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Authentic Mexican,
Twentieth-Anniversary Edition

**Rick Bayless with
Deann Groen Bayless**

AUTHENTIC MEXICAN

**Regional Cooking
from the
Heart of Mexico**

Twentieth-Anniversary Edition

RICK BAYLESS
with
Deann Groen Bayless

Illustrations by John Sandford
Photographs by Christopher Hirsheimer



Cook's mask with hinged mouth

*To the memory of Gladys Augusta Potter, my grandmother,
who taught me that you can bring a lot more than food
to the dinner table*

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PREFACE TO THE TWENTIETH-ANNIVERSARY EDITION

In the mid-eighties, when my wife, Deann, and I were living in Mexico—traveling through every one of that country’s thirty-one states, exploring age-old markets, working with local cooks to learn the dishes that had stood the test of time—I knew just what kind of cookbook was in the making. I was crafting firsthand reports of who was cooking what in Mexico, and exactly where they were doing it. I was amassing historical, geographical and social context for Mexico’s regional cooking. And I was capturing vivid verbal snapshots of authentic ingredients and traditional techniques that seemed to be getting nudged out as more shoppers (yes, even in Mexico) opted for the less diverse packaged stuff at mega-stores like Aurrerá and Wal-Mart.

Clearly, I was writing a cookbook for Americans who would describe themselves as adventurous and dedicated cooks—definite fans of Mexican food. And I assumed (or at least hoped) that they had traveled (or hoped to travel) through Mexico, and had a hankering for the non-Americanized real thing. That didn’t mean, however, that this motivated group wouldn’t end up bewildered as they sorted through the great variety of Mexico’s regional dishes and ingredients.

What those adventurous, dedicated souls needed, I resolved, was a cookbook that clearly explained the steps to traditional flavor within the context of both their American kitchens and the native kitchens of those who had created the traditions. Having lived for several years in Mexico after finishing an undergraduate degree in Spanish language and literature, followed by graduate studies in linguistics and anthropology, I was offering to become their guide and translator.

Little did I know how food and culture would evolve in the United States over the next twenty years. Hispanics, the majority of them Mexican, have become the fastest-growing immigrant group in North America. Which means two things: most non-Hispanic Americans

don't have to travel south of the border to encounter a taste of real Mexico (there are "authentic" grocery stores and ma-and-pa restaurants catering to Mexicans popping up as fast as Starbucks), and once-rare ingredients like chipotle chiles, tomatillos and key limes are now available in American grocery stores. So easily available, in fact, that they've started taking on a new life in the American kitchen, flavoring everything from barbecue sauces to chutneys to salad dressings. *Dulce de leche* (aka *cajeta* in Mexico) has become one of the most popular Häagen-Dazs ice cream flavors. Salsa, as we've heard repeatedly from the news media, is outselling ketchup.

Regional Mexican ingredients are even available in fresher and more convenient forms. When I was writing *Authentic Mexican*, tinny-tasting canned tomatillos were all most Americans could find; now citrus-bright fresh tomatillos are our norm. Back then, cilantro was called "Chinese parsley," and those lustrous dark-green poblanos claimed almost no real estate in our country's produce departments. Smoky, spicy dried chipotle chiles used to be an American cook's dream; nowadays a quick search in practically any U.S. town will produce chipotles in a variety of forms: dried (both the tan and the red varieties), powdered, canned in *adobo*, even pickled. Cactus paddles, if you were lucky to stumble upon them twenty years ago, were slimy, pickly strips in a dusty jar; just yesterday I bought beautifully fresh paddles for grilling at my local natural-foods grocery. Recently, when I discovered that a national retailer had started canning roasted tomatoes—roasting tomatoes is a technique traditional Mexican cooks use to add sweetness and depth—I knew that traditional Mexican food had taken on a more expanded role in the American kitchen.

In short, the food of Mexico has started to shed its exotic, ethnic character and is moving right toward the mainstream. Even Mexican-American food (Tex-Mex, Cal-Mex, New-Mex or whatever regional variation seems appropriate) is evolving, trading in its cheese-covered heaviness for a fresher, lighter approach that characterizes much of the food that's eaten south of the border.

Yet all of this accessibility of ingredients and growing familiarity with Mexican cuisine hasn't eliminated the need for a good set of classic recipes. That's why I—like so many of you—continue to turn to *Authentic Mexican* for a really great tortilla soup or fresh corn-poblano chowder, for a soul-satisfying pork *tinga* or Yucatecan shrimp *a la vinagreta*, for street-style red chile enchiladas or that savory, fruity Oaxacan *mole* they call *manchamanteles*. The recipes I

mined over many years from hundreds of Mexico's traditional cooks—and perfected in my American kitchen—have never let me down.

