



GIRL MEETS FIRE

# BASICS OF PUERTO RICAN COOKING

*A guide to some of our foundational Puerto Rican recipes  
and some of our favorite ingredients*

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## ABOUT ME



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Wepa mi gente!!!

First and foremost, I want to thank you for downloading this ebook and allowing me to be with you in your kitchen and grocery store.

If you are new to my blog, let me give you a quick introduction to myself. I was born and raised in Puerto Rico until 15, when we moved to the United States. At the age of 24 or 25, I decided to go to culinary school, where it seemed the whole world opened to me through food. But I have felt torn because I never dived deep into my own culture.

Since then I have been in a quest to learn more about my traditions, culture, and roots, I dedicate this ebook to all Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, looking for ways to preserve and understand who we are and where we come from. Enjoy!

*Let's get cooking!*





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# RECIPES FOR FLAVOR



## RECIPES FOR FLAVOR

I decided to divide this into three sections. This is the first section, Recipes for Flavor. In this section, I am concentrating on three basic recipes that we use on a daily basis in Puerto Rico; Sofrito, Adobo, and Achiote Oil.

These are recipes we use to season and give color to all the foods we prepare. Sofrito is added to 90% of all things cooked in the island. I, for one even add it to my pasta dishes. Sofrito is our version of the French Mirepoix (carrots, celery, and onions), or Louisiana's Holy trinity (onions, peppers, and celery)

### **Section numero Dos**

The second section is dedicated to traditional sauces. These sauces are used as garnish for meats and vegetables, or as dipping sauces

Many traditional dishes are made with the use of these sauces, and I think that knowing them as they are and not as an accompaniment to a fish or vegetable will help you and your creative

### **Section three**

In the third section I focus on each individual ingredients. I cannot possibly cover all the ingredients we use in Puerto Rico but rather the ingredients widely used for our day-to-day cooking and for the recipes covered in this book.

When I first started writing this book I came up with a list of ingredients that was so long (and which I am still adding items to) that I felt I needed to trim and focus on the most essential.

Writing this book has actually been such a great experience, and I am already working on ideas for my second book. I hope to incorporate other ingredients into that book and to cover the beautiful and delicious array of foods we consume in Puerto Rico.

### **What will you find in this book**

You will find a candid look at the original recipes that have shaped Puerto Rican cooking through the years. A "Back to the Roots" approach to Puerto Rican cooking

### **What you will not find in this book**

Name brand products like Sazón and Goya or the likes. I have nothing against them and I buy Goya products. But there is something I learned while I attended culinary school, and that was to know my ingredients. I want to teach you about the ingredients that make up the "Ready Made" products easily available at the supermarket.

I invite you to take a moment to see and taste the difference between freshly made adobo or sofrito and learn how easy these recipes are. To take this book and make your own signature sofrito and adobo. To create a new tradition. I invite you to share your knowledge with your family and your children. And to create a bond that transcends generations, like it has for my people from Puerto Rico.

# RECIPES FOR FLAVOR



## SOFRITO

Have you ever eaten out of your local bodega or lechonera (pork roasters) or even been treated to eat something your Puerto Rican friend or coworker made? Have you wondered, "wow, this tastes amazing! I want to make it at home." So you ask your friend or coworker, how did they make this dish? To which they respond with "A little bit of this, a little bit of that, some sofrito, and cook it until it's done." My friend, if you ever have gone home and tried a recipe your Puerto Rican friend gave you without adding sofrito, your recipe will never taste as good.

Sofrito is the not-so-secret Puerto Rican secret ingredient to great cooking. Sofrito is almost always present in a compound like the one pictured above or listed ingredients within the recipe. Like a mirepoix in French cuisine or a trinity in Creole, sofrito is the flavoring agent that ties together all the dishes.

### What is sofrito?

Sofrito is a blended combination of key ingredients to give your food a signature Puerto Rican flavor.

