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Main Dishes

Mexican Paella with Shrimp, Mussels and Chorizo

Paella Mexicana con Camarones, Mejillones y Chorizo

Serves 25 to 30

Recipe from Season 6 of Mexico--One Plate at a Time

INGREDIENTS

1 gallon chicken broth

¼ cup salt (1/3 cup if you're using low-sodium broth, ½ cup if using unsalted broth), plus more for the chicken

3 pounds red-ripe tomatoes

OR 2 28-ounce cans diced fire-roasted tomatoes, undrained

10 large fresh poblano chiles

30 chicken thighs (with bones and skin in tact)

1 ¼ cups good-quality olive oil

1 ½ pounds white onion, chopped into ½-inch pieces (about 5 cups)

3 pounds fresh Mexican [chorizo sausage](#), casing removed

2 heads garlic, peeled and finely chopped

8 pounds medium grain rice

4 pounds medium-large (21 to 25 count per pound) shrimp, peeled (leaving the tail and final joint in tact, if you wish) and deveined

7 pounds mussels, scrubbed and de-bearded (if necessary)

1 ½ pounds frozen peas, defrosted)

1 cup chopped flatleaf parsley

2/3 cup silver tequila (optional)

DIRECTIONS

The broth and flavorings. In a large (12-quart) stock pot, combine the broth and salt. Measure in 1 gallon of water, cover the pot and set over medium-low heat.

Roast the fresh tomatoes on a rimmed baking sheet 4 inches below a preheated broiler until blackened and blistered, about 6 minutes per side. Cool, then peel (if you wish). Scoop the tomatoes (fresh roasted or canned roasted) into a blender or food processor, along with all

their juices. Puree and set aside.

Roast the poblanos over a gas flame or 4 inches below a preheated broiler, turning frequently, until blackened all over, about 5 minutes for the open flame, 10 minutes under the broiler. Collect in a bowl and cover with a kitchen towel. When cool rub off the blackened skin and pull out the stem and seed pod, then tear the chiles open, scrape out the seeds and rinse briefly under cold water to remove stray bits of skin and seeds. Chop into ½-inch pieces.

Brown the chicken. Sprinkle the skin side of the chicken thighs with salt. Set the paella pan over the burner or wood fire—the burner set on high, the wood fire stoked to an impressive blaze. Give the pan a minute or so to heat up, then add the olive oil. Tip the pan to distribute the oil, then immediately start laying in the chicken, skin-side down. Sprinkle with salt. Fry—move the pieces around as necessary to ensure they're not sticking and that they are cooking evenly—until the skin is deeply golden, about 10 minutes. Turn the chicken thighs over (I like to do this with a pair of tongs), and fry until browned and cooked through (juices from a small cut at the thickest part will run clear), 8 to 10 minutes longer. Remove to a rimmed baking sheet and keep warm in a low oven.

Cook the flavorings. Immediately add the onion and chorizo to the pan. Stir (I use a long-handled grilling spatula), breaking up lumps of chorizo, until the chorizo is cooked through and the onion is beginning to brown, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic and stir for a couple of minutes longer. Stir in the tomatoes and poblanos, and cook, stirring nearly constantly, until the mixture is very thick and the oil has separated from it, 7 or 8 minutes.

Start cooking the rice. If using wood, make sure your fire is still stoked to burn very hot. Add the rice to the flavorings, stir to combine, and keep stirring for 4 or 5 minutes, until a good portion of the rice has turned from translucent to milky white. Pour in the broth mixture and set a timer for 12 minutes. Stir once a minute, slowly and thoroughly scraping across the bottom of the pan and moving the rice from edges into the center. At 12 minutes, the rice should have absorbed enough liquid to look like risotto. Check a kernel of rice: it should be getting soft, but still have a tiny bit of chalkiness at the center. If the rice doesn't look or taste ready, let it cook another minute or two.

Add the chicken and shellfish. Working quickly (I usually ask for help from a guest at this point), nestle the chicken thighs into the center of the rice, lay the shrimp in a ring around the chicken and arrange the mussels in the rice around the edge of the pan. Cover the pan with two pieces of heavy duty foil (it's typically 18 inches wide) or with a folded-up tablecloth. Turn the burner to its lowest setting or remove the burning logs from under the paella (but leave the embers). Let stand for 10 minutes to cook the shrimp and mussels and finish cooking the rice.

Serving the paella. Uncover the paella and sprinkle with the peas, parsley, and, if you're using it, the tequila. Using a large serving spoon, gently fluff the mussels and shrimp into the rice mixture. (You can do the same thing with the chicken, but it's more difficult.) You can breathe a sigh of

relief. You're ready to serve.