

# The *chiles en nogada* that my grandma used to make - my mom's version

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There is no possible way to try to explain about my home country's cuisine without the included drooling and tummy sounds that would like to have a taste of the flawless combination of ingredients that have been passed through generations. To glorify and celebrate the taste and flavors of recipes I will share now a classic from my grandma's book recipe, *chiles en nogada*, that my mom mastered after me begging her to cook them as soon as the first pomegranate was ripe and ready to be harvested out in the yard, right before fall, this dish brings me a lot of memories, a lot of joy and a lot of comfort to my mouth.

Let me introduce to you and according to Mexico's Government official website: "Chile en nogada is the dish that, according to legend, the Augustinian nuns of the Santa Mónica convent in Puebla, made with seasonal products to make a dish that would carry the colors of the trigarante army; This with the aim of celebrating the Independence of Mexico and Emperor Agustín de Iturbide." (Secretaría de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural, 2019)

She was standing right there, in the kitchen where I had my very first memories, she was wearing blue navy suit pants, white blouse, cluster of pearls on her ears, as always dolled up and smelling like gardenias. All started with her unique way of giving directions:

- Pass me my apron and don't get in my way if you're tryna help. – She said.

I was never able to say no or else she would raise her right eyebrow before asking again. A spicy woman with pretty flavored recipes I will say.

You are going to need:

- 6 poblano chili peppers,
- 1/2 pound of pork ground meat,
- 1/2 pound of beef ground meat,
- 3 1/2 ounces of walnuts,
- 1 3oz cream cheese,
- 1 can of evaporated milk,
- 4 oz of half cream,
- 1 tablespoon of sugar,
- 2 pomegranates,
- Some parsley,
- 3 celery sticks,
- 1 green pepper,
- 3.5 oz raisins,
- 3.5 oz dry cranberries,
- 3.5 oz pinions,
- 3.5 oz almonds,
- 1 slice of pineapple.

A good cook uses a lot of dishes, that's why we have *pinches*, that's a word for referring to those in the kitchen that may wash dishes and spoons as payment for your daily meal in a Hispanic household. - she used to call that a lot and then proceed to joke with me in word games...

The following has to be chopped in fine cubes:

<i>pinions,</i>	<i>cranberries,</i>	<i>raisins,</i>
<i>walnuts,</i>	<i>celery,</i>	<i>the pineapple.</i>
<i>almonds,</i>	<i>green pepper,</i>	

It always took me a lot to please my grandmas' expectations when I used to help her, my mom is more chill about my chopping skills but I still can't say I do it as great as them. Real small tiny little cubes. I think a lot about how those evenings with them helped to form the man that I am today, and to have a deeper understanding about my life and direction of things. Like, I remember how frustrated I always ended up because I was never able to be patient enough to let the sauces cook, to know why should I chop things so fine, to figure out the meaning of life through recipes and memories, I guess.

Place a big pan on the stove and add a bit of butter & olive oil, or vegetable oil, or preferred grease to cook. Add the meats and salt pepper a little bit. When it gets golden add the green pepper, celery, raisins, almonds, cranberries and the pinions, 10 to 15 minutes or until it's golden looking, then lower the heat.

You also are going to need *thee sauce*: mix together the cheese cream, evaporated milk, half cream, nuts and a spoon of sugar, but the last one is about preferences, my grandma always made it with brown sugar, because she said it brings the flavor to the palette with the condiments of piloncillo, but my mom's recipe with refined sugar makes it creamier, so I am going to leave that choice to you.

After mixing it keep it warm on really low heat.

The best part always comes the last, the chilis; you bathe them with a little grease, and roast them slowly, until the skin is all burned, my grandma used to do it in a coal grill, my mom's recipe is in a fancy electric stove with nonstick pan, but when I help, I usually bring out one of my *'little California scientist'* torches for making this last step faster and way easier to peel after. Once your chilis are roasted, put them in a plastic bag and keep the heat with a kitchen towel on them for 45 minutes. Now, this is just a tip between us, if you leave them next to a window with the sunlight on them for double the time, the skin will literally wash out, and that's good because you need to peel them off in order to serve. You wash them, rip them up and take the seeds out of them, wash and if you can and don't like spicy food, you need to remove also the chili inside veins, but honestly, just wash them and pray to God that your poblano chili wasn't on war against the French (French-Mexican war reference joke here), or else I recommend some Tums to chew after this wonderful dish....

Once you have your sauce warm, your chilis peeled and washed, you need to fill them with the meat mix, and place them in a container. When you finish you cover them with the sauce, the pomegranate and parsley.

That's your wonderful *chiles en nogada*, for sides you can chose a rice, either Mexican style or white rice with peas would be my suggestions but honestly, if you make enough chilis you really won't need any other side dishes, just a good dessert and your drink.

Let's talk about that.

I remember my grandma as soon as fall was coming up. She was going to start all this dishes, the *chiles en nogada*, the buñuelos (fried flour tortilla with cinnamon sugar), fruit punch, and so others, and when she started to get older and we had to take over the cooking the recipes did change, but that was for good and she was really proud of it. She not just showed us resilience and commitment but also made us good cooks: my mom mastered her chilis en nogada recipe, my brother bakes wonderful pumpkin spice pie and I make a really decent paella.

The last time we enjoyed this recipe together was the same fall she passed away, and she was still giving us directions of how to cook it, let me tell you that.

Don't forget to pray before you eat, and be thankful for having your loved ones with you, you never know when you are going to end up writing about your family's recipes while eating a chicken bake from the local chain membership store at your college's student center, just to remind you that you haven't got this far for nothing, so '*just keep pushing until you finish and finish proud*', just like she used to say...

## References

Secretaría de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural. (2019, September 14). *Chile en nogada, tradición y delicia en un solo plato*. Retrieved from Gobierno de Mexico:  
<https://www.gob.mx/agricultura/es/articulos/chile-en-nogada-tradicion-y-delicia-en-un-solo-plato?idiom=es>