SEAFOOD AND POULTRY

Over half the states in Mexico include shoreline, so it is no wonder that seafood plays a major part in the cuisine. Ducks and turkeys, which are native to Mexico, have also always been part of the diet. Chicken was introduced by the Spanish, and each region has its own specialty, whether served with a sauce, shredded and used as a filling, or baked in banana leaves. Here are recipes that reflect the wide range of ingredients and flavors in Mexican cooking.

SHRIMP IN CHIPOTLE SAUCE
58

SEA BASS IN PARCHMENT WITH SALSA VERDE
61

RICE WITH SEAFOOD
62

ZUCCHINI-STUFFED CHICKEN BREASTS
65

PIBIL-STYLE BAKED CHICKEN
66

TINGA POBLANA WITH CHICKEN
69

DUCK IN A GREEN PIPIÁN
70

SHRIMP IN CHIPOTLE SAUCE

PREPARING SHRIMP

To prepare a shrimp, pull or cut off the head with a knife. Tear off the legs on the inside curve of the body and pull off the shell, beginning at the head end and leaving the tail intact if specified in the recipe. The dark, veinlike intestinal tract that runs down the back of the shrimp is innocuous but is often removed for aesthetic reasons. To remove it, use a small, sharp knife to cut a small groove along the back of the shrimp. With the tip of the knife, lift out and gently scrape away the dark tract.

8 cloves garlic, minced

¼ cup (2 fl oz/60 ml) fresh lime juice

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

20 large shrimp (prawns), peeled and deveined, with tails intact *(far left)*

¼ cup (2 fl oz/60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

½ cup (2½ oz/75 g) finely chopped white onion

4 ripe tomatoes, about 1½ lb (750 g), chopped, or 2 cans (14½ oz/455 g each) chopped tomatoes

2 canned *chiles chipotles en adobo* with 1 tablespoon sauce

½ cup (4 fl oz/125 ml) Coca-Cola or Pepsi-Cola (see Note)

¼ teaspoon dried oregano, preferably Mexican

In a bowl, stir together the garlic, lime juice, and sea salt and pepper to taste. Add the shrimp and toss until thoroughly coated. Let marinate while preparing the sauce, at least 5 minutes.

In a heavy frying pan or *cazuela* over medium-high heat, heat the olive oil. Add the onion and sauté until golden, about 3 minutes. Add the tomatoes and cook, stirring constantly, just until the color deepens, less than 1 minute. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the tomato mixture to a blender, allowing any excess oil to drip back into the pan. Reserve the oil in the pan. Add the chiles and sauce, cola, and oregano to the blender. Process until you get a textured sauce.

Remove the shrimp from the marinade and pat dry with paper towels. Return the pan with the reserved oil to medium-high heat and heat until the oil begins to shimmer. Add half of the shrimp and cook until opaque, about 2 minutes. Using the slotted spoon, transfer to a plate. Repeat with the remaining shrimp and add them to the plate.

Return the still-hot pan to medium-high heat and add the sauce. Fry, stirring frequently, until the sauce thickens and the flavors deepen, about 5 minutes. Stir in the shrimp and cook for 2 minutes longer just to heat through. Divide the shrimp evenly among warmed individual plates. Spoon some of the remaining chipotle sauce over each serving and serve at once.

Note: Since the early 1940s, when colas were first introduced to Mexico, they have frequently been used to replace piloncillo *(page 93) in simple cooked dishes such as this one since they are frequently so easily available, adding flavor as well as sweetness.*

Serving Tip: Serve the shrimp over White Rice (page 110).

