

Shredded Chicken in Pepper Sauce

Ají de Gallina is one of Peru’s classic dishes. Indigenous ajís, or peppers, are important to the flavor of this sauce, but since the fresh peppers are hard to find, this recipe calls for the pepper pastes, which can be found in jars in Latin markets.

Rinse the chicken and pat dry. Place it in a soup pot, pour in the stock and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, partially covered, until the chicken is tender and opaque throughout, about 45 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a platter and let cool. Reserve the cooking liquid. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, pull the meat off the bones, discarding the skin and bones. Shred or cut the meat into bite-size pieces and set aside.

In a saucepan over medium-low heat, melt the butter with the olive oil. Add the onion and cook, stirring often, until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and *ají* pastes and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute.

Meanwhile, in a blender or food processor, combine 1 cup of the reserved cooking liquid, the evaporated milk, cheese, crackers and salt. Process until smooth, then transfer to the pan with the onion mixture and cook until the mixture thickens slightly, about 10 minutes. Add the chicken and ground walnuts to the sauce and stir to mix well. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes to allow the flavors to blend. To serve, place a scoop of the rice in the center of each plate. Top with the chicken mixture, garnish with the walnut halves and serve immediately. Serves 4 to 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Essentials of Latin Cooking*, by Patricia McCausland-Gallo, Deborah Schneider & Beverly Cox (Oxmoor House, 2010).

Coconut Meringue Cookies

Beloved throughout South America, coconut cookies are sold in markets and pastry shops and by street vendors.

Preheat an oven to 325°F. Line 2 large baking sheets with parchment or waxed paper.

In a large bowl or in the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the egg whites and salt. Using a handheld electric mixer or the stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat the egg whites on medium speed until very foamy, about 30 seconds. Increase the speed to high and beat until soft peaks form. With the mixer running, add the granulated sugar in a slow stream. Add the vanilla and beat until stiff, shiny peaks form. In a separate bowl, whisk the coconut and confectioners’ sugar until the coconut is evenly coated. Gently fold the coconut mixture into the egg whites until just blended.

Spoon heaping tablespoons of the batter onto the prepared baking sheets. Bake the cookies until dry on the bottom, about 20 minutes, reversing the positions of the baking sheets after 10 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the pans for 2 to 3 minutes, then transfer to wire racks and let cool completely. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 3 days. Makes 3 to 3½ dozen cookies.

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Ingredients for Shredded Chicken in Pepper Sauce

1 chicken, 5 to 6 lb., or 4 bone-in, skin-on chicken breast halves, each about ½ lb.

8 cups chicken stock or low-sodium broth

1 Tbs. unsalted butter

1 Tbs. olive oil

1 large red onion, thinly sliced

1 garlic clove, minced

2 tsp. *ají amarillo* paste*

¼ cup *ají panca* paste*

1 can (10 fl. oz.) evaporated milk

1 cup shredded *queso blanco* or farmer’s cheese

8 saltine crackers

¼ tsp. salt

½ cup ground walnuts

Cooked white rice for serving

Walnut halves for garnish

* Available at Williams-Sonoma stores.

Ingredients for Coconut Meringue Cookies

4 egg whites

⅛ tsp. salt

¾ cup granulated sugar

1 tsp. vanilla extract

2⅓ cups sweetened flaked coconut

1⅓ cups confectioners’ sugar

Dried Spices and Herbs

• *Achiote* seeds (*annatto seeds*)

• Allspice

• Aniseed

• Bay leaves

• Canela (also called true cinnamon bark or Mexican cinnamon)

• Chili powder

• Cloves, whole and ground

• Coriander seeds

• Cumin

• Oregano, Mexican dried

• Peppercorns, black

Aromatics and Other Seasonings

• Chocolate

• Currants, dried

• *Piloncillo* sugar (Mexican brown sugar)

• Raisins, golden and brown

• Sesame seeds

• Vanilla, beans and extract

Spice Mixtures and Pastes

• *Achiote* paste

• *Aji* chili pastes, *amarillo*, *panca* and *verde* (yellow, red and green)

• Moles (Mexican ground-spice mixtures)

• *Recados* (Mayan ground-spice mixtures)

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Technique Class: Latin Cooking

Latin America is a land of dramatic landscapes and varied climates, ranging from steaming tropical rain forests to rolling grasslands and mild mountain valleys to snow-capped volcanic mountains, vast deserts and frozen tundra. A rich indigenous Latin American culture and cuisines existed before any European contact; post-conquest, the arrival of settlers from Spain and Portugal, African slaves and Chinese indentured servants brought even more diversity to Latin America’s cooking.

Latin American Regions

- Baja California
- Mexico
- Cuba
- Puerto Rico
- Dominican Republic
- Central America
- South America

Latin Produce and Pantry

Latin American cooking draws on a bounty of fresh seasonal produce and fruits; hearty, nutritious grains and legumes; fresh cheeses; corn in all its forms; and a pantry of spices, seasonings and sweeteners. This guide includes some of the common ingredients used in Latin cooking.

Fresh Vegetables

Beets, bell peppers, cabbage, cactus paddles, carrots, cauliflower, celery, chard, chayote, corn, cucumbers, green beans, eggplant, jicama, kale, lettuce, malanga, okra, onions, potatoes, pumpkins, radishes, spinach, sweet potatoes, tomatillos, tomatoes, watercress, wild mushrooms, winter squash, yellow squash, yucca, zucchini

Cheeses and Dairy Products

Cotija or *queso blanco*, *crema*, evaporated milk, *queso añejo*, *queso fresco*, *queso menonita*, sweetened condensed milk

Sugar and Sweeteners

Agave nectar, confectioners’ sugar, granulated sugar, honey, molasses, *piloncillo*

Fruits, Berries and Melons

Acai berries, apples, avocados, bananas, blackberries, blueberries, cherimoya, coconuts, figs, grapefruit, grapes, guava, limes, mangoes, oranges, papaya, passion fruit, persimmons, pineapples, plantains, plums, pomegranates, quince, raspberries, sour oranges, star fruit, strawberries, tamarind, watermelons

Grains, Seeds and Nuts

Amaranth, almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, peanuts, pine nuts, pumpkin seeds, quinoa, walnuts

Wine, Beer and Spirits

Cachaça, light beer, light and dark rum, Kahlua, Pisco, red and white wine, tequila

Corn Products

Corn tortilla chips, corn tortillas, dried corn husks, *huitlacoche*, *masa*, *masarepa*, *masa harina*, *pozole* or cooked hominy

Legumes

Black beans, black-eyed peas, cannellini beans, chickpeas, lentils, lima beans, navy beans, pinto beans, red beans

Pantry Staples

Coconut milk, corn flour, corn oil, lard, olive oil, peanut oil, rice, semolina pasta, sweetened flaked coconut, wheat flour

