

Pasteles

(Puerto Rican savory cakes in banana leaves)

Makes about 12 to 15 pasteles, enough for 6 to 8 people

Remember to ask an adult to help you with this recipe.

Masa (dough)

- Green bananas, peeled and chopped -- 5
- Green plantain, peeled and chopped -- 1
- *Yautía* (taro root), peeled and chopped -- 1 1/2 pounds
- *Calabasa* (tropical pumpkin) ---1/2 pound
- Russet potato, peeled and chopped -- 1
- Salt -- to taste

Filling

- Onion, chopped -- 1
- Green pepper, seeded and chopped -- 1
- Garlic, peeled and chopped -- 3 to 4 cloves
- Oil -- 2 to 3 tablespoons
- Pork butt or shoulder--2 pounds
- Tomato sauce -- 1 cup (optional)
- Water -- 1/2 cup
- Cilantro, chopped -- 1/2 bunch
- Oregano, dried -- 2 teaspoons
- Salt and pepper -- to taste

For Assembly

- Banana leaves, hard spine removed and cut into 6x6-inch squares -- 15 pieces
- Parchment paper, cut into 12x6-inch rectangles -- 15 pieces
- Kitchen string --15 (20-inch long) pieces and 30 (10-inch long) pieces
- *Achiote* or vegetable oil -- 1/4 cup

Method

La Masa

1. Chop and peel the bananas, plantain, *yautía*, *calabasa*, and potato.
2. Grate all the ingredients by hand into a large bowl.

La Carne and La Salsa

(note: this method combines la carne and la salsa to simplify the preparation)

1. Cut the onion, pepper and chop garlic finely.
2. Cut the pork into small cubes

3. Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium flame. Add the onion-pepper mixture and sauté for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the rest of the filling ingredients and simmer over medium-low heat for 20 minutes. Remove from heat, adjust seasoning and allow to cool.

Assembly

1. Get the *masa*, the pork filling and all of your assembly ingredients together in a workspace. Lay out a piece of parchment paper, then center a piece of banana leaf over it. Wipe the banana leaf dry and then brush the top side with *achiote* or vegetable oil.
2. Scoop up 1/2 cup of the *masa* and place in the middle of the banana leaf. Spread evenly over the leaf, leaving a 1-inch border around the edges. Place 2 to 3 tablespoons of pork filling, *la carne*, in the middle of the *masa*.
3. Fold the top edge down over the filling. Bring the bottom edge up over this. Then fold in both sides to make rectangular packages. Be careful not to wrap it too tightly or the filling will squeeze out. Flip the package over on the parchment so it is seam side down.
4. Fold the bottom of the parchment up over the wrapped package. Fold in each side, then roll up, burrito-like, to complete the package. Tie one of the 20-inch pieces of string around the *pasteles* lengthwise and then three 10-inch pieces across the short side.
5. Bring a large pot of well salted water to boil on the stove. Drop in the prepared *pasteles* and boil gently for 1 to 1 1/2 hours.
6. Remove from the water with tongs, remove the outer parchment and serve the *pasteles* with or without their banana leaf wrapping. Goes well with *arroz con gandules*.

Variations

- The recipe above is a basic *pasteles* filling. Additional items are often added to the filling when the *pasteles* are wrapped. Add 5 or 6 capers and 1 pimento-stuffed olive to the filling of each *pastel*. Or add 5-6 cooked garbanzos.
- *Pasteles* can be made without the banana leaf.
- Stir a little of the sauce from the filling into the *masa* to give it extra flavor.
- Substitute yuca (cassava root) for the *yautía*.
- If you want to avoid all the string tying, use aluminum foil to wrap up the *pasteles* instead of parchment paper.
- Wrapped, uncooked *pasteles* freeze well for later use. Cook them directly from the frozen state.