

SIKIL P'AAK

VEGETABLE DIP OF TOASTED SQUASH SEEDS, ROASTED TOMATOES AND CHILE

Also known as *P'aak i tsikil* (*p'aak* is Maya for “tomato” and *sikil* means “squash seed”), this wonderful Mayan appetizer obviously dates to the pre-conquest era. The addition of cilantro and garlic are more modern treatments but these only serve to enhance the basically rich flavor. While this dish is delicious any time of year, it was traditionally served in the autumn, when pumpkin seeds were used to celebrate an abundant harvest.

YIELDS APPROXIMATELY 4 CUPS (1 LITRE)

☞ PREPARE THE VEGETABLES ☞

- **4 cups (500g) hulled green pepitas** (*squash or pumpkin seeds*)

STEP 1 IN A HEAVY SKILLET over high flame, lightly toast the squash seeds. Toss regularly during the process. They should be pale brown when finished. Remove toasted seeds to a large bowl. Allow to cool.

STEP 2 PLACE SEEDS IN FOOD PROCESSOR and grind. Continue until the seeds turn to a fine powder that sticks loosely to the sides of the processor bowl. Use a spatula to push the congealing powder back into the processor bowl. Place toasted ground seeds in a mixing bowl until ready to use.

- **1 green chile habanero, charred**
- **3 medium Roma tomatoes, charred** on a *comal* or heavy skillet
- **4 large cloves garlic, charred in a flame** or on a *comal* or heavy skillet
- **1/4 cup (75ml) juice of naranja agria**
- **3/4 cup (200ml) chicken broth**

STEP 3 REMOVE STEM, SEED AND DEVEIN THE HABANERO. Place chile, whole tomatoes with skin and garlic in a blender, along with the juice and broth. Pulse until coarsely blended but not puréed.

☞ BLEND THE DIP ☞

STEP 4 POUR THE TOMATO MIXTURE a bit at a time into the mixing bowl containing the ground seeds. Blend with a spatula until thoroughly incorporated. If necessary, add more of the tomato mixture, mixing, until you achieve the consistency of a dip – thick but not dry.

STEP 5 ADD ONIONS, CILANTRO, CANELA AND SALT to taste. Stir and check for seasonings.

- **1 cup (150g) white onion, minced**
- **3 Tbs. (15g) cilantro, finely chopped**
- **1/8 tsp. (.625ml) canela**
- **1 tsp. (5ml) salt**

STEP 6 PLACE DIP IN A SERVING BOWL. Garnish with a sprig of cilantro or a whole habanero if you wish. Serve with homemade *totopos* (crispy fried tortilla triangles.)