MAKES 4 OR 5 SERVINGS

SEA BASS IN PARCHMENT WITH SALSA VERDE

6 sea bass fillets or steaks, each 5–6 oz (155–185 g) and about ¾ inch (2 cm) thick

Sea salt

½ lb (250 g) tomatillos, husked and rinsed (page 17), then coarsely chopped

2 bunches fresh cilantro (fresh coriander), large stems removed, coarsely chopped

1 bunch fresh flat-leaf (Italian) parsley, large stems removed, coarsely chopped

3 fresh mint sprigs, coarsely chopped

3 jalapeño chiles, coarsely chopped

5 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped

¼ white onion, coarsely chopped

¾ cup (6 fl oz/180 ml) dry white wine or water

⅓ cup (3 fl oz/80 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

Preheat the oven to 450°F (230°C). Remove the skin from the fish if it is still intact and run your fingers over the fish to check for and remove any embedded bones, using tweezers if necessary. Sprinkle with sea salt on both sides.

In a blender, process the tomatillos, cilantro, parsley, mint, chiles, garlic, onion, and wine until very smooth and thick; a few tomatillo seeds will dot the sauce. Season to taste with sea salt.

Cut 6 sheets of parchment (baking) paper large enough to easily contain one piece of fish. Fold each piece in half lengthwise. Unfold and brush the center of each sheet with some of the olive oil. Spoon 3 tablespoons of the sauce in the center of one half of each sheet of parchment, place a fillet on top of the sauce, and rub the fish generously with oil. Cover with another ½ cup (4 fl oz/ 125 ml) of the sauce, making certain it does not come close to the edge. Fold the uncovered half of the parchment over the fish and cut the paper around each portion with scissors, beginning at the fold and forming a half heart all around the fish and leaving a distance of 1½ inches (4 cm) around the edge. Seal the packets by pleating the edges *(right)*. Place the packets on a baking sheet.

Bake the packets for 10 minutes. If the packets are tightly sealed, they will balloon up and fill with hot steam.

Remove the packets from the oven and place on warmed plates. Carefully open the packets with scissors and serve at once.

Note: You may also prepare this recipe using aluminum foil instead of parchment paper.

Serving Tip: Accompany with White Rice (page 110).

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

COOKING IN PARCHMENT

Tightly sealing fish in a wrapping of herbaceous leaves, which allows the fish to steam gently in its own juices, is a traditional technique in Mexican cooking. This recipe uses parchment paper instead, which lacks the flavors imparted by the leaves, but the method captures the juices and makes a dramatic presentation when the package is opened. (Take care when opening; the trapped steam can cause burns.) To seal the parchment, starting at an open corner, fold over the open edge, overlapping the fold on itself at 1-inch (2.5-cm) intervals to form flat pleats.

RICE WITH SEAFOOD

RICE

The Spanish brought rice with them to Mexico, and it has become an indispensable part of Mexican cooking ever since. Mexican cooks adopted the Spanish pilaf method of briefly frying the kernels with onion and garlic in oil before adding the liquid. But they did not adopt the stubby Valencia rice of Spain, preferring instead longer, more slender grains. For this dish, known as *arroz a la tumbada* and reminiscent of paella, a medium-grain rice imported from Valencia works best, as it will absorb the liquid better than other varieties. An American-grown medium-grain rice will also work well.

1 lb (500 g) large shrimp (prawns) in the shell (20–30 shrimp)

¾ lb (375 g) red snapper or sea bass fillet

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

4 cups (32 fl oz/1 l) fish stock or bottled clam juice

½ cup (4 fl oz/125 ml) canola or corn oil

½ white onion, halved vertically and thinly sliced crosswise

5 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1½ cups (10½ oz/330 g) medium-grain white rice, rinsed and drained

3 large, ripe plum (Roma) tomatoes, finely chopped

3 jalapeño chiles, roasted and seeded (page 106), then cut lengthwise into strips

3 tablespoons minced fresh chives

12 clams, well scrubbed

4–6 tablespoons (⅓–½ oz/ 10–15 g) chopped fresh cilantro (fresh coriander) leaves, plus 6 sprigs

Peel and devein the shrimp, reserving the shells and leaving the tails intact (page 58). Remove the skin from the fish if it is still intact and run your fingers over the fillet to check for and remove any embedded bones, using tweezers if necessary. Cut the fish into 1-inch (2.5-cm) pieces. Sprinkle the shrimp and fish generously with sea salt and pepper and refrigerate until needed.

