

Tacos & Tamales

HOUSE-MADE TAMALES MAKE THEIR RETURN TO NEWPORT BEACH COUNTRY CLUB'S TACO TUESDAY.

BY ASHLEY RYAN



Taco Tuesday is a glorified holiday throughout much of Southern California, with local eateries offering these fan favorites at a fraction of their usual cost. But at Newport Beach Country Club, it is a whole lot more than discount tacos.

With a full Mexican buffet in place, members can delight in everything from taco specials to carne asada, handmade tortillas, aguas frescas and fresh churros.

During the holiday season, the lineup also includes tamales—a special dish that quickly became the talk of the town at the

club. “They were a hit, so they’re going to come back again this year,” says Victor Soto, banquet chef at NBCC.

Throughout December, stop by to enjoy Taco Tuesday tamales or learn to make them on your own to enjoy no matter where you are.

A TREASURED TRADITION

Many of us know that tamales are a holiday tradition, but why is that? Well, it’s likely because they’re a lot of work. Typically, families will get together during the holiday season to make them together, lightening the load. But the effort is worth it more often than not.

“In my family, every year, the weekend before Christmas, we get together and make a few hundred tamales,” Soto explains. “It’s a party, honestly. By the end of it, everybody has masa on their hands and clothes, there’s masa-covered shot glasses, an empty bottle or two of tequila—it’s great. And a few hours later, once they’re finally finished cooking, everybody leaves happy and full of tamales, and gets to take a couple of bags home to stash in the freezer until next year.”

To make them, you’ll need fresh corn masa, the same as you would use to make tortillas, but with a finer grind on the corn.



The masa is stuffed, then wrapped up in either a cornhusk or banana leaf and, finally, steamed.

The type of masa used can impact how your tamales turn out. “If your masa isn’t good, then you’re going to have dense, crumbly tamales,” Soto says. “Depending on where you source your masa from and how fresh it is, it might not take very much work. If you’re able to source fresh masa from a local Mexican market, you might not need to do anything at all.”

Soto says that his family adds both lard and salt when kneading the masa, continuing until it can float in a glass of water. This is the labor-intensive part of the process, though he adds that they are able to combat that at NBCC by using a stand mixer in their professional kitchen. “If you’re making smaller batches at home, you can absolutely knead the masa in a kitchenaid mixer,” he notes. “In my family though, we did it by hand. If you have kids, this is the chance to

get them involved.”

Once the kneading is complete, Soto says you spread a layer on the cornhusk, then add a spoon of your filling. Popular options include rajas y queso (chile and cheese), chicken chile verde or beef in salsa roja. “But you can put whatever you dream of,” he adds. They can also be a great dish to prepare for those with special dietary needs, as they can easily be made vegetarian. Sweet varieties with pineapple or strawberries can also be an option.

Finally, after the filling has been added, all that’s left to do is wrap it up and then steam them. As his family created more than 200 at a time, they would steam them for quite a while—sometimes over four hours. A couple dozen, on the other hand, can steam in an hour or two. “To check if they’re done, just pull away at the corn husk,” Soto says. “If the masa is no longer sticking to the cornhusk, they’re cooked. Grab a beer and enjoy; you’ve earned it.”



CHICKEN CHILE VERDE TAMALES

Servings: 24 tamales

- 8 ounces manteca (lard)
- 5 pounds masa
- 5 ½ tablespoon kosher salt
- 2 onions, julienned
- 20 cloves garlic
- 4 jalapenos
- 10 pounds tomatillos
- 2 cups water
- 6 bunches cilantro, trimmed
- 2 quarts shredded chicken

Whip Manteca in a mixer for about 5 minutes until spreadable. Add masa and 1 ½ tablespoon of kosher salt. Mix another 5 minutes on medium speed. Scrape bowl and mix another 5 minutes at medium speed. Finish by whipping for 1 minute at high speed. In a medium pot, saute onions and garlic until translucent to make salsa. Add jalapenos, tomatillos and water. Cover and cook for about 20 minutes until tomatillos are well stewed. Strain out excess water and reserve two cups. Blend vegetables with cilantro until well blended. If too thick to blend, add a splash of cooking water. Sauce shredded chicken with fresh salsa. Set remaining salsa aside to eat with meal. Spread masa on cornhusks, spoon chicken inside, fold and steam for 2 hours.