



Culinary Institute  
of America

# Small Dishes, Big Flavors

Day 4: Latin American Street Foods



# Learning Objectives

- Identify the pantry ingredients Latin American countries
- List the specialty cooking equipment used in the preparation of select Latin American cuisines
- List and describe common street foods found throughout Latin America
- Identify different varieties of tacos
- Prepare a variety of street foods representative of Latin America

# Latin American Cuisine

- Mixture of “New World” and “Old World”
  - Ingredients
  - Techniques
  - Inhabitants
- Varying terrains, climates, and areas of isolation fostered
  - Cultivation of different crops
  - Development of different cuisines





# Latin American Flavor Profiles

## **Lime + Fresh or Dried Chiles**

- Found in Mexican cuisine
- Sometimes cilantro, cumin, and epazote

## **Tomato + Cumin + Chile**

- Basic flavor profile of Mexican red sauces
- Chocolate sometimes added

## **Coconut Milk, Dried Shrimp, Malagueta Chiles, Avocado, Ground Nuts**

- Common to Brazilian cooking

# Annatto (Achiote)

- Seed of the small flowering tropical Annatto tree
- Light, delicate flavor
- Slightly sweet and peppery
- Used in southern Mexico and the Yucatan for color and flavor with all proteins
- In Yucatan, ground into a paste with other spices



# Seeds and Herbs



- **Epazote** - used in bean dishes, tastes like anise
- **Mexican Oregano** - stronger flavor, used in highly spiced dishes
- **Pumpkin Seeds/ Perpitass** - delicate flavor intensified when roasted and salted
- **Hoja Santa/ Pepperleaf** - aromatic leaf used for herbal tea, to wrap foods, added to soups and stews
- **Sesame Seeds** - nutty, slightly sweet flavor
- **Cilantro** - lends fresh, clean flavor to highly spiced foods

# Fresh Chiles

- Most common: Sweet bell peppers, jalapeño, Serrano, Poblano, and Fresno
- **Small fresh chiles:** generally hotter
  - Add bright, intense flavor known as picante
- **Larger fresh chiles:** generally milder
  - Sliced into strips, cooked, and tossed with other ingredients
  - Often stuffed (rice or beans) and cooked
- Store fresh chiles in the refrigerator, lightly covered. Most will last several weeks.



# Dried Chiles



- Most common: Ancho (dried poblanos), chipotle (smoke-dried jalapeños), pasada, guajillo, pasilla, habaño
- **Smaller chiles:** usually hotter, puréed into a sauce to add spice
- **Larger chiles:** usually milder, used to provide sauce's substance and flavor
- Often toasted to enhance the flavor, bring out essential oils

# Corn

- One of the first cultivated plants
- Aztecs called corn the “first mother and father, the source of life”
- A staple in modern Latin America
- Used in ceremonies
- 100% utilization
  - Husks for wrappers
  - Silk made into tea
  - Kernels dried, made into masa
  - Eaten out of hand
  - Cob for animal feed



# Beans



- Traditionally planted with corn and squash
  - Corn stalks support the growing beans
  - Squash plants suffocate weeds
  - Beans added nutrients to the soil
- Good source of protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals
- Incomplete protein (corn + beans = complete)
- Served at most meals
- Common varieties: Black beans, white beans, pinto beans, red kidney beans, chickpeas

# Wrappers



- Food commonly eaten out of hand in some form of wrapper
- **Dried corn husks** - Commonly soaked in water and used for tamales
- **Banana leaves** - Large, pliable leaves for rice, vegetables, meat, fish, and tamales
- **Hoja Santa** - flavorful, aromatic leaf for imparting flavor
- **Corn/ Flour Tortillas** - for burritos, chimichangas, enchiladas, fajitas, quesadillas, tostadas
- **Dough** - for cheese, meat, or vegetables, often fried