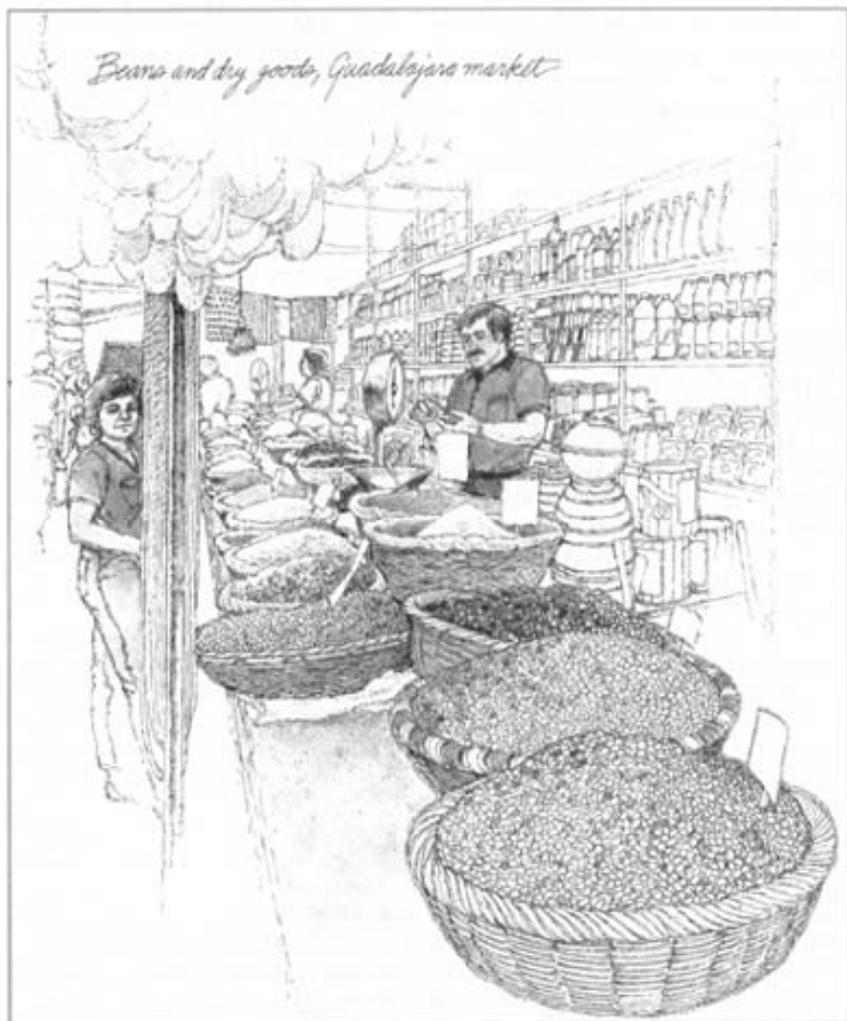
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A great number of people are responsible for the creation of this book: My mother and stepfather, Levita and Andy Anderson, and Deann's mother, Edith Groen, who provided generous support, both emotional and financial. The scores of Mexican cooks in markets, street stalls, small restaurants and homes, who shared both the details of their craft and a love for their specialties. Employees of the tourism offices all over Mexico, who went out of their way to supply information on local specialties and where to find them. The people running the gastronomical library at the offices of the Loreda restaurant group in Mexico City, who offered unlimited access to their collection of regional Mexican cookbooks. Cliff and Sue Small, who generously opened their Mexican home to us and introduced us to rural Mexican life. Carol Zylstra, Virginia Embrey and Maria Villalobos (and her mother), who shared their love for Mexican life, knowledge of little-known places and (in the case of Maria and her mother) delicious recipes. Fran and Jim Murray of Murray Western Foods in Los Angeles, who unflinchingly supported us through the years, and Peggy Playan, who was always encouraging and gracious in spite of our erratic consulting schedule. Craig Sumers and Brad Friedlander of Lopez y Gonzalez restaurant in Cleveland, who believed that regional Mexican dishes were not only very tasty but could attract an enthusiastic clientele. Many friends and family (especially Georgia and Dan Gooch, Floyd and Bonnie Groen, Paul and Macky Groen, Jewel and Bob Hoogstoel, Bill and Yvonne Lockwood, Jan and Dan Longone, Margot Michael, Nancy and Gary Oliver, Mary Jane and Steve Olsen, Pep and Ilene Peterson and Peg Tappe), who contributed valuable knowledge, encouragement and recipe-testing skills. LuAnn Bayless, my sister, who freely devoted a good portion of one summer to testing recipes with us, and Molly Finn, who tested recipes in New York. Maria Guarnaschelli, my editor, who saw value in my research and worked enthusiastically to give it a beautiful, easily usable form. Amy Edelman, my copy editor, who scrutinized all the details with amazing rigor, unearthing lost ingredients and taming wayward punctuation. Molly Friedrich, my hardworking