At its most basic, it is a mix of onions, garlic, peppers, sweet peppers, chiles, culantro, salt, pepper, vinegar (or lemon juice), and oil. Other ingredients commonly found in sofrito include; ham, salt pork, cilantro, parsley, oregano, cumin, coriander, paprika, and saffron. The individual taste of the person making it means that not all sofrito taste the same. This is where it becomes your signature blend.

### How to use sofrito

There are many ways to use sofrito. Add sofrito to sauces, stewed beans, rice pilaf, soups, and stews in the middle of the cooking process. Or use sofrito as a seasoning agent, as a marinade. I have used it on chicken, shrimp, pork, and fish with excellent results. To turn it into a marinade for lighter meats, I will add a liquid, i.e., bitter orange, lemon, or regular orange juice.



## **SOFRITO** *continued*

### **Some ingredients to know**

CULANTRO. Nope, that is NOT a typo. Culantro is a much deeper flavored cousin of cilantro. The leaves are long and saw-shaped. I have replaced culantro with cilantro before. But, keep in mind that cilantro has a much sweeter taste than culantro. So, it is not an exact replacement, more like a 1 part culantro for two parts cilantro. Also, both herbs are in the genus of coriander. I like adding coriander to my sofrito, so that is three different uses for a similar herb.

Coriander seeds tend to have a flowery smell mixed with pepper but without the heat. At the same time, the seeds do not taste the same as cilantro or culantro. I live in Florida, where about 23% Hispanic population is, so I have easy access to typical Puerto Rican ingredients. If you cannot find a culantro where you live, no sweat, use cilantro instead, and maybe add a dash of coriander to round up the flavors.

For my sofrito, I like to blend parsley, cilantro, and culantro. I also added dried oregano, coriander, and cumin. So, in other words, I am using the entirety of both plants, stems, leaves, and seeds. I point this out because there are different flavors to different parts of the plant. The leaves tend to have a fresher taste. The stems have a more pronounced flavor, and seeds have a different flavor profile altogether. Mixing these flavors is what gives your dish depth.

### **Cubanelle Peppers**

Cubanelle pepper has a healthy mix of spice and sweetness. Long and skinny, the cubanelle pepper has thinner skin than the bell pepper. It reminds me of the Pepperoncini, but bigger and longer. The pungency/spiciness of this pepper is relatively mild but present. The smell of the cubanelle tends to also be in the sweeter end. I do not care much for bell peppers, and neither does my husband. So, I have been cooking without bell peppers for the last few years, and I do not miss them.

But I do enjoy the cubanelle in this recipe. When green, cubanelle is not as dark as green bell peppers. They tend to have a slightly more yellow tone but ripen to a beautiful bright red.

### **Chilli Peppers**

This sofrito recipe is mild. Other than cubanelle, raw garlic, and peppercorns, there are no other "spicy" ingredients. Why? Because I like to have a soft base to build flavor. Also, Puerto Rican food is not necessarily spicy, as much as it is flavorful. BUT, if you want to make your sofrito hot, please do so. After all, it's YOUR flavor signature. Here are a few options to add to the sofrito to spice things up. Note of advice, the longer you cook some chili peppers, the hotter they get. Red Crushed Pepper. If you want to use crushed red pepper, add this ingredient last and blend all the ingredients.

Jalapeños. Rating 2,500 to 8,000 Scoville units, it blends well with this mixture. The thicker skin makes it quite substantial for this preparation. Remember to remove all seeds and membranes before blending.

Aji. We have super tiny peppers that grow native to the island. They are called Aji Caballeros

### **Tocino or Salted Pork**

In Puerto Rico today, we are still eating many of the same foods that were introduced by either the Spanish colonizers, African slaves, or the native Taino Indians. However, we do not recognize their nature or understand the reasons why we use these ingredients. For example, salting meats to preserve them is an old process due to the lack of refrigeration. It's the same with smoking meats. But both of these processes of curation and preservation add a unique flavor to the food that is used along with the processed ingredient.

