

Recipes by Ruben Ortega, Htown Restaurant Group (Houston, TX)

Barbacoa de Borrego | slow-roasted leg of lamb

Serves 8 to 10

For adobo marinade (yield about 1-3/4 cups)

3 whole dried *ancho* peppers
2 whole garlic cloves
5 ea. allspice
1 bay leaf
1 small avocado leaf*
1/4 teaspoon cumin
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
3 ea. cloves
1/2 cinnamon stick
1-1/2 cups water
1 teaspoon kosher salt

For barbacoa:

1, 5-lb leg of lamb
3 small avocado leaves*
Salt to taste
3 banana leaves

To make the adobo: Soak ancho peppers in enough hot water to cover the peppers for about 10 minutes or until soft. Drain the ancho peppers and place in blender with remaining ingredients and purée into a smooth consistency. Set aside.

To make the barbacoa: Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In a Dutch oven, place a roasting rack in the bottom and add 3 cups of water. Make sure that the rack is higher than the water level, so the meat does not directly touch the water. If need be, you can place small ramekins on top of the rack to lift the meat higher. Make three slits (approximately 2 inches long) in the top of the lamb and salt to taste. Next, rub the lamb leg with the adobo and place the avocado leaves on top of the meat. Lay the banana leaves on the counter and place the lamb in the center, then wrap the banana leaves around, making sure to "envelope" the meat. Place on the roasting rack inside the Dutch oven. Cover the opening of the Dutch oven tightly with aluminum foil and then place the lid on top. Cook in the oven until fork tender, about 4 to 4-1/2 hours. It is important to not remove the lid or foil during the cooking as you will release the steam.

Remove from oven and debone meat. Serve with corn tortillas for rolling or to make tacos, ensalada de nopales (grilled cactus salad) , avocado slices, pico de gallo, and habanero salsa.

*If you are unable to find avocado leaves, you can substitute with one bay leaf and one-half of star anise (or 1/8 of a teaspoon if it is powder) for each avocado leaf.

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Salsa de habanero

Habanero Salsa | Makes 1 cup

Habanero peppers are common to the Yucatán. Since they are one of the hottest peppers in the world, I suggest wearing gloves when handling these peppers. Although I use the whole habanero in this recipe, you might want to remove the seeds and vein to reduce the intensity of this pepper's extreme hotness. If making ahead, cool *salsa* completely after making, transfer to a glass or plastic airtight container and refrigerate up to 3 days.

½ cup corn oil

1 whole habanero pepper, stemmed

3 garlic cloves, peeled

½ large white onion, coarsely chopped

4 medium tomatoes, roasted, peeled

½ tsp kosher salt

Place cast iron skillet over medium heat, add ¼ cup corn oil and preheat 2 minutes. Add pepper, garlic and onion and cook 5 minutes. Remove from heat and transfer to food processor or blender. Add tomatoes and process into a smooth consistency. Return skillet to medium heat, add remaining corn oil and preheat 2 minutes. Add *salsa* and salt, cook 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and transfer to bowl. Cool completely before serving or storing as directed above.

Salsa fría en molcajete

1¾ tsp kosher salt

5 medium tomatoes, lightly roasted, coarsely chopped

¼ small white onion, lightly roasted, coarsely chopped

2 garlic cloves, peeled, lightly roasted, coarsely chopped

1 whole *serrano* pepper, roasted, stemmed, coarsely chopped

½ medium avocado, peeled, pitted, cut into ½-inch cubes

¼ small bunch *pipicha*, optional

¼ small bunch cilantro, leaves only

Place salt on *molcajete* and mash a couple of times with the pestle. Add *tomatos* and mash into a chunky purée. Add onion, garlic, pepper and avocado; mashing after each addition. Add *pipicha*, if using, and cilantro. If using food processor, place tomatillos, onion, garlic, pepper and avocado and pulse four times. The salsa will have a chunky texture. Add *pipicha*, if using, and cilantro and pulse twice.