agent, who gives sound advice. And finally, John Sandford, whose kindness and sensitivity have made him a treasured friend and whose brilliant illustrations lovingly celebrate regional cooking from the heart of Mexico. My respect and thanks to you all.

Twenty years later: Thank you to those who helped us realize the twentieth-anniversary edition: Christopher Hirsheimer for photos that so perfectly capture the heart of Mexico; Doe Coover for organizing the details; and Stephanie Fraser, David Sweeney and Michael Morrison from HarperCollins for seeing it to completion.

INTRODUCTION



THE TWO WORLDS OF MEXICAN COOKING

My taste buds were trained on Mexican food. And it was real Mexican food to our family: hot tamales and tacos from a little drive-in wedged in between a greasy auto-repair yard and a hubcap seller, and El Charrito down on Paseo with its oozy cheese-and-onion enchiladas smothered with that delicious chile gravy. We knew it was authentic, assertive, almost wickedly good Mexican fare, and we knew there were few places to find it outside Oklahoma City.

In Austin at El Patio, we found the food tasty, as we did at Mi Tierra and at a few places on up through Dallas and Forth Worth. But in New Mexico, even the best-loved Mexican restaurants served dishes that, to my taste, were unexpectedly different. And when I made it to totally Mexican East Los Angeles some years later, I truthfully came across nothing with that familiar savor of home. I ate in the recommended family-run joints—the ones that reminded me of the tamale drive-in back home, and El Charrito and El Patio. Oh, the food was good, but not like the Mexican food that heritage had convinced me was the best.

There in East L.A., they claimed to serve the real food of Mexico...and *that* I found surprising.

I suppose it's that way with most folks who've learned the world's cuisines at their local eateries and loved them. Then they venture out; they set that first foot onto foreign soil, and their noses don't catch a whiff of anything expected. Menus filled with the best (even better-than-the-best) versions of dishes they'd learned at home never materialize. And they return home, a little more world-wise, to report with disappointment (and a little pride) that Mexican food down at Pablo's, say, is better than anything you can find in Mexico.

When I first saw Mexico and ate what it offered, I was too innocently captivated by foreign ways to afford myself that opinion. I lapped up what was put before me, was convinced I loved it, and, of course, felt it necessary to feign at least some understanding. But with time that wonderment wore off, and I began to see that I would have to either go back to the El Charrito I knew so well or figure out what these puzzlingly enticing dishes really were and why they weren't like anything at home.

I did both. And after a number of years shuffling between the two cultures, I have come to a simple answer: There have developed two

independent systems of Mexican cooking. The first is from Mexico, and (with all due respect to what most of us eat and enjoy in this country) it is the substantial, wide-ranging cuisine that should be allowed its unadulterated, honest name: Mexican. The second system is the Mexican-American one, and, in its many regional varieties, can be just as delicious. But its range is limited, and to my mind it forms part of the broader system of North American (or at least Southwest North American) cookery.

Mexico's Mexican food has rarely been imported to the United States, except to a few well-insulated Mexican neighborhoods like the one in East Los Angeles and some on the South Side of Chicago. The Mexican-American style of cooking seems to win out most everywhere else that *paisanos* set up shop. Even in the small family restaurants, the inflexible health-department guidelines must be conformed to, the "general" customer's tastes accommodated. Progress, sadly, seems to be made most quickly by North Americanization.

What I've discovered, though, while teaching Mexico's Mexican cooking throughout the United States, is that most North Americans don't really even know well-prepared Mexican-American foods. Their unhappy experience is often limited to some mass-produced takeoff on the Southwest Traditional at a Chi Chi's or El Torito's or whatever the regional chain restaurant is called. And unfortunately, at the hands of such forces, Mexican-American food seems to have suffered unmercifully, to have become a near-laughable caricature created by groups of financially savvy businessmen-cum-restauranters who saw the profits in beans and rice and margaritas.

