

Stuffed Peppers in Walnut Sauce

Chiles en nogada

Ingredients

10 large Poblano peppers

Stuffing:

1 lb (454 g) lean ground beef (original recipe uses hand-chopped cooked pork loin)
2 tbsp vegetable oil (original recipe uses lard)
½ onion, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
4 medium tomatoes; peeled and finely chopped
¼ cup parsley, finely chopped
1 Granny Smith apple; peeled and chopped (original recipe uses *Panochera* apple)
1 Bartlett pear; peeled and chopped (original recipe uses *San Juan* pear)
½ plantain; peeled, chopped and fried
1/3 cup raisins
1/3 cup almonds; peeled and chopped
1/3 cup dried apricots, chopped (original recipe uses 1 fresh Puebla orange peach and ¼ cup crystallized *biznaga* cactus, called *acitrón*, currently an endangered species)
¼ tsp ground cinnamon (some recipes also use cloves and thyme)
½ tsp dried marjoram (some recipes use oregano)
¼ cup white wine (some recipes use Jerez)
Salt and pepper, to taste

Walnut sauce:

1 cup walnut pieces (original recipe uses fresh walnuts, brown membrane removed)
1 cup milk (some recipes use table cream)
1/3 lb (150 g) fresh goat cheese
Salt, to taste
(Original recipe calls for 2 tbsp sugar, I omitted altogether)

To garnish:

1 pomegranate, seeds
Chopped parsley

Prepare stuffing: heat oil in a large pan, and sauté the onion until translucent; add garlic and parsley and cook for another minute. Add meat and cook while stirring until no longer pink (if using cooked pork, just cook until heated through). Add tomatoes and continued stirring, to loosen any brown bits at the bottom of the pan. Let the preparation simmer for about 5 minutes, then incorporate the dried fruit and almonds:



After another five minutes, the fresh fruit and fried plantain are added to the pan. When everything is well incorporated, sprinkle the spices over and pour wine, adjusting the seasoning with salt and pepper:



Remove from heat and reserve, until peppers are ready for stuffing.

Note: stuffing may be prepared the night before up to this point, and kept in the fridge.



Prepare Poblano peppers: choose firm and shiny peppers, with no blemishes and as straight as possible.



Wash and dry peppers. Arrange in a single layer on an ovenproof tray, and roast under broiler, checking every couple of minutes, until skin looks blackened and blistered; turn and repeat for the second side. Turn broiler off and let the tray rest in the oven for 5 to 10 minutes. Peel skin off and discard.



Cut an opening on each pepper with a paring knife, lengthwise. Separate seeds from the top and inside of walls and scoop with a spoon; dislodge veins as well, for milder peppers.



The peppers are now ready for stuffing. Use a spoon to gently hold the pepper open when stuffing.



For the sauce: Process all ingredients in the blender until smooth.

To assemble: Place one stuffed pepper on a plate, completely cover with a generous amount of walnut sauce, then sprinkle on top with parsley and pomegranate seeds along the sides, to form bands of Mexico's national colours:



Note: Many traditional recipes prepare the peppers *"capeados"*, a technique to coat the stuffed peppers with an egg batter and fry afterwards. I chose not to apply it this time, but if using, follow the instructions on the next page after stuffing the peppers, and right before covering with the walnut sauce.

Egg Batter for Coatings (*Capeados*):

Allow one egg for every two large peppers. Separate egg whites and yolks into two bowls. Reserve yolks. Beat egg whites until frothy, and no longer translucent; do not overbeat. Add reserved egg yolks to frothy whites, one at a time, folding gently. The finished egg batter should be smooth and airy:



Dust stuffed peppers with flour, then immediately coat with egg batter and pan fry until golden brown, flipping halfway to brown on both sides:



Place one fried stuffed pepper on a plate, cover with walnut sauce and decorate as explained before.