturday of the week. The tamal is prepared in the same way everywhere, unlike some ingredients, which makes it very varied.

Tamales: Some pompous Baroque provincial poet of the beginning of the century, very much in tune with the refinement of the time, said that:

The tamales were as old as Mexico itself.

Delicious corn cakes wrapped in natural strips that, leaving the steamy pot, were intended to decorate the tables of the Aztec emperors snacks Mexican parties.

The way of making them does not differ much, although they are filled and seasoned in different ways, because they are made of sweet, with anise or without it, filled with rice with milk, mole, spice, poultry, pork and even of picadillo and fish. Others are mixed with capuces and others with beans that the natives usually eat at their parties with the mole of turkey, but these two classes are not the best taste, nor are usually served at decent tables, but very rarely, on a whim, and of the same ones that the Indians do, without our girls arranging them for themselves, as they usually do with those of the other classes.

Definition of tamal

A culinary description of tamal is: mixture of batter with fat, stuffed and seasoned according to the way of each place, wrapped in corn or banana leaf and steamed.

From the pre-Hispanic era, in the Aztec Imperial cuisine And at the Moctezuma table, the tamal has been an important part of Mexican cuisine.

Carlos Lumhotz, in his book Unknown Mexico, mentions "the ritual tamales" (tamales in honor of the gods) found among the Huicholes of Jalisco, Tarascans of Michoacán, Tarahumara of Chihuahua, and Tepehuanes of Durango.

The word tamal comes from the Nahuatl word tamalli, which appears in the prehispanic vocabulary prepared by Alonso de Molina^[1], dictionary of the XXI century.

Let's see what the Mexican Cook tells us in the form of a dictionary, 1888 on the definition of tamal and its varieties:

Tamal: Voice that brings its origin from the Mexican Tamalli, and means a kind of tasty and delicate bread, made with the mass of corn, which the ancient inhabitants of this continent used more than the tortillas that were their common bread, as they are to the day not only of their descendants, but of many others who descend from the Spaniards, who eat them for pleasure. The same happens with the tamales, which are not taken in place of bread, but rather with it and appetite, because they are very pleasing to the palate, at the same time as nutritious and of good digestion.

Preparation of the tamal



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Ingredients for the tamal dough:

- Mass
- Manteca
- Beef calx (or cinnamon infusion for sweet tamales)
- Baking powder, tequizquite or tomato leaf cooking
- Salt (or sugar to taste for sweet tamales).

Preparation:

Accrete butter; Add alternately the meat and flour dish previously stirred with the salt and baking powder (or the tequizquite or tomato leaf cooking). Beat the mixture until it is at its point, this is when dropping a bit of dough into a glass of water, that is floating on the surface.

If it disintegrates or goes to the bottom, it is necessary to beat a little more. The consistency of the dough should be smooth, if it is a little hard add more meat or water soup and continue beating.

How to make tamales:

Wash the corn leaves thoroughly with water, then soak them for about an hour and drain thoroughly.

Take leaf by leaf, on the concave side, and apply a spoonful of the dough, then put a little filling in the center. Double and form the tamale. As you do, place them vertically in a tamal pot, steamer or prepared pot. Steam without getting wet and without water reaching its level, for an hour until it is easily detached from the leaf

* You can use a) masa nixtamal for tortillas, or b) nixtamalized flour special for tamales. If flour is used, it must be moistened with a little stock (pork or beef) warm and strained, until it reaches the consistency of the dough. A kilo of lard is usually used for two kilos of dough.

First butter is beaten (it is recommended that it is cold) in a large bowl. A wooden spoon is used. Cold water is added little by little, until the butter is white and fluffy. A kilo of butter takes approximately 30 minutes to reach this point. You can also melt the butter instead of beating it.

To the whipped butter add the dough or flour (previously moistened with broth), broth and baking powder, as indicated by the recipe. The mixture of dough or flour with butter should be light or fluffy.

The broth that is added to the dough should be warm and strained (as indicated in most recipes). It is known that the dough does not need more broth when it does not drain when putting it on the sheet that will wrap the tamal.

The dough is ready and has the necessary lightness when a ball (half a teaspoon) put in a glass of cold water does not sink.

The wrap of the tamal

It is very important to properly treat the leaves that are used to wrap the tamales. The function of the leaves is to shape and enclose them gently during cooking in certain cases also provides aromatic elements.

Types of tamal leaves



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- Corn leaf: are those that wrap the fresh corn, are tender and flexible. They are separated from the corn using a knife, carefully, trying to keep them whole. They wash and dry. With one or two leaves each tamal is wrapped, the ends are bent and tied with a strip taken from a large leaf.
- Dry leaf of ear: the dry leaf is called totomostle, with them bundles are formed and, with several bundles, large moored wheels that are sold in the markets, to make them flexible they are left to soak in water for two or more hours, as they dry that they are.
- Maize leaves of milpa: are the leaves of corn plants not of the ears. They are used when they are still green, fresh and tender; If necessary, soak in water for a few minutes. They wash and dry; they are used almost exclusively for the small tamales typical of Michoacán called corundas.
- Banana leaves^[2]: with a well-cut knife the central rib of the blade is trimmed, starting at the tip. Cut into square pieces of 30 cm. on the side, discarding the broken or perforated parts. To soften the banana leaves there are three methods.
 - Boiling them in water or placing them in a water bath (30-20 min.)
 - Passing the square pieces by a hot comal first on one side and then on the other, until they are flexible and change color.
 - Put them in bundles in the microwave oven for one minute.
- Tamales wrapped in other leaves

Occasionally tamales are wrapped in reed leaves, chaya (in the Yucatecan tamalito called tzotobilchay), holy leaf (also called acuyo or momo), spinach, chilaca, etc. When the leaves are not flexible, they are left in water for a few minutes, for the lashing a string is used, without tightening a lot.

notes

^[1] It is a classic in the matter. He arrived as a child in Mexico and learned the language in his coexistence with

Indian children. He spoke well and was an interpreter of the first Franciscans who came to America. It is said that during the day he preached to the Indians and at night he wrote and composed books in the Mexican language.

[2] The roasted banana leaves give the tamales a light and pleasant flavor.

This is an automatic translation from the [original in Spanish](#).