

RICK BAYLESS
MEXICO
ONE PLATE AT A TIME



Baked Tomatillo—Green Chilaquiles (Tortilla "Casserole")

CHILAQUILES VERDES HORNEADOS

Serves 6 as a casual main dish.
10 as an accompaniment

18 (15 ounces total) corn tortillas, cut into sixths and fried or baked to make chips (see page 136)

OR 12 ounces (12 to 18 loosely packed cups, depending on thickness) thick, homemade-style tortilla chips (such as ones you buy at a Mexican grocery)

2 pounds (20 to 24 medium) tomatillos, husked and rinsed

Fresh hot green chiles to taste (roughly 4 serranos or 2 jalapeños), stemmed

2 tablespoons vegetable oil or olive oil

1 medium white onion, sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick

4 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup homemade crema (page 133), crème fraîche or heavy (whipping) cream

3 cups chicken broth, vegetable broth or water

Salt

4 ounces cooked ham, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch dice (optional)

3 tablespoons roughly chopped fresh epazote

OR $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped fresh cilantro

4 ounces Mexican melting cheese (Chihuahua,

quesadilla, asadero or the like) or Monterey Jack, brick or mild cheddar, shredded (you'll have about 1 cup)



1. THE CHIPS. Make the chips or measure out the store-bought chips.
2. THE BROTHY SAUCE. Roast the tomatillos and green chiles on a baking sheet 4 inches below a very hot broiler until darkly roasted, even blackened in spots about 5 minutes. Flip them over and roast on the other side—4 or 5 minutes more will give you splotchy-black and blistered tomatillos and chiles that are soft

and cooked through. Cool, then transfer everything to a blender, being careful to scrape up all the delicious juice that has run out onto the baking sheet. Blend to an almost smooth puree. There should be about 2 1/2 cups puree.

In a medium (4- to 5-quart) pot or Dutch oven, heat the oil over medium. Add the onion and cook, stirring regularly, until golden, about 7 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook another minute, then raise the heat to medium-high. Add the tomatillo puree and stir constantly for 5 minutes or so, until the mixture has reached a full boil. Stir in the *crema* (or one of its substitutes) and broth or water. Season with salt, usually about 3/4 teaspoon if you are using salted chips.

COOKING AND SERVING THE CHILAQUILES. Heat the oven to 400°F. Scoop the chips into a 13 x 9-inch baking dish. You may have to press down on them, crushing them just a little, to get them to fit. Sprinkle with the optional ham.

Bring the sauce to a boil and stir in the *epazote* or cilantro, then ladle the sauce over the chips. Gently press the chips into the sauce to ensure they're evenly coated (though a few may be sticking out). Evenly spread the shredded cheese over the top and set in the oven. Bake until lightly browned on top and bubbling around the edges, about 15 minutes. Carry your *chilaquiles* to the table or buffet.

WORKING AHEAD: Though the sauce (Step 2) can be prepared as much as 4 days ahead and kept covered in the refrigerator, the *chilaquiles* will have the most delectable texture when served shortly after baking.



Shelling freshly harvested beans

TOTOPOS FRITOS O HORNEADOS

• FRIED OR BAKED TORTILLA CHIPS

If you're going to use these chips for *chilaquiles*, you should buy medium-thick tortillas, ones that weigh 10 ounces per dozen. Choosing these will yield the right weight/volume for making Chipotle *Chilaquiles* (for the Baked Tomatillo Green *Chilaquiles*, you'll need 1½ times the recipe—18 tortillas). For snacking chips, choose the thinner, drier tortillas that are made from more coarsely ground corn—especially for frying light, crisp and greaseless. Baked chips can be nearly as good as fried ones (especially right out of the oven), and they are leaner. We counted: Baked chips take about 80 spritzes of oil (a total of 1 tablespoon oil spritzed over 12 tortillas).