Salted pork is one of the ingredients we still hold dear in Puerto Rican cuisine—Tocino, also known as salt pork. If you cannot find it at your local supermarket, look for it at a Latin market or bodega.

## **SOFRITO** *continued*

What I see at my supermarket is a much thicker cut of bacon labeled salt pork. Salt porks are part of the bacon-belly area of the pork, but what Puerto Ricans consider salt pork looks like the picture below.

### **Peppercorns**

I am not saying you cannot use ground black pepper. However, if you do not have peppercorns, then use ground pepper. The whole peppercorn will grind unevenly, giving the sofrito different flavor notes, some subtle, some strong. I use a peppercorn mix of black, white, green, and pink to create taste subtly.

### **Why make your own Sofrito?**

Easy. CONTROL OF INGREDIENTS AND PERSONAL TASTE. Since the convenience of all ready-made food are continuously available at supermarkets, specialty stores, and online, we have grown accustomed to these products and not exploring our tastes. We have all heard the arguments against preservatives and added sugars and salts. As consumers, we keep looking for less fat, low sodium, less added sugar, fewer preservatives. The best answer to these concerns is to make your product at home. Some people feel that making your sauces, condiments, soups, bread, and you name it, is more work than it is worth. And at times, it could be more work than expected, especially in this day and age of 24/7, always on the go society. But, the thing is, as much as COVID has put a damper on the way we live, work, and gather, it has allowed us to take a deeper look at what is essential and given us time to get back to lost traditions.

### **Build on generational traditions**

Have you ever noticed the brand names on some of the products out there? Most of the names are a surname, or the name of someone's mother, or the person/restaurant that created it.

Before this technology of mass-producing pantry items began, our mothers taught us how to make a special sauce taught to her by her mother, whom her mother's mother taught. Generational recipes with secret ingredients were passed to the next generation at a certain age. Learning these recipes was a rite of passage. Now, all we do to make a marinara is go to the store and buy a jar. This is another topic I could go on and on with, and perhaps it too will have its post.

The point is, creating your products lends to the opportunity to make any recipe your own and for you to establish your flavor signature to your cooking. This also opens the possibility for you to be known for making "X-recipe" and maybe be able to pass "X-recipe" to the next generation. Although my sons enjoy being in the kitchen, I do not have daughters I can teach how to cook, so I teach them a few things. I hope to revive the idea of making our products from scratch and honing the recipes to be passed on. This is a way to keep people's memories and experiences alive.—something you cannot buy at the store.





### **A Note on the origins of Sofrito**

Below I have written a traditional sofrito recipe with salt pork and ham. I do not use this recipe. Instead, I puree the uncooked vegetables and make my sofrito without meat. When I am cooking, I will use the ham or salt pork, depending on the recipe, and then add a tablespoon or two of my raw sofrito just as I render the fat for my recipe.

Why do I do it this way? Because I like to keep certain dishes vegetarian at times. I don't necessarily want the bacon to flavor everything all the time. Doing it this way gives me more flexibility.

Heat a sauté pan or iron skillet and add the salt pork and ham to make the traditional sofrito. Allow the pork to render some fat and become translucent, then add onions and peppers. Cook, stirring occasionally until the vegetables become soft and translucent. Next, add garlic, herbs, salt, and pepper.

Stir continuously, until all ingredients are cooked through. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool. Once cooled, place in an air-tight container like a mason jar and store in the refrigerator for up to a month.

