

Mexican Chiles

General Notes

In general the heat from chiles comes from the seeds and membranes. Remove seeds and membranes to control the heat. (Don't pull the membranes out with your fingers for they have a tendency to tear the chile.) Remember you can always add the heat back in to a dish you are preparing, but it can't be taken out. When handling chiles take care, tales of people who didn't heed such a warning abound with painful eyes and various other sensitive parts of the body touched with chile tainted hands. If you have sensitive skin wear thin surgical gloves so you can still feel your work. Wash your hands after handling; DO NOT RUB YOUR EYES!!

Fresh Chiles

General Rules

Fresh chile salsa cannot be thickened by cooking only salsa made from dried chiles can be thickened by cooking. Control the consistency of fresh chile salsas by limiting the addition of liquid.

In traditional Mexican cooking, with fresh chiles, the following rules generally apply:

- Use only one type of fresh chile per salsa
- Never mix fresh and dried chiles in a salsa
- Never mix salsas on same plate, the exception would be salsa verde can be also made red and you might want both on the same plate.

Roasting Fresh Chiles

The skin of fresh chiles is frequently removed by roasting. Roast over an open flame, use a high heat don't be shy. The secret here is to blacken the skin for easy removal without cooking the chile. Turn once a side has been blacked, until all sides have been charred. Frequent turning will end up cooking the chiles and make for a mushy mess. Place the blackened chile in a plastic bag until it cools enough to handle. Don't leave in the bag for a prolonged time as it will tend to over cook. Remove the chile and rub the blacked skin off with your hands. You then can wash the outside of the chile to remove any other charred bits

Dried Chiles

General Rules

Dried chiles should never be washed, but rubbed with a cloth to remove any dust or dirt.

Unlike fresh chiles, dried chiles can be boiled for extended periods of time. One can cook down a dried chile salsa to thicken.

Do not worry about the skin from dried chiles as the salsas will typically be strained which will remove skin and any seeds and membranes left in for taste while cooking.

In traditional Mexican cooking with dried chiles:

- Never mix fresh and dried chiles in a salsa
- Never mix salsas on same plate

Roasting Dried Chiles

Dried chiles are usually roasted before using to bring out the oils. The traditional pan for roasting is called a comal which is a flat piece of steel, nothing fancy but used daily in a traditional Mexican kitchen. When roasting don't get into a rush, roast one or two at a time constantly turning. Your nose should tell you when it is done. The finished product should be pliable and fragrant. DO NOT BURN. A burned chile will impart a bitter taste much like burned garlic does and should be discarded.

Chiles

Following a list of frequently used fresh and dried Mexican chiles and is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Note that generally when fresh chiles are dried they have a different name.

Fresh Chiles

Name when fresh	Description	Use	Name when dried
Chilaca	Long (approx. 5") mild to medium-hot, deep green chile	Most often used in Western Mexico, especially in the state of Jalisco, for fresh salsas and rajas- marinated or sautéed chile strips, not used much in other regions.	Pasilla,
Jalapeño	Medium length (approx. 3") Medium to hot, deep green chile	One of the most famous and widely-used chiles. Used both fresh and pickled in a wide variety of dishes ranging from salsas to stuffed jalapeños. Fresh jalapeños are frequently canned in a pickling solution called Escabeche.	Chipotle
Poblano	Large and fat, (about 5" long) mild (Some can be hot), dark green, originally cultivated in the state of Puebla,	most famous as a stuffing chile is also used to make chile strips, cream sauces, vegetables, chicken, fish and pasta dishes;	Ancho, Mulatto
Serrano	a very small (only Small (about 1½"-2" long and ¼"-1/2" wide) bright-green chile,	commonly found in even the most basic markets throughout Mexico, it is used in fresh and cooked salsas, as well as several mushroom and egg dishes. Do not deseed, control heat by limiting the amount used.	Serrano Seca.

Dried Chiles

Name	Use	Name when fresh
Ancho	A mild chile, dark reddish-black, a foundation of many salsas, can be soaked and used for chile relleno, use with tomato and onion	Poblano
Chipotle	A mildly hot, smoke-dried jalapeño, it is a common ingredient in cooked salsas and often found in Central Mexico preserved in a brown sugar and vinegar marinade and called chipocludo; canned in seasoned sauce, it is chipotle adobado. Do not use the canned chipotle in salsa as the canned has vinegar added.	Jalapeño
Mirasol Guajillo	Long & Slender, (approx. 4") mild to medium hot. Used in various regions. Make sure you always strain a salsa made with these as the skin is tough and not pleasant.	
Mulato	a nearly black variety of ancho, and often used interchangeably with it, this is one of the requisites for a classic mole poblano. Stronger taste than ancho, will support garlic, cumin, and oregano.	Poblano
Pasilla	Medium hot, is most often used in salsas used with meats and is also required for mole poblano	Chilaca