Makes enough for 6 to 8 as a snack, or the right amount to use in making Chipotle *Chilaquiles*

12 corn tortillas

Vegetable oil to a depth of at least 1 inch (1½ inches is even better) for frying

OR vegetable oil in a spray bottle

Salt

1. THE TORTILLAS. For the crispest, most greaseless chips, the tortillas you start with should not be at all warm or moist—in fact cold, dryish, slightly stale tortillas are best. Separate the tortillas (make sure none are stuck together) and cut each into 6 wedges (it's most efficient to cut stacks of 4 or 5 tortillas). For dramatic-looking chips that are perfect for serving *ceviche* or other pass-around appetizers, cut the tortillas as illustrated on page 137. Spread out the wedges on your cutting board to air-dry for a few minutes.
2. OPTION 1: FRYING THE TORTILLAS. In a heavy pot, preferably at least 8 inches across and 3 to 5 inches deep, heat 1 to 1½ inches of oil over medium to medium-high. For greatest consistency, attach a deep-fry thermometer and adjust the heat to keep the oil at 375°F. Lacking a thermometer, the most accurate way to judge temperature is with your nose—at about 325°F, the oil will begin to give off that characteristic hot oil smell—and with your eyes—you'll

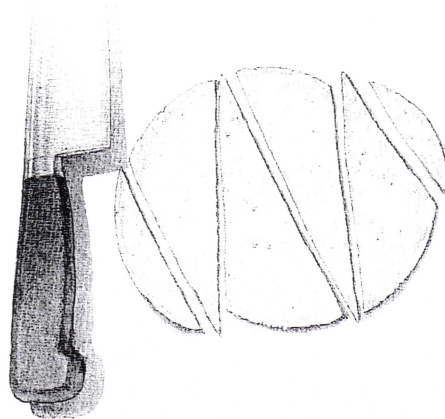
notice a shimmering surface on the oil (but no smoking) when it's about 375°F. You should also use good old trial-and-error: Lay a tortilla triangle in the oil, and if it sizzles happily, the temperature's about right; if it languishes with only a trickle of bubbles, the oil's too cool; or, if it gets zapped unmercifully, you've got smoking-hot oil that is dangerous and will give the chips a bad taste.

Working with a small handful (about 12 pieces) at a time, fry the chips, stirring them around nearly constantly, until they've darkened just a shade and the bubbling has slowed way down, 45 seconds to a minute. Use tongs or a skimmer to remove them from the oil and drain on paper towels. Sprinkle with salt.

OPTION 2: BAKING THE TORTILLAS. Heat the oven to 375°F. Spread the triangles into a more-or-less single layer on two baking sheets. Using a spray bottle of oil, evenly mist them on both sides. Bake, stirring them around once or twice, until they're crisp and slightly golden, 10 to 15 minutes. Sprinkle with salt.

WORKING AHEAD: Allowed to cool completely and stored in an air-tight container, chips for snacking are okay for several days after they're made. But just-made chips are heads-and-shoulders above chips made even, say, 2 hours before. For *chilaquiles*, they can be made a week or so ahead.

VARIATION: Tostadas: To make these flat crispy disks, fry or bake whole tortillas as directed above.



CREMA MEXICANA • MEXICAN-STYLE THICK CREAM

This is the luscious stuff that burns a simple dish into your memory. A little edgy, a little nutty and really voluptuous. Did they ever call Marilyn Monroe *crema*?

Makes about 1 cup

1 cup heavy whipping cream

3/4 cup good-quality commercial sour cream with active cultures

OR 2 tablespoons buttermilk with active cultures

In a small saucepan, heat the cream just long enough to take the chill off—to bring it to body temperature. If you have ready access to a low-range instant-read thermometer, it should be about 100 degrees. Off the heat, whisk in the sour cream (or buttermilk) and pour into a glass jar. Set the lid on the jar (but don't tighten it), then place the jar in a warmish place (it shouldn't be over 90 degrees). After 12 hours, the cream should be noticeably thicker. Refrigerate (you can tighten the lid now) for at least 4 hours or, better yet, overnight to complete the thickening. *Crema* will last for at least a week in the refrigerator.