Put the shrimp shells and fish stock in a saucepan and season to taste with sea salt. Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce the heat to medium, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes. Remove from the heat and strain into a measuring pitcher. Add enough water to bring the liquid to 4 cups (32 fl oz/1 l).

In a Dutch oven over medium heat, heat the oil. Add the onion and garlic and sauté until softened, about 2 minutes. Stir in the rice and cook until golden, about 3 minutes. Add the tomatoes and cook, stirring often, to combine the flavors, 4–5 minutes. Pour in 2 cups (16 fl oz/500 ml) of the reserved stock and bring to a boil. As soon as the liquid boils, reduce the heat to medium-low, cover, and cook for about 5 minutes. Uncover, stir in the chiles and chives, and add the remaining 2 cups stock. Re-cover and continue cooking for 5 minutes longer.

Uncover and stir in the fish, shrimp, and clams, discarding any clams that do not close to the touch. Reduce the heat to low, re-cover, and cook, stirring occasionally if necessary to prevent sticking, until the rice is tender, 8–10 minutes. Discard any clams that failed to open. Add 1 teaspoon sea salt and ½ teaspoon pepper, then taste and adjust the seasoning. Stir in the chopped cilantro. The mixture should be the consistency of thick soup with some liquid remaining. Spoon the rice and seafood into warmed individual large, shallow bowls or into a warmed shallow serving bowl. Garnish with the cilantro sprigs and serve at once.

MAKES 4–6 SERVINGS

ZUCCHINI-STUFFED CHICKEN BREASTS

5 tablespoons (2½ fl oz/ 75 ml) canola or safflower oil

¼ cup (1 oz/30 g) finely diced white onion

1 clove garlic, finely minced

¾ cup (3 oz/90 g) finely chopped zucchini (about 1 small)

4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

3 poblano chiles, roasted and seeded (page 106)

4 slices Monterey jack cheese, each 2 inches (5 cm) long, 1 inch (2.5 cm) wide, and ⅛ inch (3 mm) thick

FOR THE SAUCE:

Reserved chopped poblano chiles

¼ white onion, roasted *(far right)*

1 clove garlic, roasted *(far right)*

1 cup (8 fl oz/250 ml) half-and-half (half cream)

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

Sea salt

In a heavy frying pan over medium heat, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil. Add the onion and sauté until just starting to turn pale yellow, about 2 minutes. Stir in the garlic and sauté for several seconds, then add the zucchini and cook until softened, 1–2 minutes longer. Remove from the heat, drain off any oil, and let cool. Trim off any excess fat from the chicken breasts. One at a time, place the breasts between 2 sheets of plastic wrap or waxed paper and, using a rolling pin or the flat side of a meat mallet, pound them gently, working from the center outward, until an even ⅛ inch (3 mm) thick. Sprinkle the chicken breasts on both sides with ¼ teaspoon sea salt. Coarsely chop 2½ of the chiles and reserve to use for the sauce. Cut the remaining ½ chile lengthwise into 4 strips.

