



## Celebraciones Mexicanas: History, Traditions, and Recipes (Rowman & Littlefield Studies in Food and Gastronomy)

By Andrea Lawson Gray, Adriana Almazan Lahl

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*Celebraciones Mexicanas: History, Traditions, and Recipes* is the first book to bring the richness and authenticity of the foods of Mexico's main holidays and celebrations to the American home cook. This cultural cookbook offers insight into the traditional Mexican holidays that punctuate Mexican life and provides more than 200 original recipes to add to our Mexican food repertoire. The authors first discuss Mexican eating customs and then cover 25 holidays and festivals throughout the year, from the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Carnival, Cinco de Mayo, to the Day of the Revolution, with family celebrations for rites of passage, too. Each holiday/festival includes historical background and cultural and food information. The lavishly illustrated book is appropriate for those seeking basic knowledge of Mexican cooking and customs as well as aficionados of Mexican cuisine.

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**Celebraciones Mexicanas: History, Traditions, and Recipes (Rowman & Littlefield Studies in Food and Gastronomy)** By Andrea Lawson Gray, Adriana Almazan Lahl Bibliography

- Rank: #2110648 in Books
- Published on: 2013-09-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.38" h x 1.20" w x 7.31" l, 2.63 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 412 pages



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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

I'm going to be honest with you that the first thing that comes to mind when you say Mexican food to me is carne asada burrito. Blame the fact that I live in the Mission district of San Francisco where you can't go a block without passing two or three tacquerias. But *Celebraciones Mexicanas* by Andrea Lawson Gray and Adriana Almazan Lahl clearly shows that Mexican cuisine goes way beyond the burrito and taco (both of which, I actually DO know is not really common Mexican food. I'm not THAT ignorant). With chapters on various Mexican holidays as well as the history of the food and recipes, this book is a fascinating exploration of the culinary culture that is oft overlooked by most people (like myself). Sopa de Tortilla (Tortilla Soup), Tamales de Frijos (Bean Tamalas) and Buñuelos con miel de Piloncillo (Street Fritters with Piloncillo syrup) all sounds like things that I can't wait to make at home. And yes, there's even a recipe for how to make my Carne Asada. (*Eat the Love*)

To talk about Mexican food is to look well beyond what is actually prepared and consumed to what can be described as "a way of life on plate." It means embracing cultural practices and shared knowledge that are the common root of Mexico's gastronomy, extensive and diverse, passed along from generation to generation without recipes but through practice alone. *Celebraciones Mexicanas* disseminates these practices, traditions, and recipes and in doing so makes an important contribution to traditions of the great nation that is Mexico. (Enrique Farjeat, assessor, Conservatory of Mexican Gastronomy; representative to UNESCO's recognition ceremony honoring the addition of Mexican Cuisine to the list of Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity)

*Celebraciones Mexicanas* leads us to rich, human stories of Mexico, as well as extensive recipes and cultural explanations. The zestful recipes project Mexican food and festivals throughout the history and flavors of Mexican cuisine. Gray and Lahl present their comprehensive research in vibrant reading and cooking style. The writers present past Mexican rituals and rites, weaving the legacies with today's table. It is difficult to imagine a more complete collection of information on the present and past of Mexican cuisine. (Antonia Allegra, professional career and writing coach)

Adriana and Andrea have done a masterful job sharing the celebrations of Mexico with their words and recipes. They delve deeply into the rich history, customs and culture that will make you not only want to take this book to bed as bedtime reading but also you'll want to keep it in your kitchen library and cook up some of the fantastic recipes they share. Books like this one are rare today! This is a must for anyone who loves food, culture, history, cooking and Mexico! (Joanne Weir, James Beard Award-winning cookbook author; television food personality; restaurateur and Executive Chef, Copita Tequileria y Comida)

Every society has special dishes to celebrate important occasions, but festival foods are particularly important to Mexican identity. This splendid cookbook guides readers through the highlights of Mexican history and includes recipes for recreating banquets from the past. (Jeffrey M. Pilcher, author of *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food*)

I like to think I have an educated impression of Mexico but reading *Celebraciones Mexicanas* makes it clear how much I didn't know before I read the book. You can use it as a reference piece, but if you're like me, you'll want to read every word from the beginning and not miss one delicious detail. Both the fiesta and the food are put into context and I get the feeling this will become a treasured family heirloom for those who

remember and for those who want to start celebrating a la Mexicana. (Steve Sando, founder, Rancho Gordo New World Specialty Food; co-author of "Heirloom Beans: Great for Dips and Spreads, Soups and Stews, Salads and Salsas, and Much More")

Andrea Gray and Adriana Lahl have a winner in this charmingly beautiful cookbook that focuses on the food of Mexico's festivals. As well as recipes, there is abundant material about history and folklore, much of it highly visual and appealing to children – it's a perfect family gift. Professional cooks as well as writers, Gray and Lahl know their way around the Mexican kitchen. It's a labor-intensive cuisine, and the streamlining here is as intelligent as any I have ever seen – no false notes, some truly helpful simplifications. If you want the best ever recipe for Nogada Sauce, one of the signature paradisaical items in *Like Water for Chocolate*, buy the book and turn to page 257. (Elatia Harris, founder, Tessa's Table 2050 and food sustainability activist)

From the Author

**This is** an exciting time for Mexican cuisine--in the United States, in Mexico, and internationally. Many think that Mexican culinary arts are well on the way to taking a legitimate place next to those of Italian and French cooking as an integral part of an accomplished chef's culinary toolbox, no longer relegated to the "ethnic cuisine" compartment. Cooking techniques, ingredients, and complex flavor profiles that have been refined and preserved, some for over five hundred years, merit this elevation.

