

CALABACITA FRITA

WARM SAUTÉED ZUCCHINI DIP

Calabacita, or “little squash”, is the name used in Yucatán to refer to the zucchini (*Cucurbita pepo* L.) *Calabacita frita* is a great party dip for the health-conscious; it is also a wonderful side dish for fish or grilled meats. In *cantinas*, *Calabacita frita* is deliciously picante – good for tempting patrons to order more beer. But if you are heat shy or plan on using this as a side dish, you may wish to use just one seeded serrano (or even a half for the truly timid).

8 SERVINGS

- **3 Tbs. (36g) black peppercorns**
- **3 Tbs. (6g) whole dried Mexican oregano**, *lightly toasted*
- **20 whole cloves**
- **20 allspice berries**
- **8 bay leaves**

- **4 cups (1 1/3 lb. / 650g) zucchini**, *unpeeled, cut into large dice*

- **¼ cup (62.5ml) Spanish olive oil**
- **1 cup (175g) fresh corn kernels**
- **1 medium white onion (10 oz. / 275g)**, *finely chopped*
- **6 medium cloves garlic (1 ¼ oz. / 36g)**, *peeled and finely chopped*
- **½ cup (70g) green bell pepper**, *seeded and chopped*
- **1½ tsp. (9g) salt**
- **1½ tsp. (4.5g) recado para escabeche**
- **1 or 2 medium chiles serranos**, *charred, peeled, seeded and chopped*
- **3 medium Roma tomatoes (10 ½ oz. / 300g)**, *seeded and chopped*
- **½ cup (30g) cilantro**, *chopped*

- **Cotija or feta cheese**, *crumbled*
- **Corn totopos (chips for dips)**

☞ PREPARE THE RECADO ☞

THIS SEASONING BLEND is known as recado para escabeche and is used in many pickled and other dishes in Yucatán. Place all of the ingredients in a spice mill or coffee grinder adapted for the purpose. Grind until very fine; strain through a fine sieve over a bowl, crumbling any remaining bits of debris through the sieve with your fingers. Return anything left in the sieve to the grinder and process again; pass through the sieve, and discard any residue. Store in an airtight container; leftovers will keep well for several months.

☞ PARBOIL THE ZUCCHINI ☞

BRING A MEDIUM SAUCEPAN OF WATER to a boil; add the zucchini; return to a boil and cook an additional 10 minutes or until very tender. Drain and set aside to cool.

☞ PREPARE THE SOFRITO & FINISH ☞

HEAT THE OLIVE OIL in a large nonstick skillet until shimmering; add the corn and sauté 3–4 minutes, stirring constantly to prevent sticking, until the kernels are lightly browned and tender; add the next five ingredients in the order shown, stirring to combine after each addition; sauté until onions are beginning to caramelize.

Add the chiles and the tomatoes to the skillet; cook, stirring frequently, 3–4 minutes. Meanwhile, place the drained zucchini in a bowl and mash with a potato masher until well broken up. Transfer to the skillet; continue cooking over medium heat another 4–5 minutes, stirring frequently, until most of the liquid from the squash and tomatoes has evaporated. Add the cilantro, stir and serve immediately.

☞ SERVE ☞

MOUND THE ZUCCHINI in a serving bowl; sprinkle with the crumbled cheese and serve with totopos for dipping. Alternatively, you may serve the squash as a side dish as noted above.