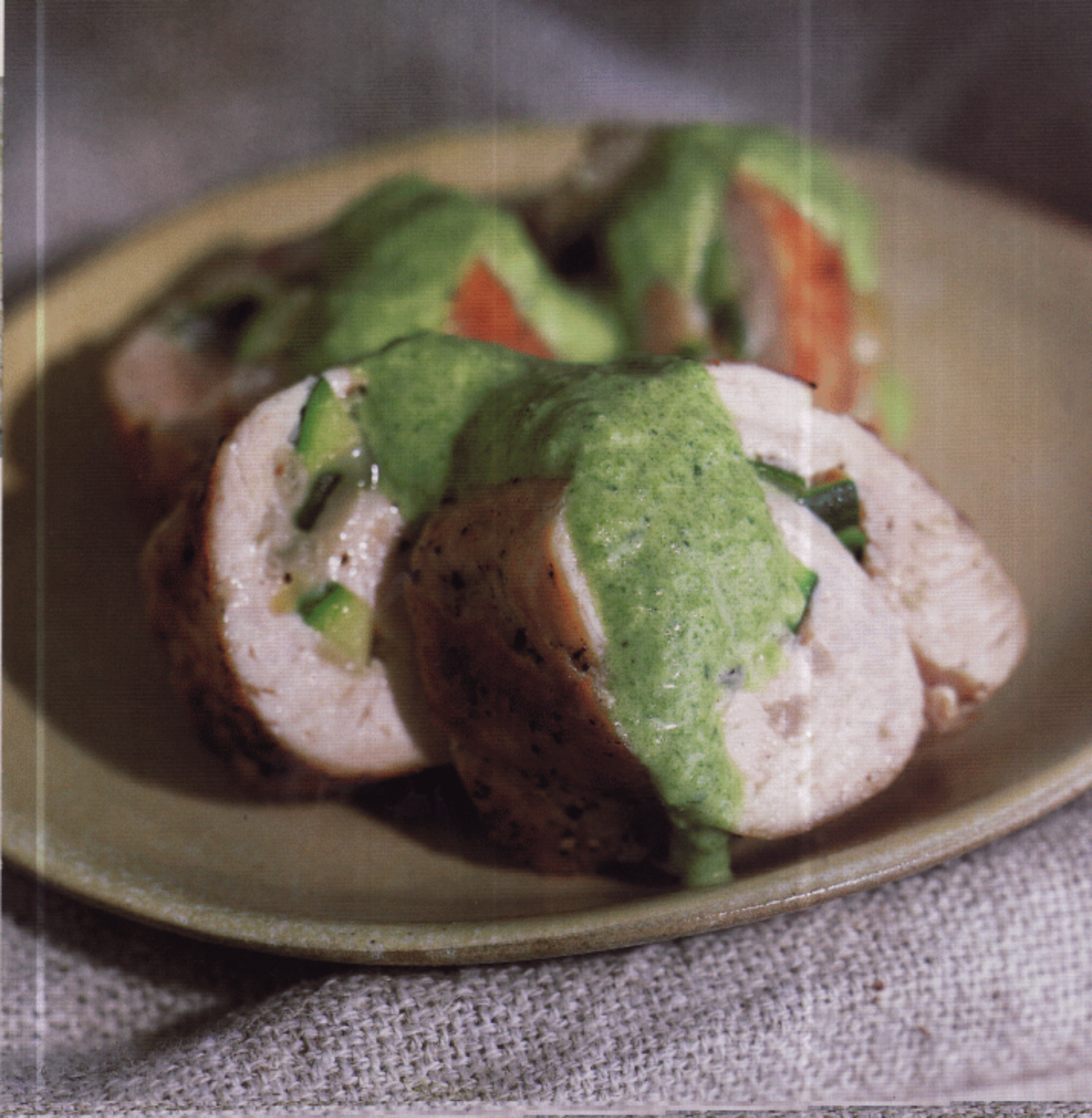
Lay out the chicken breasts, smooth side down, and spread a fourth of the zucchini mixture evenly over each breast, leaving a ½-inch (12-mm) border on all sides. Lay 1 chile strip and 1 cheese strip across the narrow side of the chicken. Starting at a narrow end, carefully roll up each breast, making at least 1 full turn and forming a tight, fat tube. Secure with toothpicks. In a large, heavy frying pan over medium-high heat, heat the remaining 3 tablespoons oil. Add the rolls and lightly brown on all sides, turning as each side starts to color, about 6 minutes. Sprinkle with sea salt and pepper. Reduce the heat to medium and continue cooking, turning frequently, until the meat is opaque throughout, 10–15 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the sauce. In a blender, process the reserved chiles, the onion, garlic, and half-and-half until smooth. In a small saucepan, melt the butter over low heat. Pour in the sauce and stir constantly until the mixture thickens, about 5 minutes. Season to taste with sea salt. Keep warm over low heat. To serve, slice each roll crosswise into 3 or 4 rounds. Divide among warmed individual plates, spoon the chile sauce over the top, and serve.