Mexico and the fare of its peoples is thoroughly different from all that, and most North Americans are understandably unprepared for it. The repertory is broad and variable, and it reflects the history and individuality of the country's distinct regions. Much of the produce is local and seasonal, not yet genetically engineered. Mexico's European-and-Indian soul feels the intuitions of neither bare-bones Victorianism nor Anglo-Saxon productivity.

Frankly, Mexican fare and its attendant customs can be so unexpectedly different that many first-time visitors to our next-door neighbor find themselves taking refuge in the Denny's or the continental dining rooms simply from the stun of its rich diversity. But with the most rudimentary introduction, the unexpected can become anticipated. And then, perhaps, comfortable and magnetic, as it has for me.

MEXICO'S CULINARY HERITAGE

When the first Spaniard set foot on New World soil, he was, without knowing it, breaking the seal on a highly developed world of altogether different plants, animals and people. Fully six and a half millennia earlier, the humans that had hunted and gathered on this continent began to settle into agricultural ways, and through those centuries they developed one of the major horticultural systems in the history of humankind.

The earliest foods to emerge in the agricultural camp were some beans and a squash that at first seemed good only for its meaty seeds, then for its golden flowers and tender leaves, and finally for its edible pulp. Nutritive, tasty chiles were added, and, within a short thousand years or two, the primal kernels of the corn cob—the builders and sustainers of American civilization—had been tamed from the tiny wild grain.¹ “In focusing their attention on maize, beans, and squash,” say Peter Farb and George Armelagos in *Consuming Passions*, “the domesticators thus merely had to copy a natural model. Both in their habits of growth and in the nutrition they offer, the three plants complement one another.”²

Now, the way those early domesticators had developed for making edible their domestic and wild-gathered produce would probably not have stimulated anyone’s culinary curiosity. But by 1519, when the Spaniards made their conquering march into the future home of Mexico City, all that had changed.

The peoples that made up the Meso-American empires had orchards full of avocados, coconuts, papayas, pineapples, prickly pears and a long list of others whose names don’t ring familiar in our ears. Their farms grew the father of our red tomato and a little green husk “tomato”; there were chiles, manioc, sweet potatoes, four kinds of squash, peanuts and at least five major strains of beans. *Epazote* was the herb of preference (as it is today), and there were huge quantities of amaranth and *chía* seeds to make into porridge and unleavened cakes.

The Aztecs’ domination was felt far and wide in this part of

¹Paul C. Mangelsdorf, Richard S. MacNeith and Gordon R. Willey, “The Origins of Agriculture in Middle America,” *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, ed. Robert Washope (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 430–431.

²Peter Farb and George Armelagos, *Consuming Passions* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), p. 202.

America. They had subjugated all the competition from Yucatán to barren Northern Mexico, but it was a top-heavy domination that sucked all but the guts out of many of the neighboring societies. Everyday people were on a subsistence diet of sweet or chiled *atole* (porridge), some beans and the necessary allotment of tortillas; meat was scarce and fruit only a little less so.³ When shortages came, the people's recent emergence from the less civilized life of nomadic gatherers showed through: The whole system lacked a fundamental stability.

But in the face of all this uncertainty, the lordly houses had tables set with such brilliant flavors and ingeniously constructed dishes that their presence is still felt in the best Mexican kitchens. Beyond the simple boiled or pit-cooked domestic turkeys, Muscovy ducks, venison and little dogs, these households commanded all manner of wild quails and peccary, pigeons and a remarkable variety of fish and shellfish from the coasts as well as local waters.⁴

Cortés described the dishes at Emperor Montezuma's table as being of four classes: meat, fish, herbs and fruit.⁵ The great, good Friar Sahagún was more detailed in his astoundingly thorough ethnography of that early Aztec society. He detailed two basic sorts of sauces for the stewed dishes that simmered in the traditional earthenware *cazuelas*. One was thickened with ground pumpkinseeds and flavored with red chiles and tomatoes—called *pipián* in the mid 1500s when Sahagún wrote, and still known by that name today. The second was a kind of chile sauce or tomato sauce, depending on your perspective and the proportions of ingredients.⁶

Most royal homes served this kind of highly flavored food with tortillas of all sorts. Some were smooth, others made from rough-ground corn. The cooks prepared *tlacoyos* and *gorditas* like the ones popular today; and Aztecs apparently loved *tamales* and turnovers as much as their modern ancestors do.⁷

³Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Conquest*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), pp. 148–154.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Hernán Cortés, *Conquest: Dispatches of Cortés from the New World*. Intro. and commentary by Irwin Blacker (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1962), p. 61.

