

Daddy's Famous Tamale Recipe

(makes about 25 dozen)

Day 1:

Prepare the Meat and Broth.

Meat choices are flexible. I've used 1:1 pork:beef, but I prefer just pork. You can substitute the cut or the animal as you prefer, but you need to keep the total in the 17-20 lb range. Here is my currently most preferred blend:

- 1 pork picnic (about 8 lbs)
- 1 pork butt (about 8 lbs)
- 1 pork belly (about 4 lbs)
- 3 large sweet onions (cut into medium sized chunks)
- 1 entire head of garlic (chopped)
- 2 bay leaves (optional)
- about 1 dozen sliced jalapeno peppers
- about 1 dozen sliced serrano peppers
- 2-3 habenero peppers (optional)
- 3 tbs salt
- 4 tbs chile powder
- 1 tbs cumin
- 1 tbs pepper
- 2 quarts broth (any kind or you can use water - I use vegetable broth)

Cut the meat into 1"-2" cubes. Don't worry about meat left on the bone, we will cook that off. Place all ingredients in a large turkey roaster, including the bones from the pork cuts, and cook at about 200 F for about 10 hrs. Stir every 30 minutes for the first two hours, then every hour until it's done - you don't want the same bits of meat exposed out of the broth for too long or they will get dry and tough, so keep stirring them back under.

When done, remove the bones (all meat should be cooked off, or easy to remove, now). Then remove and strain most of the broth into quart jars - I usually save 7 quarts. I use a small colander for straining. We will use the broth to make the MASA.

Refrigerate the meat and broth and wait for day 2. I've waited more than 1 day but never more than 3 before making the tamales.



Tamales are a long standing holiday family tradition at my house. We usually make 25 dozen or so at Thanksgiving and then eat them up over the holidays - sometimes just warmed up, sometimes with chili and cheese, but best with Daddy's Famous Chili.

		
Ancho Chile	Guajillo Chile	Arbol Chile

The chile mix I usually use - ancho is mild and sweet, guajillo is peppery and warm, Arbols bring the heat. But it is fun to experiment and you can't really go wrong. Remember we cooked the meat with some hot peppers, and we can top off the heat with cayenne, so you don't need these for heat, just find the chile mix with the taste you like

Make the Chile Puree

Ingredients:

- Enough chiles to fill about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an 8 qt stock pot, The blend I use is:
 - about 30% Ancho chiles
 - about 10% the little Arbol chiles
 - the rest a mix of quajillo, new mexido, sante fe, or whatever you like
- 1 head of garlic broken into naked cloves

By hand, I tear the stems off the dried chiles and then tear them in half. I shake out seeds as best I can - but I don't fret too much if seeds remain. Put the chiles in an 8 qt stock pot and cover with about 2" of water. Bring the water to a boil, simmer for 15 minutes, then turn off the heat and let soak for at least 30 minutes (I sometimes start the chiles first and they will soak for 2 hours or more while I make up other stuff). Don't empty the pot, you will use the water to make the puree.

It takes several batches in a food processor to make all the puree. I fill the food processor about 2/3 full with soaked chiles, then add about 5 cloves of garlic, a pinch of salt, and enough of the soak water to about halfway cover the chiles. I run the food processor until all little flakes of chile skin are ground down to a fairly smooth puree - how long and at what setting depends on your machine, so experiment until you get the right technique. I put the puree into 1 qt mason jars. I use 3 quarts for the tamales and I use the rest to make Daddys Famous Chili later.



After refrigeration, the broth will look something like this. A solid fat cap at top, a gelatine layer in the middle, and an inch or two of liquid at the bottom. my broth is usually darker than this and gelatine layer is a reddish/brown.

Summary

At the end of Day 1, you want your meet cooked up nice and soft and in the fridge. You want to have removed the broth, put it into quart jars, and then in the fridge. You want to have made at least three quarts of the dried chile puree.

Overnight, the broth will solidify into several layers, I usually have a hard fat layer at the top, a gelatine layer in the middle, and an inch or two of liquid at the bottom that is mostly water (the pork renders a lot of fat). We will use the fat from the broth to make the Masa.

Day 2

Supplies:

- 5 packs of corn husks
- 25 lbs of masa (buy fresh at Fiesta, not premade)
- The pork meat from Day 1
- The broth from Day 1
- 3 qts of chile puree from Day 1
- 1 tub of lard (it's good for you, don't freak)
- Spices for the meat (approximate, add a little at a time)
 - 3 tbsls chile powder
 - 3 tbsls salt (or to taste)
 - 3 tbsls Cumin
 - Cayenne (just enough to top off the heat, remember we cooked the meat with a healthy helping of peppers).
- Spices for the Masa
 - about 3 tbsls chile powder per batch
 - about 3 tbsls salt per batch

Soak the Husks

I usually soaked the husks in a medium sized ice chest, but you can use any container suitably large. Cover them with warm water. The husks will try to float, and I've tried various tricks to keep them submerged including big rocks. Use whatever trick works for you, but soak for a couple of hours.

Pull the Meat

Heat the meat in the oven until it is warm, but not too warm to handle. Heat (or microwave) one quart of the broth. Add broth to meat as necessary to keep it nice and moist and soft. Now pull the meat. You want to pull all the cubes of meat apart and squeeze all the chunks of fat until you get a nice Sloppy-Joe-like consistency. Resist the temptation to remove the fat - it's the fat that makes it good - just squeeze it in your hands and mush it into the pulled meat mixture. Take your time; it takes a while; I usually make it a two man job, but more than four hands is too crowded.