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

ROASTING ONIONS AND GARLIC

Roasting onions and garlic will intensify their flavor. To roast onions, cut as directed in the recipe. Prepare a medium-hot fire in a charcoal or gas grill, or line a griddle or heavy frying pan with aluminum foil, shiny side up, and place over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, turning often, until blackened in spots and starting to soften, about 10 minutes. Let cool and remove and discard any outer papery skin. Roast garlic in the same way, separating, but not peeling, each clove and removing any loose papery skin. Roast until the skins blacken. Let cool before peeling.



TINGA POBLANA WITH CHICKEN

4 chicken thighs, about 1 lb (500 g) total weight

½ white onion, cut into chunks, plus 1 cup (5 oz/155 g) finely chopped

4 cloves garlic, 2 cloves slightly smashed and 2 cloves finely chopped

Sea salt

1 tablespoon canola or safflower oil

½ lb (250 g) Mexican chorizo, casings removed and sausage crumbled

1 can (14½ oz/455 g) chopped tomatoes, drained

1 teaspoon dried oregano, preferably Mexican

2 bay leaves

2 canned *chiles chipotles en adobo* with 1 tablespoon sauce

FOR THE GARNISHES:

½ white onion, quartered vertically, thinly sliced cross-wise, and separated into quarter rings

2 ripe Hass avocados, pitted and peeled (page 10), then cut into ½-inch (12-mm) chunks

Place the chicken thighs, onion chunks, and smashed garlic in a saucepan and add water to cover. Add 1 teaspoon sea salt and bring to a boil over high heat, skimming off any foam that forms on the surface. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, until the chicken is opaque throughout, 20–30 minutes. Using tongs or a slotted spoon, transfer the chicken to a plate. Reserve the broth. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, remove and discard the skin and bones and coarsely shred the meat with your fingers.

In a large frying pan, Dutch oven, or *cazuela* over medium heat, heat the oil. Add the chorizo and fry for about 5 minutes. Discard the excess rendered fat from the pan, leaving just 1 tablespoon. Add the finely chopped onion and garlic and sauté until beginning to soften, but not yet starting to brown, about 1 minute. Add the shredded chicken, tomatoes, oregano, bay leaves, chiles and sauce, and about 1 cup (8 fl oz/250 ml) of the reserved broth to keep the mixture moist. Simmer, uncovered, until the flavors are blended, about 15 minutes. Add more broth to the pan if the mixture begins to stick, but do not add too much; the mixture should absorb the liquid and not be runny. Remove and discard the bay leaves and season to taste with sea salt. Scoop the chicken into a warmed serving dish and garnish with the onion and avocado.

Note: Tinga, *a specialty of Puebla, means "disorder" in Spanish and refers to a dish of savory shredded meat often used as a filling for tacos.*

Make-Ahead Tip: The chicken can be cooked up to 1 day in advance. Cover and refrigerate until needed. You can also prepare the entire dish 1–2 days in advance and then reheat it over low heat.

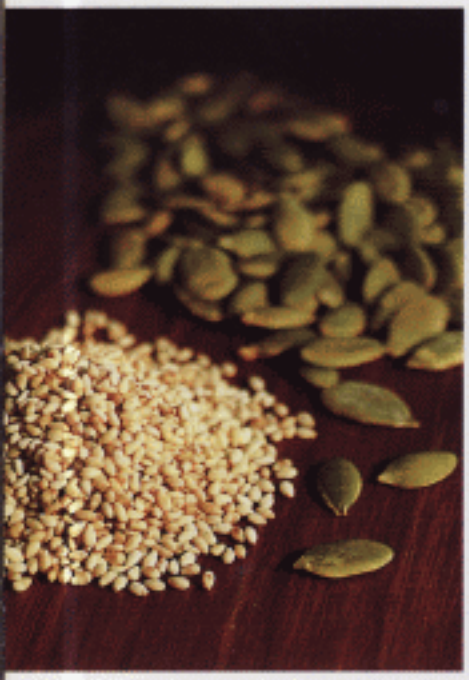
Serving Tips: Serve with warmed corn tortillas (page 115) for diners to use for making tacos, or spoon over White Rice (page 110).

