

Cream of chayote (Merliton)

Crema de Chayote

A staple starch of the Aztecs and reportedly one of only two foods Hernán Cortés refused to eat. The other was roasted hedgehog (*erizo*).

This smooth, pear-shaped member of the gourd family is a cheap poor gringo substitute for squash or cucumbers, which reside, culinarily speaking, on the better side of the vine. Strongly seasoned, *chayote* can hold its own with zucchini on a bad day.

Pickerel brought this recipe from Veracruz, the *chayote*-producing capital of Mexico—where pear-shaped women and their pear-shaped breasts have also borrowed this vegetable name.



Ingredientes (three servings)

- 3 merliton (3 *chayotes*)
- 1 small garlic clove, peeled (1 *diente chico de ajo, pelado*)
- 1/2 serrano chili (1/2 *chile serrano*)
- 1 small onion (1 *cebolla chica*)
- 3 coriander sprigs (3 *ramitas de cilantro*)
- 1 tbsp margarine (1 *cucharada de margarina*)
- 1 tsp salt (1 *cucharadita de sal*)
- 1/2 tsp ground pepper (1/2 *cucharadita de pimienta molida*)

Equipo

- Vegetable peeler (*pelador de verdura*)
- Saucepot with cover (*cazuela con tapadera*)
- Blender (*licuadora*)

Preparación

Peel *chayotes* with vegetable peeler (careful!—slippery when peeled), trim ends, and cut in half lengthwise. Remove soft pip from center, and slice halves into finger-wide strips. Cut crossways into bite-size pieces. Dice garlic and onion. Mince chili. Finely chop coriander leaves and thinnest stems—enough to fill 2 teaspoons.

Melt margarine in saucepot, and fry without browning (*acitronar*) onion, garlic, and chili until onion softens. Add *chayote* and coriander. Mix well and fry 5 minutes, stirring often. Add 2 cups of water, stir, and simmer under cover over low heat 30 minutes or until *chayote* cooks (tender when probed with a fork).

Remove from heat and cool. Pour saucepot contents into blender. Add salt and pepper. Blend until smooth.

Serve in soup bowls (*tazones*) with corn tortillas on the side.

Poor Gringo Soup *Caldillo*

Ingredientes (two servings)

2 small tomatoes (2 *tomates chicos*)

1 potato (1 *papa*)

1/2 small onion (1/2 *cebolla chica*)

1/2 Anaheim chili, deveined and seedless (1/2 *chile largo-verde sin venas, ni semillas*) (See *Deveining Chili Peppers*, page 30.)

2 tbsp cooking oil (2 *cucharadas de aceite para cocinar*)

1 cup *machaca* (1 *taza de machaca*) (See *Carne machaca*, pages 21/22.)

1/2 tsp salt (1/2 *cucharadita de sal*)

1/4 tsp ground pepper (1/4 *cucharadita de pimienta molida*)

2 eggs (2 *huevos*)

Equipo

Saucepan (*cazo*)

Saucepot with cover (*cazuela con tapadera*)

Preparación

Peel potato and cut into dice-size cubes. Chop tomatoes, onion, and chili finely. In saucepan, heat 1 liter of water. In saucepot, heat oil.

Add veggies (except potatoes) to hot oil. Stir. When onion cooks, sprinkle in *machaca*. Mix well. *Machaca* sucks up the hot veggie juice. Add potatoes and stir.

When water boils in saucepan, add to saucepot with veggies and *machaca*. Add salt and pepper. Stir and cover. Cook over high heat for 10 minutes.

Crack eggs and drop each into boiling broth. Cover and cook until the eggs poach, their yolks turning hard.

Serve with warm tortillas.