

DZOTOBICHAY

VEGETARIAN TAMAL WRAPPED IN CHAYA LEAVES

Chaya – a leafy green vegetable native to Yucatán – has long been one of the favorite staples of the Maya. It is rich in iron and other nutrients, and is supposedly healthier to consume than either spinach or chard (which may in fact be used as substitutes.) This special *tamal* – known as *dzotobichay* – refers to the vegetable in its last syllable.

Substituting vegetable shortening for the lard in this recipe makes this a 100% vegetarian *tamal*.

NOTE: The way the *masa* is prepared for *dzotobichay* is typical of Yucatecan *tamales*: they include *achiote* for color and *chile habanero* for a bit of zing.

10 SERVINGS

☞ PREPARE THE PUMPKIN SEEDS ☞

- **8 oz. (225g) green squash seeds**

- **1/2 tsp. (2.5ml) salt**

- **1 lb. (500g) fresh *chaya*** (Substitute: *chard or spinach*)

- **1/2 cup (120ml) lard**, preferably enriched by frying it with 2 strips bacon. (Substitute: *vegetable shortening*)

- **2 Tbs. (30ml) *achiote* seeds** (Substitute: *pinch saffron*)

- **18 oz. (500 g) *masa**** (Substitute: *masa prepared according to the instructions on the packaging of "masa harina"*)

- **1³/₄ oz. (50 g) flour**

- **1/2 tsp. (2.5 ml) baking powder**

- **2 tsp. (10 ml) powdered chicken bouillon**, mixed with 2 Tbs.(30 ml) boiling water (Optional)

- **2 cloves garlic**, finely chopped

- **1 *chile habanero***, stem removed, seeded and finely chopped

- **1/2 tsp. (2.5ml) salt**, or to taste

STEP 1 IN A HEAVY SKILLET OVER HIGH FLAME, heat the seeds until toasted. The seeds will pop like popcorn, exploding out of the pan – so beware. Toss regularly during the process until seeds are lightly brown. Remove from skillet and allow to cool.

STEP 2 PLACE COOLED SEEDS in a food processor and grind. Continue until the seeds turn to a fine powder that sticks to the sides of the jar. Use a spatula to push the congealing powder back into the bowl; add salt and process for a few seconds more. Place ground seeds aside until ready to use.

☞ PREPARE THE CHAYA ☞

STEP 3 THOROUGHLY WASH CHAYA. Remove thick stems and discard; separate into leaves. Drain, spin or pat dry and set aside.

☞ PREPARE THE MASA ☞

STEP 4 MELT LARD in a skillet or saucepan; add *achiote* and cook for 5 minutes on low heat until seeds stain the fat a deep yellow-orange. Drain, discard seeds and allow lard to cool.

STEP 5 PLACE MASA IN A MIXING BOWL with the other ingredients. Beat on high speed for 1-2 minutes until well incorporated. Add melted lard and beat for 3-4 minutes or until the dough is lightened.

- **6 hard boiled eggs, peeled and chopped**

- **One recipe *Salsa de Jitomate Yucateca I, II* or *Tomate Frito***
- **One recipe *Chile Tamulado***

** Available shrink-wrapped in the refrigerator section of many Hispanic markets*

☞ **ASSEMBLE THE TAMALES** ☞

STEP 6 PLACE 2-3 LEAVES on a work surface, flattening and overlapping them slightly. Gently pat 1/4 cup (60ml) dough into a 1/8-inch (3mm)-thick circle on the leaves. Be sure to leave a border of leaf on all sides of the dough.

STEP 7 SPRINKLE 1 TBS. (15ML) OF THE GROUND SEEDS down the center of the dough. Repeat with 2 Tbs. (30ml) chopped egg.

STEP 8 LIFT THE SIDES OF THE LEAVES gently so that the dough folds over onto itself. The object is to seal the fillings inside the dough while using the leaves to create a wrapper. In Yucatán, Maya women don't bother tying these; they simply fold and tuck and mash a bit to form a tight if slightly messy little package. But you may want to secure them using kitchen string so that they don't fall apart during steaming.

☞ **STEAM THE TAMALES** ☞

STEP 9 BRING WATER TO A BOIL IN A VAPORERA or a large steamer. Stack *tamales* gently on the rack and cover. Steam, adding water as needed, for 1 hour.

☞ **SERVE** ☞

STEP 10 PLACE TAMALES ON A SERVING PLATTER or on individual plates. Allow guests to top with some of the tomato sauce, a few sprinkles of any leftover ground squash seeds and some *Chile Tamulado* to taste.