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

CHORIZO

Mexican chorizo is ground pork heavily seasoned with chile and garlic, stuffed into casings, and hung for several days to allow the flavors to mellow before using. Unlike the milder, smoked Spanish chorizo, this sausage is never eaten without cooking. It can be purchased freshly made at Mexican markets and at many butcher shops. Never purchase chorizo prepackaged in plastic. Your dish will be greasy and of disappointing flavor. Spanish chorizo may be substituted, but add additional ground chile to the sausage once it is removed from its casings, or use hot Italian sausage.

DUCK IN A GREEN PIPIÁN



PIPIÁN

A thick sauce similar to a mole, a *pipián* always includes seeds, traditionally pumpkin, and often sesame seeds. To prepare the seeds for the *pipián* in this recipe, in a large, dry frying pan, toast the sesame seeds over medium heat until they start to turn golden, about 2 minutes. Let cool and transfer to a blender. In the same pan over medium heat, heat the oil. Add the pumpkin seeds and toast, stirring constantly, until plump, 1–2 minutes; do not let brown. Using a slotted spoon, remove the seeds, reserving 2 tablespoons for garnish and adding the rest to the blender. Set aside the pan with the oil.

2 ducks, 5–6 lb (2.5–3 kg) each, skin intact, cut into 4 pieces (2 leg-and-thigh pieces and 2 breast halves), giblets, neck, and back reserved for making stock

½ white onion, thickly sliced

2 cloves garlic

8 peppercorns

2 bay leaves

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

1 tablespoon canola oil

FOR THE PIPIÁN:

½ cup (1½ oz/45 g) sesame seeds

2 tablespoons canola oil

1 cup (5 oz/155 g) raw hulled green pumpkin seeds, plus 2 tablespoons

12 tomatillos, husked and rinsed (page 17)

½ white onion, coarsely chopped

12 serrano chiles, coarsely chopped

8 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped

8 fresh epazote sprigs

Sea salt

White Rice (page 110) for serving

To make the stock, put all the giblets but the livers, the necks and backs, the onion, garlic, peppercorns, bay leaves, and 1 teaspoon sea salt in a large pot. Add cold water to cover and bring to a low boil over medium-high heat, skimming off any foam. Reduce the heat to low, partially cover, and simmer for at least 1½ hours or up to 4 hours. Remove from the heat. Pour through a sieve into a clean container. Let cool, cover, and refrigerate overnight. Lift off the solidified fat on the surface. You should have 7 cups (56 fl oz/1.75 l).

Trim off any excess fat from the duck pieces and season them with sea salt and pepper. Prick the skin with a sharp knife, being careful not to pierce the flesh. In a large, heavy frying pan over medium-high heat, heat the oil. Add the leg-and-thigh pieces, skin side down, and fry without turning, stopping to drain off the rendered fat from time to time, until browned, 10–15 minutes. Transfer to a plate and repeat to brown the breasts. Return the duck pieces to the pan, reduce the heat to medium-low, cover tightly, and cook until the meat is tender, about 40 minutes.

Prepare the seeds for the *pipián (left)*. In a saucepan over medium heat, cover the tomatillos with water. Bring to a simmer and cook until soft, about 10 minutes. Drain and add to the blender. Add the onion, chiles, garlic, epazote, and 1½ cups (12 fl oz/375 ml) of the duck stock and process until smooth, adding more stock if necessary. Pour through a medium-mesh sieve placed over a bowl.

Return the reserved frying pan with the oil to low heat and reheat the oil. Pour in the sauce and stir frequently for about 5 minutes. Gradually add 4½ cups (36 fl oz/1.1 l) stock and continue cooking over very low heat until the sauce thickly covers the back of a wooden spoon, about 10 minutes. Season to taste with sea salt. Add the duck pieces and warm thoroughly in the sauce. Transfer the duck to individual plates. Ladle the sauce over the duck, garnish with the reserved pumpkin seeds, and serve with the rice alongside.

MAKES 6–8 SERVINGS