

Mexican

POTATO-STUFFED CHILES RELLENOS



The *chiles rellenos* in Mexican restaurants often contain plenty of salty cheese filling in roasted poblanos that are dipped in an egg-flour batter and fried. Not that there is anything wrong with them—I do love a good dose of indulgence. But when you can execute a healthier rendition with creamy potatoes and an eggless batter, it allows you to enjoy them guilt-free. **SERVES 4**

1 pound russet or Yukon Gold potatoes
4 large cloves garlic, peeled
8 dried guajillo chiles (see Tater Tip)
2 cups boiling water
4 large poblano chiles (see Tater Tips, page 165)
¼ cup finely chopped fresh oregano leaves
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh cilantro leaves and tender stems
2½ teaspoons coarse sea or kosher salt
1 teaspoon smoked paprika

2 tablespoons canola oil, plus extra for deep-frying
1 cup finely chopped onions
1 cup chickpea flour (see Tater Tips, page 164)

1. Peel the potatoes and cut them into quarters. Give them a good rinse under cold running water, place them in a medium-size saucepan, and cover them with cold water. Throw in the garlic cloves. Bring it to a boil over medium-high heat. Turn down the heat to medium-low, cover the pan,



TATER TIP

▲ Almost leathery in their dryness, blood-red guajillos are commonly available in Latin American groceries and in some supermarkets that stock a variety of chiles. Long, stout, and mild in heat, these are prized in Mexican kitchens for their musky flavor, low heat from capsaicin, and deep red color.

SMASHED
BOILED
MASHED
RICED
FRIED
SHREDDED
ROASTED
BAKED



TATER TIPS

▲ The ability of chickpea flour to have that egg-like quality of binding is uncanny. Rich in fiber and proteins, it is available in the flour section of most moderately sized grocery stores. If the flour appears a bit clumped up—perhaps because it has been exposed to too much humidity or moisture—break up the clumps with a fork to return it to its powdery state. Or tap them through a fine-mesh sieve.

▲ If you wish to alter the chiles you use and don't mind the punch of capsaicin, by all means, try using a fresh jalapeño or two or a habanero. I still blister the skin in a dry skillet or even on a grill before mincing them. But don't turn on the grill just for this task. At the tail end of summer, when chiles are abundant at the farmers' market, I grill them all and freeze them in zip-top bags for later use.

and gently boil the potatoes and garlic until the potato pieces fall apart quite easily when pierced with a fork or knife, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. While the potatoes cook, place the guajillo chiles in a medium-size bowl and pour the boiling water over them. They will float at first because they are very light when dry, but as they absorb water and start to soften, they will sink. Allow them to soak for about 15 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, prepare the poblano chiles. Slit each from the stem end down, halfway through its length, without cutting through (make sure to leave the stem intact). You want to create a slit wide enough so you can reach in with your fingers and scoop out as much of the seeds and ribs as possible to fashion a cavity.

4. Once the potatoes are ready, scoop out 1 cup of the potato cooking water and set aside. Drain the potatoes and garlic in a colander and give it a good shake or two to get rid of excess water. Working in batches if necessary, transfer the potatoes and garlic to a ricer and press them through into a medium-size bowl. (If you don't have a ricer, use a potato

masher and fluff them with a fork when completely mashed.) Sprinkle in 2 tablespoons of the oregano, all the cilantro, and 1 teaspoon of the salt, and fold to incorporate them.

5. Fish out each guajillo from the soaking liquid (it should be tepid enough to handle the chiles) and yank out the stems. The stems will separate easily along with the ribs and some of the seeds. Discard these. Reserve the soaking liquid. Transfer the guajillos to a blender jar, sprinkle in the remaining 2 tablespoons oregano and the paprika, and pour in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the soaking liquid. Set the jar aside.

6. Pour 2 tablespoons of oil into a medium-size skillet and heat it over medium-high heat. Once the oil appears to shimmer, add the onions and stir-fry them until they start to turn light brown around the edges, 3 to 5 minutes. Scrape the onions into the blender jar and add 1 teaspoon of the salt. Pour another $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of the guajillo soaking liquid into the onion skillet to dislodge any remaining bits.

7. Puree the guajillo-onion mélange to a smooth paste, scraping down the inside of the jar as needed. Stop the machine, pour

in the liquid from the skillet, and give the blender another whirl. (If you were to pour that into the blender earlier, the total liquid in the jar would have been too much to create a smooth puree. Hence the addition in batches.)

8. Divide the potato filling into 4 equal portions and stuff 1 portion into each poblano cavity.

9. Combine the chickpea flour and the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt in a medium-size bowl. Pour $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the potato cooking water over the flour and whisk it in, making sure that there are no lumps and that the batter is the consistency of thick pancake batter. If it is too thick, thin it a bit with a few more tablespoons of the reserved liquid.

10. Pour oil to a depth of 2 to 3 inches into a wok, Dutch oven, or medium-size saucepan. Heat the oil over medium heat until a candy or deep-frying thermometer inserted into the oil (without touching the pan bottom) registers 350°F.

11. Line a large plate or a cookie sheet with several layers of paper towels. Once the oil is hot, dunk a poblano into the batter, making sure it is completely coated. Gently slide it into the hot oil. Coat and add a second poblano to the oil. Deep-fry the poblanos, periodically turning them with tongs until they are reddish brown and crispy, 5 to 8 minutes. Transfer them from the oil to the paper towels to drain. Repeat with the remaining poblanos and batter.

12. To serve, ladle a few tablespoons of the guajillo sauce on each serving plate. Place a warm poblano on it and ladle a generous $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the sauce over the top. Serve right away.



TATER TIP

▲ If you wish for a more tender poblano, first pan-fry them whole in a bit of oil in a large pan over medium-high heat, turning them occasionally, until they blister and become slightly soft to the touch but still firm, 5 to 8 minutes. Once they are cool, slit them as described in the recipe and proceed to stuff, batter, and deep-fry them.