# Corn and Tortillas

## Masa

- Soaking dried corn in hot lye solution
- Grinding into a paste
- Coarse grind for tamales
- Finer grind for corn tortillas

## Masa Harina

- Flour made from dried, ground masa
- NOT interchangeable with cornmeal, polenta, or maize meal
- Corn not soaked or cooked with lime



# Tortillas and Tacos



- Meat or seafood wrapped in a tortilla,
- Accompanied by salsa
- Corn tortillas common in southern Mexico
- Flour tortillas common in northern Mexico
- Crisp taco shells uncommon

# Huitlacoche

- Fungus or mushroom that forms on the ears of corn
- Swells and deforms kernels
- Black inside silver skin
- Delicate corn and mushroom flavor
- Used in soups, stuffing, and crêpes



# Cooking Equipment

## Comal

- Thin circular griddle
- Used to cook tortillas, roast chiles

## Metate

- Grinding stone made from sloping piece of volcanic rock (looks like 3-legged stool)
- Muller – matched stone roller that does the grinding
- Used to Make masa dough from skinned, cooked corn kernels
- Used to grind cocoa and cane sugar



# Cooking Equipment



## Molcajete

- Mexican mortar made from volcanic rock
- Tejolote - short stubby pestle used to grind ingredients

## Tortilla Press

- masa traditionally shaped into tortillas by hand
- Made from cast iron with 2 round metal plates, hinged together

# The Mexican Pantry

Allspice	Almonds	Anise	Annatto	Apples
Apricot	Avocados	Bananas and Leaves	Beef	Beets
Black Beans	Black-eyed Peas	Cashew	Chayote	Cherimoyas
Chicken	Chickpea	Chiles	Chocolate	Chorizo
Cilantro	Cinnamon	Cloves	Coconut	Cod Fish
Coffee	Coriander Seeds	Corn Husks	Cumin	Dried Beans
Epazote	Garlic	Goat	Grouper	Guavas
Hoja Santa	Hominy	Huitlacoche	Iguana	Jerusalem Artichokes
Jicama	Kid	Kidney Beans	Lamb	Lemons

# The Mexican Pantry

Lettuces	Lime	Mangos	Marjoram	Mint
Mushrooms	Olives	Onions	Oranges	Oregano
Oysters	Papayas	Peaches	Peanuts	Pear Cactus
Peas	Pecans	Pigeon Peas	Pine Nuts	Pineapples
Pinto Beans	Pistachios	Plantains	Pomegranate	Pompano
Pork	Potatoes	Pumpkin and Seeds	Quince	Radishes
Raisins	Red Beans	Red Onions	Red Snapper	Rice
Sage	Shark	Shrimp	Squash and Blossoms	Squid
Strawberries	Sunflower Seeds	Sweet Corn	Sweet Potatoes	Tamarind
Thyme	Tomatillos	Tomatoes	Turkey	Turtle
Vanilla	Veal	Venison	Walnuts	

# The South American Pantry

Agouti	Aji Amarillo	Almonds	Avocado	Bananas
Beef	Basil	Bay Leaves	Beans	Beef
Carrots	Black Beans	Black Olives	Calabaza	Cardamom
Chuño	Cashews	Chickpeas	Chicken	Chiles
Coconut Milk	Cilantro	Clams	Cloves	Coconut
Custard Apples	Collard Greens	Corn	Corvina	Cumin
Ginger	Dried Salt Cod	Dried Shrimp	Duck	Garlic
Lima Beans	Grapefruits	Hearts of Palm	Manioc	Lemon

# The South American Pantry

Mirasol Pepper	Lime	Mace	Onions	Marjoram
Mole	Mussels	Oregano	Oranges	Papaya
Parsley	Papa Seca	Peaches	Peas	Peanuts
Pineapple	Pine Nuts	Plantains	Pork	Potatoes
Pumpkin	Raisins	Rice	Green Onions	Shrimp
Snapper	Spinach	Squid	Strawberry	Suckling Pig
Sweet Potatoes	Tomatoes	Yam	Yuca	