After the meat is pulled, add three quarts of chile puree to the pulled meat. I add the spices a little at a time and taste along the way; I don't skimp on the salt! Mix the chile puree and spices in to the meat with your hand. When it is well mixed and tasting the way you like, set it aside.

Knead the MASA

I make masa in 12 lb batches. when the first batch runs out, the family is usually ready for a break while I make next 12 lb batch. You will need a big container for kneeding the masa. I use a plastic storage bin from WalMart. Put 12 lbs of masa in the bin and break it up with your hands.

To complete the MASA you need to add fat. I use a mixture of lard and fat from the pork broth. Pull the solid fat cap off 3 quarts of broth and place in a large sauce pan. Now warm the 3 quarts of broth in the microwave until the gelatine has melted - the liquified fat will stay separate from the water in the bottom. Add 3 cups of lard to the sauce pan, then add liquified fat from the broth to fill the rest of the sauce pan (take care to not use more than half of the total broth because we'll make two batches of masa). Heat the sauce pan until the lard and all the fat is completely liquid (be careful, it will be hot).

Add about half the sauce pan of melted fat to the masa and carefully start to kneed the fat into the masa. Once $\frac{1}{2}$ the fat is completely blended in, add fat a little at a time until you get to a smooth peanut buttery consistency (The final consistency is a judgement call, but you want it easy to spread and it should squeeze easily through your fingers.) It takes a while, so be patient and work it slow, and make sure the entire bin is uniform. When the consistency is about right, add the salt and the chile powder. You want to add chile powder until the MASA has a slight red tinge (about 3 tbsls, but I judge by the color).

Assemble the Tamales

Assembling tamales is a lot of work and a group effort is best. We make it a family thing. The tamales don't all come out the same because the tamale makers tend to have each their own technique. But I'll describe the technique I think is best.

		
Spread masa	Bend at the meat	Fold over the top

Grab a husk and lay it on your hand - skinny side to fingers, fat side to the wrist. My technique is to spread masa over about $\frac{2}{3}$ the width of the husk so I have bit of bare husk at one side. I leave about two inches of bare husk at the top and about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch at the bottom. Spread the MASA nice and thick - when you fold the husk, you want the meat to be completely surrounded by a nice layer of masa. The common mistake is to use too much meat and not enough masa.

After you spread the masa, add a row of meat down the middle of the masa layer. Then bend your husk so the meat is right in the bend. Now (and this is why I only cover $\frac{2}{3}$ of the husk) roll the masa covered side over the top and tuck it into the other side so that the meat is completely surrounded by masa. Now, roll the bare side of the husk over the top and then lock it down by folding the top.

What you want to accomplish is:

- A thick layer of masa over $\frac{2}{3}$ the width of the husk leaving some bare husk at one side.
- Leave about 2 inches of bare husk at the top and about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch bare husk at the bottom
- A generous (but not too generous) row of meat down the middle of the MASA
- Bend the husk right at the meat
- Fold the MASA side of the husk over the top so the meat is completely surrounded and then tuck it down.
- Roll the bare side of the husk around the tamale.
- Fold the top part over to secure the roll.
- Place your tamale in a bin or whatever you are using to store freshly assembled tamales.

Day 3

Steam Tamales (this can be day 3 or late in day 2)

You will need a tamale steamer and I think there is no other way. I have a very large steamer I bought at HEB. It isn't quality metal, but it is big enough for about 100 tamales (remember, you are making 300-ish tamales). Here is the steaming procedure I use.

First, before putting tamales in the steamer, measure how much water fits in the bottom of your steamer so the level is about $\frac{1}{2}$ below the tamale tray. Empty the pot, but remember the measure.

Have someone tilt the steamer over to about 45°. You want to place the tamales so that the open side is up and the folded side is down, and you want them stacked so they stay up and don't fall over. I find it's easier to do when the pot is tilted so they lie on their sides as I add them instead of me constantly trying to keep them from falling over.



Steam the tamales, open side up and folded side down. I find it easier to get them properly in the pot if I have someone tile it over at 45° and hold it for me. My steamer holds about 100 tamales!

Once you have loaded the steamer, Remember your water measurement and carefully add that much water by pouring along the side of the steamer (don't dump the water into the top of the tamales.)

Put the pot on the oven and the oven on high until the water boils and the steam lid gets hot. Even after the water starts to boil, the steam won't make it to the top until the tamales get hot, so keep the heat on until the lid is too hot to touch (test this by touching, of course). Then turn down the heat to a slow boil.

I steam the tamales about 2 hrs, Steam time is a source of great controversy and I have read times as short as 20 minutes. In my experience, it takes 2 hours to cook the MASA. Moreover, I think tamales are hard to overcook, but undercooked tamales are awful.

After 2 hrs, turn off the heat and let the tamales cool for about 15 minutes, then use a pair of tongs to remove them from the pot. Toss the water from each finished batch and add fresh water for each batch. I usually need 3 batches of about 100 tamales.

I put the cooked tamales into the same bin I used to kneed the masa until they are cool enough to handle. We usually eat some right away but we freeze most of them by the dozen wrapped in foil and inside a freezer bag. They can last a few days in the fridge, but they keep very well in the freezer - I've had plenty of months old tamales.



Tamales covered in chili cheese and a bit of green onion. I prefer plain old sweet onion and, of course, Daddys Famous Chili - either way, they won't suck!

We make it a big days long family project, but you can scale down (or up) to what works for you. If your family is like ours, you will get all kinds of shapes and sizes - short, tall, skinny, fat - but thats half the fun, and they all taste great. Just remember: more masa, less meat!

Enjoy!