



Mexican food is healthy? Forget what you think you know

The Mexican food we know and love is about as authentic as American Chinese food. Just as thick sauces, peanuts or frying crop up rarely in China, the Mexican food that Dos Caminos chef Ivy Stark saw on a recent trip south of the border didn't feature many of the ingredients we expect.

"I want to dispel the myth that melted cheese and sour cream are authentic Mexican food," she says.

Cheese, in fact, is a rarity — she found none in central Mexico, or the coast. It was actually Mennonites who settled along the border who popularized it. Another missing "staple" on every menu here: quesadillas as we know them. What you do get is cuisine rich with vegetables, which are cheaper than meat. Sauces are made with roasted veggies, spices and sometimes nuts.

After her trip, Stark created a whole new, healthier menu for her restaurants, and shared with us the tips on how, through changing techniques and ingredients, you can capture authentic flavors in dishes that are more nutritious and less fatty.

Roast your vegetables

Stark revamped her guacamole for the new menu, giving it a smoky depth of flavor with roasted jalapeno peppers. “Roasting is a really good technique because it concentrates the flavor,” she says.

Change your wrapper

Replacing flour tortillas with corn saves calories, makes the dish gluten-free (one of the few items with gluten on a Mexican menu) and cuts out any potential hydrogenated oil. Cook it on a griddle to crisp it up instead of frying it.

Put out the fire

Stark worked with nutrition and sustainability consultants SPE Certified, who recommended not putting proteins, including fish, on the grill — the charring can cause carcinogens to form. But you can still grill vegetables like corn and asparagus. “Grilling is also a really good technique, especially if you’re looking to not use any fat,” she says. “It’s really delicious for corn, squash — everything tastes good on the grill because you get that smokiness against the sweetness of the vegetables. And it’s easy!”

Recipe: Spring Vegetal Tacos

Ingredients for tacos:

12 corn tortillas
12 oz. refried white beans
12 spears grilled jumbo asparagus
2 ripe California Hass avocados, sliced and grilled
12 tsp. cucumber pico de gallo
12 tsp. queso fresco

Ingredients for cucumber pico de gallo:

2 kirby cucumbers, peeled
1 small red onion, finely diced
2 roma tomatoes, finely diced
1 jalapeno pepper, finely chopped
1 serrano chile, finely chopped
¼ cup freshly squeezed lime juice
2 tsp. extra virgin olive oil
1 tsp. lemon olive oil
salt

Ingredients for refried beans:

1 cups dried cannellini beans
2 serrano chiles, split
2 pints of water
1 tbsp. olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, diced
1/2 tsp. dried oregano

2 tsp. lemon olive oil
1 tsp. salt

Directions for refried beans: Wash the beans in a colander. Bring water to a boil in a medium stock pot. Add the beans and the serranos. Reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook, skimming foam from the top occasionally, about 1 hour and 45 minutes. Drain, reserving the liquid. Mash the beans, along with some of the bean cooking liquid, until creamy but not completely mashed.

Heat the olive oil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Sauté the onion with the oregano and salt until golden brown. Add the mashed beans and cook, stirring occasionally. Cook until the liquid evaporates and the beans form a mass that pulls away from the sides and bottom of the pan, about 10 minutes. Puree in a blender, while adding the lemon olive oil in a steady stream. Season with salt as needed.

Directions for the pico de gallo: Finely dice the cucumbers, combine with the remaining ingredients and season with salt. Let stand 30 minutes before serving.

Directions for the tacos: Warm the corn tortillas by placing them on a warm

griddle for 30 seconds. Place a spoonful of white beans into each of the corn tortillas. Cut asparagus in half and place on top of white beans. Place one slice of grilled avocado and 1 tsp. of cucumber pico in each taco. Sprinkle with queso fresco.



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