

RECADO NEGRO

SEASONING BLEND OF CHARRED CHILES

The word *mole* comes from the Náhuatl *molli*, or "sauce". *Chilmole*, then, is a *mole* or sauce of *chiles*. Called *recado negro* in Spanish, *chilmole* can be viewed as the Adam (or Eve!) of all moles, since its almost primordial formulation is obviously their precursor. Dried chiles are simply charred over a flame or hot coals, then ground with other spices to form a pungent, black paste. The paste is then used as a rub on meats or as a flavoring and thickening ingredient in sauces. The heat of the *recado* can be controlled by using hotter or milder chiles, to the diner's taste. The process of burning chiles produces an acrid smoke so fierce that it causes choking, sneezing and watery eyes, such that making *recado negro* within Mérida city limits has been banned. Like other *recados*, it is available commercially in brands such as *El Yucateco* and *Marin*, both in Mexican groceries and in the ethnic foods sections of many supermarkets. For recipes that call for *recado negro*, there is unfortunately no substitute.

YIELDS APPROXIMATELY 8 TABLESPOONS (200g)

☞ CHAR THE CHILES ☞

- 1 lb. (500g) dried *chile de árbol*, *chile ancho*, or a mix of the two (the former is hotter, the latter milder), seeded and deveined

STEP 1 CHAR THE CHILES over a charcoal or gas fire. With the larger *anchos*, this can be accomplished by simply placing them directly on the fire or hot coals; with the smaller *chiles de árbol*, a grilling basket serves well. Be careful: chiles contain a lot of natural oils and may burst into flame. Rescue the chiles while there still remains a bit of colored flesh. Toss into a stock pot filled with water as the chiles are finished; continue charring remaining chiles.

STEP 2 DRAIN THE CHILES through a sieve lined with cheesecloth. Return the ash to the stockpot with clean water. Repeat. Collect the ash in a small bowl and add about 1/2 cup (125ml) of the black water from the last rinse.

☞ GRIND THE RECADO ☞

- 2 Tbs. (30ml) *achiote* seeds
- 5 large whole cloves
- 5 large whole allspice
- 1 Tbs. (15ml) black peppercorns
- 1/2 tsp. (2.5ml) cumin seeds
- 1 Tbs. (15ml) coarse sea salt
- 1 Tbs. (15ml) dried Mexican oregano leaves, toasted (if using ground oregano, reduce quantity to 1 tsp/5ml)

STEP 3 PLACE NEXT SEVEN INGREDIENTS in a spice grinder or coffee mill adapted to that purpose. Grind to produce a fine powder. Pass powder through a fine sieve, then return to grinder; repeat. Discard any remaining hard particles.

- 10 large cloves garlic, peeled and charred
- 1 tsp. (5ml) white vinegar

STEP 4 PLACE CHILE ASH AND ITS LIQUID, spice mixture, garlic and vinegar in an electric or hand grinder, or a food processor and process until well blended. Collect mixture in a piece of cheesecloth and press to squeeze out water. Form mixture into a ball and wrap with plastic wrap. Store covered in the refrigerator up to one year.