⁶Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. and annotated by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe, NM: The School of American Research, 1953), vol. 9, pp. 37–40.

⁷*Ibid.*, and Ana M. de Benítez, *Cocina prehispánica* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Euroamericanas, 1974), pp. 34–48.

The greatest concentration of royal households was in the capital, Tenochtitlán. And there is little doubt that the streets of this beautiful city were some of the most active in the world of that time. The market was massive enough to hold sixty thousand souls buying and selling, estimated Hernán Cortés.⁸ It was filled with incalculable variety, and varieties of variety, according to Sahagún. Beans, fish, chiles, meat...even prepared stews and sauces, roasted meats and guacamole.⁹ The whole must have been spectacular, and, in spite of the passing of four centuries and disparate rulers, it sounds not unlike the aggressively sensual offerings in and around the colossal Merced market at the center of present-day Mexico City.

The first city was cultured—albeit from a different source than our culture—and, perhaps for the first time, the Spaniards encountered a sect that thought *them* rather barbaric. Of course, the opposite was true in other respects, but it's clear from what was written down by Cortés and his soldier Bernal Díaz del Castillo that the refinements of the Aztec ruling class were impressive. They both described the banquets with myriad dishes, the ceremonial hand-washing, the beautiful red and black dishes and the gilded chocolate cups filled with that foaming, exotically flavored drink of nobles.¹⁰

By a decade after the 1521 fall of Tenochtitlán, the Mexican natives had already adopted a new set of flavors into their existing large assortment. There seemed to be an “absence of strong cultural resistance to the introduction and use of foreign plants,” as one researcher found recently when he tried to discover what had become of so many of those pre-Columbian crops in modern Mexico.¹¹

Spice traders brought cinnamon, black pepper and cloves; everyone wanted the common European thyme, marjoram and bay leaves.¹² As early as the second voyage of Columbus, the first load

⁸Cortés, op. cit., p. 55.

⁹Sahagún, op. cit., vol. 10, pp. 65–94.

¹⁰Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 224–227; and Cortés, op. cit., p. 61.

¹¹Angel Palerm, “Agricultural Systems and Food Patterns” in Robert Waushope, ed., *Handbook of Middle American Indians*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1967), vol. 6, p. 44.

¹²Virginia Rodríguez Rivera, *La comida en el México antiguo y moderno* (México, D.F.: Editorial Pormaca, 1965), p. 10.

of wheat, chickpeas, melons, onions, radishes, salad greens, grapes, sugar cane and fruit stones had made their way to America.¹³

Though the Indians knew well the ways of agriculture, they had domesticated only a small selection of animals. So when the Spaniards came with horses, hogs, cattle and chickens, they were welcomed immediately. By the end of Cortés's life, meat was plentiful, wheat bread was cheap, rice was growing where wheat and corn could not; in fact, most all the fruits, vegetables and other new important food crops like sesame seeds, almonds and citrus were in the land.¹⁴

But several European foodstuffs failed to thrive in America, and that, of course, meant that the Spanish diet found itself in a state of transition perhaps as great as that of the Indians. Olive trees yielded little, so there was little oil; grapevines did quite miserably, which meant—devastatingly for the Spaniards—less wine. The newcomers never lovingly embraced the ubiquitous corn, but their wheat did well and the meat those Iberian cattle ranchers relied on grew at a rate previously unknown.¹⁵

Bernal Díaz describes a 1538 banquet in the court of the Spanish conquerors that lays bare the early tastes of the Spanish branch of the Mexican family. They had a sweet tooth (Spain had just reconquered its own land from seven centuries of sweet-loving Arab domination), and they served great quantities of marzipan and their other favorites. They made little birds in a pickling sauce (*escabeche*) that Yucatecans still prepare; they put together salads and vegetable dishes; they roasted meats; they set out cheese and bread and dishes made with lots of eggs; and they showed plainly their newly acquired partiality for the cup of chocolate.¹⁶

For several centuries that strain of Spanish blood stayed as pure as any of them could have hoped for in a land as alluring as Mexico. But all the while, of course, the Indian blood was becoming more mestizo, and stronger, and less content with the pure-white ruling crust. The War of Independence in 1821 was the first blow to the Crown, but not so much to the whites' control. Then, in the revolu-

¹³ Alfred Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), pp. 67–68.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 76–77, 106–108.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72, 76, 98.

¹⁶ Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la Nueva España* (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, 1955), p. 627.