In fact, in 2010 UNESCO awarded Mexico the organization's first-ever recognition of a gastronomic tradition as a world cultural treasure, inscribed on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity alongside such marvels as the Taj Majal and the Summer Palace in Beijing. In doing so, the UNESCO committee noted on its website that Mexico takes great care to safeguard its culinary arts, acknowledging that they are "central to the cultural identity of the communities that practice and transmit [them] from generation to generation":

- "Traditional Mexican cuisine is a comprehensive cultural model comprising farming, ritual practices, age-old skills, culinary techniques and ancestral community customs and manners. It is made possible by collective participation in the entire traditional food chain: from planting and harvesting to cooking and eating . . . and singular utensils including grinding stones and stone mortars. . . . Mexican cuisine is elaborate and symbol-laden, with everyday tortillas and tamales, both made of corn, forming an integral part of Day of the Dead offerings. Collectives of female cooks and other practitioners devoted to raising crops and traditional cuisine are found . . . across Mexico. Their knowledge and techniques express community identity, reinforce social bonds, and build stronger local, regional and national identities."

This truly speaks to the ancient and modern marvel that is Mexican gastronomy. Rather than being lost and rediscovered, like so many ancient treasures, it has been and is a living, evolving cultural legacy, one that has been passed from generation to generation, for centuries. Many cooking techniques and recipes have been preserved since the pre-Columbian era and are still in use.

### **Fiestas and the Rhythm of Mexican Life**

Life in Mexico is marked by its fiestas more than anything else, living remembrances of past and sometimes even ancient events. Octavio Paz, the Nobel Laureate Mexican poet, interprets the place of these celebrations in Mexican culture this way:

- "The fiesta is by nature sacred, literally or figuratively, and above all is the advent of the unusual. . . . It all occurs in an enchanted world: time is transformed to a mythical past or total present; space, the scene of the fiesta, is turned into a gaily decorated world of its own; and the persons taking part cast off all human or social rank and become, for the moment, living images. And everything takes place as if it were not so, as

if it were a dream. . . . Fiestas are our only luxury."

When the fiesta ends, Paz maintains, there is a kind of rebirth, a reinvigoration, which leaves the participants ready to get back to work, to conform to the normal predictable pace of daily life.

If the fiesta is the heart of the Mexican community, food is the heart of the fiesta. Food has played an important role in the fiesta system since the pre-Hispanic era. The Aztecs, for example, followed religious dictates around which foods could be eaten and by whom (some foods, like chocolate, were reserved for rulers and the elite) and which were to be offered to the gods.

This focus on food and cooking continues to permeate the Mexican culture, especially around festivals. When asked recently about the importance of cooking, the women of Ocotepc in central Mexico "clearly [thought] this a strange questions and respond[ed] categorically, 'If no one cooks there is no fiesta.'"

The recipes in this book are organized by menu by fiesta. While some may choose to produce an entire menu for a specific occasion, we realize that others may want to use the book in a more traditional manner. Therefore, all recipes are also listed in the "Index of Recipes by Course"(Appetizer, Salad, Entrée, etc.).

At the beginning of the book, there is a list of "Common Mexican Cooking Tools and Techniques", which are referred to in some of the recipes, for example, how to dry-roast and sweat chiles to remove their skins. This is designed as a reference but is also a good place to start to immerse yourself in cooking *a la Mexicana*. In the same list, you'll find some Mexican kitchen tools that are in every Mexican kitchen. Most are easily accessible (see our "Ingredient and Cooking Ware Sources Online" section if you cannot find them locally) and inexpensive. While there are modern substitutes for most, if not all of these implements, there is a certain joy in cooking with the same tools that have been in Mexico for over five hundred years.

We have also provided a list of "Basic Recipes for Mexican Cooking", such as chicken stock, tomato purée, and tortilla and tamale dough (*masa*). Some will be familiar to the experienced cook and others perhaps less so. Generally, these are recipes for stocks and sauces that you can prepare in advance and freeze so as to have them on hand as needed. While we realize that time does not always allow for home preparation of every ingredient, as traditional cooking in Mexico precludes ready-made soup stocks or tomato purée in a can, we have written the book with this approach, providing recipes for many items that can also be store bought. In many cases, the quantity called for in a given recipe is half of what comes out of the "Basic Recipes for Mexican Cooking" ingredients and instructions, so as to

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#### About the Author

**Andrea Lawson Gray** owns San Francisco-based Tres Señoritas Gourmet, a caterer specializing in authentic Mexican cuisine. **Adriana Almazan Lahl**, a native of Mexico City, attended culinary school in Mexico and Cordon Bleu and is the proprietor of Sal de Vida Gourmet. She also teaches Mexican cooking in the San Francisco area.

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**William Nix:**

This book untitled *Celebraciones Mexicanas: History, Traditions, and Recipes* (Rowman & Littlefield Studies in Food and Gastronomy) to be one of several books this best seller in this year, here is because when you read this publication you can get a lot of benefit on it. You will easily to buy this kind of book in the book retail outlet or you can order it by way of online. The publisher on this book sells the e-book too. It makes you easier to read this book, as you can read this book in your Cell phone. So there is no reason to your account to past this reserve from your list.

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