



COOKING CLASSES
AT SUR LA TABLE

Nora

SPANISH TAPAS

WITH CHEF BRIEA N.

INTRODUCTION TO SPANISH CUISINE

From a culinary standpoint, Spain is defined by its geographical mix of plains, mountains, and coastline, as well as influences from by neighboring France and Portugal. Its Mediterranean climate makes Spain an agricultural center of Europe and the world's largest exporter of olives and oranges. It is also lays claim to the world's largest fishing fleet as well as having more land planted with grapes than any other country.

The country's cuisine is known for certain signature dishes, but also for its style of eating. All over Spain, people take part in the daily ritual of eating tapas, little pre-dinner snacks that have evolved into an entire sophisticated cuisine of its own. Spanish tapas feature many native ingredients which lend rich and distinctive flavors to each small dish, such as:

Cazuelas: Traditional terra cotta cookware and serving dishes, commonly used to serve tapas.

Chorizo: A cured pork sausage made with garlic and smoked or sweet pimentón (see below). Available in Spanish and specialty meat markets.

Manchego: A sheep's milk cheese from the La Mancha region of Spain. Manchego has a firm buttery and slightly piquant flavor that is not too strong or creamy.

Marcona Almonds: A pale tan, round and flat almond with a creamer texture than California almonds. Often served fried in oil and salted. Available in specialty markets.

Olive Oil: Oil used for dressing and cooking, pressed from native olive varieties such as Arbequina, Picual Hojiblanca and Morisca. Available in Spanish markets and many specialty grocery stores.

Pimentón: A ground spice made from drying varieties of native red peppers. Pimentón is sometimes referred to as smoked paprika, but not in Spain, and is commonly used in Spanish cooking or sprinkled over to finish a dish. Pimentón comes in sweet (dulce) or hot (picante) varieties and is available in many specialty grocery stores and Spanish markets.

Piquillo Peppers: A variety of chile pepper grown in northern Spain. The name comes from the Spanish word for "little beak." They are hand-picked between September and December and roasted over wood, giving them a distinct sweet and smoky flavor. Afterwards they are peeled and seeded by hand before being packed into jars or tins. Available at well stocked grocery and specialty stores.

Saffron: The red stigmas from a small purple crocus. Each flower supplies three stigmas which are handpicked and then dried. Over 14,000 tiny stigmas are used for each ounce of saffron, making it the world's most expensive spice. Purchase saffron threads with the most consistent dark red color for best quality and flavor. Available in specialty markets and large grocery stores.

Serrano Ham: A dry-cured ham traditionally made from the Landrace breed of pig and similar in texture to Italian prosciutto. Available in specialty delis and fine grocery stores.

Sherry (Jerez): Is a fortified wine made primarily from palomino grapes in Andalusia, Spain. Sherry has a rich distinctive flavor that ranges from light and dry (manzanilla and Fino), to sweet and heavier (Amontillado and Oloroso).

Sherry Vinegar (Vinagre de Jerez): Aged vinegar made from sherry wine. Sherry vinegar is available in most grocery stores, though specialty stores will provide a better selection of higher quality sherry vinegars.

PORK MEATBALLS WITH SMOKY TOMATO SAUCE - ALBÓNDIGAS

Yield: 30 small meatballs, 4 to 6 appetizer servings

These little meatballs, called albóndigas in Spanish, are packed with smoky flavors that will delight guests at your next tapas party. Serve with toothpicks and cocktail napkins just like the tapas bars in Spain!

Smoky tomato sauce:

*2 tablespoons olive oil
1 yellow onion, finely chopped
1 large garlic clove, minced
½ cup amontillado (medium-dry) sherry
1 ½ cups whole peeled San Marzano tomatoes
1 cup low-sodium chicken broth
1 bay leaf
1/8 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes, or more to taste
1/8 teaspoon saffron threads
2 teaspoons smoked pimentón
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper*

Albóndigas:

*1 tablespoon olive oil
1 yellow onion, finely chopped
1 green bell pepper, cored and finely chopped
1/4 cup whole milk
2/3 cup panko bread crumbs
10 ounces ground pork or beef
10 ounces fresh chorizo or Italian sausage, casing removed
1/2 cup grated Manchego or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for garnish
1 egg, beaten
2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, plus more for garnish
2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme leaves
1 teaspoon sea salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
¼ teaspoon nutmeg*

