

CHORIZO: THE FAMOUS MEXICAN SAUSAGE

... anyone who has seen the grubby [pigs] from the Hot Lands—put together with monstrous long snouts and frightful fangs, thin, lumbering, with dry, acrid meat—and who has also contemplated the pigs that are raised in Toluca—snub-nosed, fat, handsome—will understand why the good chorizo and the good carnititas can only be eaten [there].

—ALFONSO SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA, Toluca de chorizo [author's translation]

It is certainly like no other sausage: fragrant with herbs and spices, rich and tender with deep-red chile, and pleasantly sharp with a touch of vinegar. It hangs in undulating strings all over Toluca (like waves of the Nile, says Sr. Sánchez García)—in the butchers' counters that border one of the big market buildings and in the beautifully packed taco stalls a few buildings over. And it's in the little downtown stores that sell Tolucan treasures like fresh *asadero* cheese (flavored with *epazote* and *chile manzano*), jars of colorful pickled vegetables, and bottles of orange-flavored liqueur called *moscos*. Strings of *chorizos*: red with dried peppers and uniquely green with *tomatillos*, fresh coriander and hot chiles—either of them textured with peanuts, almonds, raisins or pine nuts.

Of course, Toluca doesn't have a corner on *chorizo* or *longaniza* (as a cheaper, often untied brother is called). The little Oaxacan sausages, tied in 1½-inch rounds, are deliciously sweet and spicy. The Yucatecan sticks of *longaniza* from Valladolid are smoky and closer in appearance to pepperoni. And Chiapas has a stunning array of nearly unacculturated smoked and fresh Spanish-style meats, from *butifarra* sausage to good hams. Those are the highlights; lesser sausage specialties string on and on.

But none of those other specialties compares with the proudly nationalistic *chorizo*. Sr. Sánchez García swells up with the refrain:

And what is it that Toluca—the Mexican ground—added to the Spanish chorizo to produce the non plus ultra of chorizos? The answer is in the flavor, undoubtedly . . .

First: the flavor of the corn that the luminous Tolucan valley produces, filtered, by natural alchemy, [through] to the meat of our pigs.

Second: the flavor of the exciting, sweet, sour, dried red chile that . . . [is] the essence of mole with turkey.

Third: the flavors and aromas of the herbs, . . . chosen and united in the Mexican ways; the touch of strong coriander seeds, the freshness of ginger and, above all else, the careful process, the observance of certain rules, the little details of seasoning, etc., that constitute the artistic contribution of the Tolucan pork butchers to the singularity of their chorizo. [author's translation]

TOLUCAN CHILE- FLAVORED SAUSAGE

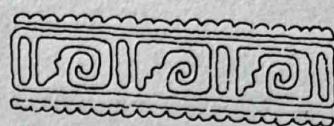
Chorizo Toluqueño

Chorizo sits prominently on the mixed-grill combination plates in places known for charcoal fires; other places it gets scrambled invitingly into fresh eggs (page 116), or browned with crispy potatoes (page 134). One of my favorites, though, is *chorizo* on a plate of good melted cheese (page 82), with a stack of fresh-baked flour tortillas to roll it all in.

The *chorizo* recipe that follows, for the deliciously flavored Toluca variety, is based on one in Velázquez de León's *Platillos regionales de la República Mexicana*.

YIELD: about 1½ pounds fresh sausage; about 1 pound after air-drying for 36 hours

- ⅓ pound pork fat, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 2 medium (about 1 ounce total) dried *chiles anchos*, stemmed, seeded and deveined
- 2 medium (about ⅔ ounce total) dried *chiles pasillas*, stemmed, seeded and deveined
- A generous ¼ teaspoon coriander seeds (or about ¼ teaspoon ground)
- ½ inch cinnamon stick (or about ½ teaspoon ground)
- ⅛ teaspoon cloves (or a generous ⅛ teaspoon ground)
- ¾ teaspoon dried oregano
- A generous ¼ teaspoon black peppercorns (or about ⅓ teaspoon ground)
- ⅛ teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
- ⅛ teaspoon ground ginger
- 2 tablespoons good-quality paprika
- 1 generous teaspoon salt
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and finely minced
- ⅓ cup cider vinegar
- 8 ounces lean, boneless pork loin, cut into 1-inch cubes and chilled
- 8 ounces lean, boneless pork shoulder, cut into 1-inch cubes and chilled
- 4 to 5 feet of hog casings in 1 or 2 pieces, for stuffing the sausage (optional)



COOK'S NOTES

Techniques

Aging and Drying: The overnight refrigeration is simply to blend the flavors; at the end of it, the sausage is usable, though the texture will be crumbly because of the high moisture content. Aging the sausage produces a firm, compact texture and mellower flavor.

