

PIBIL DE VENADO

PIT-SMOKED VENISON IN ACHIOTE MARINADE

True *pibil* dishes (as the root of the word suggests) are cooked in a *pib* – an earthen pit lined with fiery coals and hot stones. Meats cooked in a *pib* are wrapped in banana leaves, which seals in juices and flavor. The secret of the *pib* is that a covering over the hole locks in heat, steam and smoke, which makes *pibil* meats so tender and succulent, and gives them their smoky character. For this dish, we have created a stove-top method for achieving a similar result. We have also modernized the recipe somewhat by brining the venison for a few hours. You may substitute beef for the venison, but omit the brining step. You may also grill either meat (omitting the banana leaves), preferably over a charcoal fire to achieve a smoky taste.

10 SERVINGS

☞ BRINE THE VENISON ☞

- 4 quarts (4 liters) cold water
- 1/2 cup (130g) salt
- 1/2 cup (130g) sugar
- 5 whole allspice berries
- 1 tsp. (5ml) black peppercorns
- 2 lbs. (1k) venison, steaks or cubed (weight after being boned)

- 8 Tbs. (120ml) *recado rojo* (achiote paste)*

- 8 Tbs. (120ml) juice of *naranja agria* (Also known as sour orange or Seville orange. Substitute: 2 parts fresh lime juice, 1 part each fresh orange juice and grapefruit juice)

- 1 Tbs. (15ml) dried Mexican oregano leaves (or 1 tsp/5 ml ground), toasted
- 1 tsp. (5ml) cumin, toasted
- 3 large cloves garlic, peeled and charred
- 1 tsp. (5ml) black peppercorns
- 1 tsp. (5ml) sea salt

- Banana leaves, left whole, ribs removed and set aside
- 2 green bell peppers, thinly sliced
- 1 large white onion, thinly sliced
- 2 large Roma tomatoes, sliced
- 3 oz. (85g) smoked bacon, sliced
- 1 bunch *epazote*, separated into leaves

- 2 Tbs. (10g) wood smoking chips, preferably mesquite

*Available in Mexican grocers or the ethnic sections of supermarkets

STEP 1 DISSOLVE THE SALT AND SUGAR in the water. Crush allspice and peppercorns in a mortar and pestle and add with venison to the brine; refrigerate 8 hours or overnight. After the brining process, drain and rinse meat under cold water and pat dry. Discard the brining solution.

☞ PREPARE THE MARINADE ☞

STEP 2 DISSOLVE THE ACHIOTE PASTE in the juice. Use more juice if necessary to achieve the consistency of thick cream.

STEP 3 IN A MOLCAJETE or mortar and pestle, coarsely grind the oregano, cumin, garlic, peppercorns and salt. Add to the *recado* mixture and stir thoroughly to incorporate. Pour over meat and spread to cover completely.

☞ WRAP THE VENISON ☞

STEP 4 ARRANGE BANANA LEAVES on a work surface, overlapping in order to form a size sufficient for holding all of the meat. Place meat in the center of the leaves. Garnish meat with the vegetable slices, bacon and *epazote*. Fold over ends of banana leaves to wrap the meat as you would a package, and tie with reserved ribs or kitchen twine to secure.

☞ SMOKE THE VENISON ☞

STEP 5 FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS for stove-top smoking. Smoke 45 minutes, or until a meat thermometer registers 160° F (71° C). Off heat, remove cover and let stand for 10-15 minutes before serving. Serve as is or use in recipes such as *Venado en Pipián Rojo* or *Tsi'ik de Venado*.

STOVE-TOP “PIB” SMOKING INSTRUCTIONS

- **Large cast-iron Dutch oven or roasting pan with lid** (*NOTE: Because of the intense heat required for this dish, enameled iron cookware is not recommended.*)

- **Heavy-duty aluminum foil**

- **10-12 inch (25-30cm) cake rack** (*must fit snugly in bottom of pot*)

✧ PREPARE THE POT ✧

STEP 1 WORKING WITH THE DUTCH OVEN OR ROASTING PAN, line sides and bottom with foil, using two or three pieces if necessary. Leave at least 6 inches (15cm) of foil extending beyond the edge of the pot. Using a fork or sharp object, cut and tear away a small hole in the foil at the center of the bottom about 3 inches (8cm) in diameter to expose the pot's surface underneath. Line underside of lid with aluminum foil and crimp tightly around edges. Create “feet” for the cake rack with balls of foil. The rack should rest about 1^{1/2} inches (4cm) off the inside bottom surface of the pot.

✧ PREHEAT THE POT ✧

STEP 2 PLACE THE POT without cover or cake rack over highest heat on stove top. Heat for 10 minutes. Have banana leaf-wrapped meat at hand. When pan is pre-heated, place smoking chips called for in recipe on the pan's surface where you cut away the foil. Immediately place rack at bottom of pot. Place meat packet(s) onto rack, spacing evenly and allowing some space around packet(s) so that steam and smoke can circulate. Put lid in place, and crimp edges of foil all around to create a tight seal. Cook according to recipe instructions.