# The Caribbean Pantry

Allspice	Almonds	Annatto	Arrowroot	Avocados
Bananas	Beans	Beef	Bitter Oranges	Black Beans
Black-Eyed Peas	Bleu Fish	Boniatos	Bonito	Bread Fruit
Cachuchas	Calabaza	Callaloo	Capers	Cashews
Chayote	Cherimoya	Chicken	Chickpeas	Chiles
Chorizo	Cilantro	Clams	Cloves	Coconuts
Collard Greens	Conch	Coriander	Crab	Culantro
Cumin	Curry Mix	Dasheen	Dried Peas	Dried Salt Cod
Eggplant	Flying Fish	Garlic	Ginger	Goat
Grouper	Guavas	Hearts of Palm	Herring	Kidney Beans

# The Caribbean Pantry

Lemons	Lima Beans	Limes	Lobster	Mace
Mangoes	Mint	Mussels	Nutmeg	Okra
Oregano	Oysters	Papaya	Passion Fruit	Peanuts
Pepper	Pigeon Peas	Pineapples	Pinto Beans	Plantains
Pork	Raisins	Red Beans	Rice	Saffron
Scallions	Scotch Bonnets	Shallots	Shark	Shrimp
Sour Oranges	Soursop	Soy Beans	Soy Sauce	Spanish Mackerel
Star Fruit	Sugar	Sweet Potatoes	Tamarind	Taro
Thyme	Tomatoes	Turtle	Ugli	Vanilla
Worcestershire	Yams	Yuca		

# Street Foods: Latin America

## Bowl Foods

- Caribbean Rice and Beans
- Salsa
- Chutneys

## Foods on a Stick

- Jerk Kebabs
- Anticuchos Meat Kebabs
- Corn-on-the-Cob

## Breads

- Corn/ Flour Tortillas



# Street Foods: Latin America



## **Sandwiches/ Stuffed Foods**

- Arepas
- Chile Rellenos
- Empanadas
- Jamaican Patties
- Enchiladas
- Pastels
- Roti
- Tortas
- Tamales

# Street Foods: Latin America

## **Finger Foods**

- Fried Plantains
- Chicken Wings
- Sugar and Cocoa Popcorn

## **Sweets**

- Sopapillas
- Dulce De Leche
- Churros
- Ice Cream Sandwiches



# The Caribbean



## **Jamaican Chicken Patties**

- Crescent-shaped meat pie
- Made with highly seasoned, minced meat, seafood, or vegetables in a flaky pastry shell

## **Jerk Skewers**

- Highly seasoned barbecued pork, chicken, or fish
- Scotch bonnet peppers, allspice, and spices lend distinctiveness

# The Caribbean

## **Stuffed Roti Bread**

- Crepe-like flatbread filled with curried meat/vegetables

## **Annatto Fried Chicken Wings**

- Annatto used as a coloring and slightly sweet and peppery flavoring agent



# Central & South America



## **Arepas Con Queso**

- Flat, unleavened cornmeal patty
- Can be grilled, baked, or fried
- Topped or filled with meat, eggs, tomatoes, salad, cheese, shrimp, or fish

## **Pork and Pepper Pies**

- Latin American and Spanish fried pastry with meat/ vegetables or fruit filling

# Central & South America

## Dulce de Leche Ice Cream Sandwiches

- Ice cream “sandwiched” between two cookies
- Flavored with milk caramel prepared by caramelizing milk sugars





# Mexico

## **Baja-Style Fish Tacos**

- Grilled or fried fish served in a tortilla with coleslaw and sauce

## **Chile Rellenos**

- Roasted chile stuffed with meats, cheeses, or vegetables
- Dipped in an egg batter and fried

## **Mexican Tortas**

- Mexican sandwich made from bolillo roll cut in half and stuffed with tomatoes, meats, cheese, and sauce







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Any Questions?