An Alternative Unstuffed, Refrigerated Aging: Without a sausage stuffer, place the sausage in a colander, set in a bowl, cover and refrigerate for 2 days. Excess liquid will drip off or evaporate and the flavors will improve.

Ingredients

The Chiles: *Anchos* are essential; if *pasillas* aren't available, replace them with an extra *ancho*.

Hog Casing: Many grocery stores make their own sausage and will sell you casings, usually salt-packed in 1-pound containers. They keep at least 6 months, refrigerated.

Equipment

Meat Grinder and Sausage

Stuffer: I use the commonly available Kitchen Aid meat grinder and sausage stuffer that fits on the heavy-duty mixer. Any meat grinder will work, and you can get some of them with sausage-stuffing attachments. Without a meat grinder, I'd use a food processor for grinding and opt for the refrigerated aging.

1. *The pork fat.* Place the pork fat in the freezer (to firm it for easy chopping) while preparing the seasonings.

2. *The chiles and other seasonings.* Set a griddle or heavy skillet over medium heat, then tear the chiles into large flat pieces. A few at a time, lay the chiles on the hot surface, press them down with a metal spatula until they blister and change color, flip them over and press down to toast the other side. Cool until crisp, then crumble them into a spice grinder (or blender fitted with the miniblend container). Measure in the coriander seeds, cinnamon stick, cloves, oregano and black peppercorns, and pulverize. Sift through a medium-mesh sieve into a large bowl, add the nutmeg, ginger, paprika and salt, then stir in the garlic and vinegar.

3. *Grinding and flavoring the meat.* Set up a meat grinder fitted with the coarse grinding plate. Mix together the pork loin, shoulder and fat, then run through the grinder and into the bowl with the seasonings. Mix the meat and seasonings thoroughly, cover and refrigerate overnight. (Before using or stuffing the sausage, fry a little, taste it, then add more salt, if necessary.)

4. *Optional stuffing and aging.* If the casings were packed in salt, soak for an hour before stuffing. According to manufacturer's directions, set up the meat grinder with the funnellike sausage-stuffing attachment.

Rinse the casings, then check each piece for leaks by running water through it; either cut the casing where there are leaks or discard the piece. (To be useful, a casing should be at least 30 inches long, with no leaks.)

Thread 1 piece of casing over the sausage-stuffing attachment, leaving a 3-inch overhang. Begin feeding the sausage through: When it comes through the end of the attachment, clamp off the casing so that the sausage collects and stretches the casing to a 1-inch diameter; if there is an air bubble, stop the machine and work it out. Feeding the sausage through the grinder in an uninterrupted flow, slowly move the casing away from the stuffer as the sausage fills out a continuous 1-inch diameter link. When the sausage is about 6 inches long, pull off an extra inch of casing and squeeze through the meat, completing one link and starting another. Continue until all of the sausage meat has been cased, stopping to thread on more casing as necessary.

Stuffing chorizo sausage into casing



Timing and Advance Preparation

Start at least 24 hours (preferably 3 days) ahead and allow about 45 minutes to make the sausage, then 30 to 45 minutes to stuff it. Wrapped and refrigerated, the sausage will keep for a week or so.

TRADITIONAL VARIATIONS

Tolucan Chorizo with Nuts and Raisins: Prepare the sausage as directed; before stuffing, stir in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup each raisins, toasted almonds (coarsely chopped) and toasted peanuts or pine nuts.

Chorizo with Spirits: Josefina Velázquez de León, in her 1946 edition of *Salchichonería casera* recommends adding 2 tablespoons grain alcohol (you could use vodka, though it's not as strong). It has a nice effect on the meat and adds another bit of preservative; with this addition of liquid, the sausage must be air-dried.

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Either twist the links several times to separate them or tie pieces of string between them. Hang in a cool, dry, airy place for about 36 hours or until dry to the touch and somewhat firm. Set a dish underneath to catch drips.

Wrap in plastic and refrigerate until ready to use.

