

Joe's Texas Enchiladas

The enchilada is the king of the tortilla dish family. They are a part of all Mexican regional cooking, but each area's enchiladas are different, with different peppers, sauces, and fillings determined by local custom, climate, and produce. The Texas enchilada is a corn tortilla wrapped around a cheese or meat filling and heated in a red chili sauce. It is time-consuming, multi-step, special occasion cooking, but one of its advantages is that it is an excellent way to use leftovers in a new and appealing incarnation. Plan on about two hours from start to finish once you have mastered all of the steps below. -JG

The first step in making enchiladas is to create the sauce. Along the Texas border the pepper of choice for a chili dish has always been the ancho, which is the dried red poblano. This recipe makes 12 enchiladas.

1 1/2 c. broth or water
3 large dried chili anchos or 3 T. red chili powder (6 if you like it hot)
1 yellow onion chopped & sautéed in 1 T. oil until soft & translucent (save a raw handful for the topping)
2 cloves garlic, minced 1 T. cumin powder
1 t. dried oregano
Freshly ground pepper & sea salt
2 T. unbleached white flour
Corn oil

Filling: 3/4 pound of grated white cheese (Monterey Jack, Cheddar, or Queso Blanco), 3 cups shredded chicken meat, shredded pork, scrambled eggs, etc.

For the topping: 1/4 pound grated white cheese Handful of raw, finely chopped onion

Simmer broth or water in a saucepan. Tear the tops of the chilies off and take out as many of the seeds as possible. Rinse the dust off the chilies and add to the simmering liquid. After 10 minutes, the peppers should be rehydrated and soft. With a slotted spoon, remove the peppers to a blender and add only enough of the pepper liquid to cover them. Add the sautéed onions and the garlic. Blend to a purée. (Start on "low" speed or you'll spew boiling hot pepper napalm all over the kitchen.) In a 12" skillet, sauté 2 T. of flour in 2 T. of oil until the flour is just cooked. Pour the pepper purée into the skillet. Use the rest of the liquid to rinse out the blender, put this liquid into the skillet, and add the rest of the ingredients. Simmer for at least 1/2 hour or more, until the flavors marry. Keep the sauce warm. If it gets too thick, add more broth or water. (At this point, if I am making chicken or meat enchiladas, I like to add the shredded or chopped meat to the sauce, to be heated and covered by it. I think it makes a better, less dry filling, especially with white chicken meat.)

Heat 1/4 inch of oil in an iron skillet until almost smoking. With tongs, dip a tortilla into the hot oil for 5 seconds, turn it over for 5 more, lift it and let the oil drip back into the pan. Dip the tortilla into the warm sauce until covered, then remove to a greased baking dish. Put two tablespoons of filling on the tortilla, roll it up, and place it seam side down in the dish. Repeat this sequence 11 more times. Now pour the remaining sauce over the enchiladas, top with grated cheese and finely chopped raw onion, and heat in a 400 degree oven for 10 minutes or until the top is melted and the dish is bubbling. Don't leave it in too long or the enchiladas will turn to mush or dry out. Serve immediately, two per plate (or three, but they are filling), with pinto beans and rice. Serves 4 to 6.