-
1. Preheat oven to 475°F. Position rack in the center and line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment.
 2. *To prepare the sauce:* Heat olive oil in a large skillet or Dutch oven set over medium-high heat. When oil is shimmering, add onions and cook until soft and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add sherry and cook until almost evaporated. Add tomatoes, broth, and seasonings. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove the bay leaf and puree sauce with a hand-held immersion blender. Taste and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. A small amount of water can be added to thin the sauce as necessary.
 3. *To prepare albóndigas:* To a medium skillet set over medium-high heat, add oil. When oil is shimmering, add onions and peppers and sauté until vegetables are soft and translucent, about 5 minutes; set aside to cool to room temperature. In a small bowl, combine milk and bread crumbs and set aside to soak for 5 minutes. In a medium bowl, combine the rest of the meatball ingredients with the cooled onions and peppers and soaked bread crumbs; mix thoroughly. Roll albóndigas into balls 1 ¼ inches in diameter. Transfer the meatballs to prepared baking sheet and bake until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Using tongs, add cooked albóndigas to the tomato sauce and simmer to blend the flavors, about 5 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper.
 4. *To serve:* Transfer albóndigas to a large shallow serving bowl or divide between medium-size cazuelas, garnish with parsley and cheese.

SAUTÉED SHRIMP WITH SHERRY AND GARLIC (GAMBAS AL AJILLO)

Yield: 4 to 6 appetizer servings

Traditional tapas like this one are simple preparations of fresh ingredients. In Spain you will see tapas served in small terra cotta dishes called cazuelas.

¾ pound medium shrimp, tail-on, peeled, and deveined

Sea salt

5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

3 tablespoons thinly sliced garlic

2 tablespoons minced fresh flat-leaf parsley

2 tablespoons amontillado (medium-dry) sherry

1/2 teaspoon pimentón

1. Sprinkle shrimp with salt and set aside for 10 minutes; pat the shrimp dry with paper towels.
2. To a large skillet set over medium heat, add oil, garlic, and parsley. Cook until garlic is aromatic, about 1 minute. Add the shrimp and sauté until they are opaque, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the sherry and pimentón; taste and adjust seasoning with salt. Continue to cook until the sherry evaporates and the sauce thickens slightly, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to serving dish and serve immediately.

MARINATED PIQUILLO PEPPERS WITH GRILLED BREAD

Yield: 6 servings as an appetizer

The name piquillo means "little beak". Seen everywhere in Spain, these peppers have endless applications in tapas recipes. Piquillo peppers can be found roasted, peeled and packed in jars or tins. These sweet little peppers are available at most grocery stores and specialty markets.

1 (7.6-ounce) jar piquillo peppers, rinsed well
1/4 cup capers, rinsed and drained
1 garlic clove, thinly sliced, plus 1 garlic clove, halved
3 whole cloves
1, 1x2-inch piece orange zest
1 bay leaf
3 sprigs fresh thyme or rosemary
1/8 teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon sherry vinegar
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
1 loaf rustic bread, sliced 1/2-inch thick
1/2 teaspoon flakey sea salt
1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
2 tablespoons shaved Manchego cheese

1. Quarter piquillo peppers and pat dry with paper towels. To a medium skillet set over medium-low heat, add peppers, capers, sliced garlic, cloves, orange zest, bay leaf, herb sprigs, pepper flakes, oil, vinegar, and salt. Gently stir with a wooden spoon and cook until herbs and garlic just begin to sizzle. Remove skillet from heat and let peppers marinate for at least 10 minutes. (Peppers can be prepared ahead of time and reheated before serving.)

2. Heat a grill pan on high. Grill bread until dark grill marks are achieved, about 1 minute per side. Cool bread slightly and rub with halved garlic cloves on both sides.

3. *To serve:* Remove spices, zest, and herb sprigs from marinated peppers; gently stir in flakey salt, parsley, and cheese. Arrange the pepper mixture evenly on the bottom of a serving platter. Cut grilled bread in half and arrange around the peppers; serve at room temperature.

STUFFED DATES WITH BLUE CHEESE AND MARCONA ALMONDS

Yield: 24 pieces

24 large medjool dates, stem ends trimmed
4 ounces Spanish blue cheese, crumbled (about 1 cup)
24 marcona almonds

1. Preheat oven to 375°F and line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Cut a lengthwise slit in each date with a paring knife and gently pull open; remove and discard the pit. Stuff each date with about a teaspoon of cheese and 1 marcona almond; gently push the sides together; place on a baking sheet and repeat with remaining dates, cheese, and almonds. Transfer baking sheet with dates to the oven and bake until dates are heated through and cheese starts to melt, 5 to 7 minutes.
3. *To serve:* Cool dates for about 5 minutes before serving.