### **For Traditional Sofrito:**

- one ounce salt pork
- two ounces lean cured ham
- one tablespoon lard or vegetable oil
- 1/2 teaspoon whole dried orégano
- 1 onion, peeled and fine dice
- 1 green pepper, seeded, and fine diced
- 3 sweet chili peppers, seeded, and fine diced
- 3 fresh culantro leaves, fine chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste

# Sofrito

Prep Time 15 minutes Total time 15 minutes  
Yield: 20 ounce  
Category: Condiment  
Method: Puree  
Cuisine: Puerto Rican  
Serving Size: 1 tablespoon  
Calories: 14

## INGREDIENTS

- 3 ounces peeled garlic
- 2 teaspoons dried orégano
- 1 onion, peeled, and large diced
- 3 cubanelle peppers
- 1 bunch parsley
- 1 bunch cilantro
- 4 fresh culantro leaves
- 1 teaspoon peppercorn
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1/4 olive oil

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place all ingredients in a blender and puree for about 30 seconds
2. Place content in an air tight container and refrigerate for up to a month





# RECIPES FOR FLAVOR



## ADOBO

This amazing blend has evolved with time into a powder combination that could be used for literally anything. Today, we will cover all aspects of adobo, from its beginning to our modern use. I will also give you a recipe to combine your own powder blend if you so desire. Let's begin!

### What is Adobo

At its most basic form adobo is a blend of garlic, salt, black pepper, oregano and olive oil. Optional to add an acid like vinegar, lemon, or bitter orange juice. Adobo is used to season meats, poultry, pork, and fish.

### Is adobo a powder?

If you were to walk down the baking aisle in the grocery store you will find the collection of spices towards the end of the aisle. Most likely there will be a small section of spices dedicated to the latin community. You could also find adobo at the International foods aisle in the supermarket. Goya and Badia are two of the most popular latin brands. These powdered adobos come in different combinations like; regular, without pepper, or without cumin.

The ease of use of powdered adobo has made them quite popular, as well as available to use with all types of cooking. When I was a child we used adobo in lieu of any other seasoning. Besides seasoning meats, we also used it in eggs, rice, pastas, sauces, you name it. The go to seasoning mix, was and still is in many Puerto Rican homes, adobo.

### Why I like to use a garlic paste form of adobo and not a powder?

My personal goal is to reconnect with my Puerto Rican roots. Before the convenience of powdered adobo, ingredients such as garlic, peppercorns, salt, vinegar, and oil were ground in a pestle and mortar.

I remember my mother telling me stories about her grandmother cooking in the kitchen. How her grandmother would pound the garlic, peppercorns, and salt in a large pestle and mortar to make a paste that she would rub onto the meat to marinate.

## **ADOBO** *continued*

When I went to culinary school the basic way to season meats was with salt, ground pepper, and minced garlic, pretty much the basic ingredients for adobo. Not knowing or realizing what I was learning at the culinary arts school, I cooked for my mother one day. And with a smile brought by reminiscing of childhood days, my mother said, "You took me back to my childhood. You took me back to her." And for a little while, I was connected with my great grandmother whom I never met.

### **There is versatility in a paste**

When you are making your own adobo, whether it is powder or paste, you have more control of the ingredients you are utilizing, and our first point on versatility, control in what we put in our foods and on our plates.

The beauty of the paste is the addition of the acid. I guess you could blend lemon juice or vinegar to the powder form to make a paste, but there is a little bit of magic that happens when fresh ingredients intermingle with each other. Rendering their flavors and mixing them together creating a depth and layers of flavor in the final product.

Rabbit Hole Alert!! I know I talk about this depth of flavor often, but I really want you to understand, the experience of eating something is heighten by the process the food was cooked and how it was seasoned. There is nothing more disappointing than eating a dish that's bland. Adequately seasoning your dishes is how you take your cooking to the next level. Seasoning in and of itself, is just as stellar as the dish you are eating.

### **Versatility point #2**

It is the base for a marinade. Many countries forged from Spanish colonization share similar, almost identical, cultures.

This is expressed in the arts, music, language, and of course cooking. The only factor that's different is the natives of the countries that were colonized, the addition of slaves (like in the Caribbean), and the country's native resources, these elements create each country's unique flavor profile. Adobo is not, by any means, only Puerto Rican. In Mexico, adobo includes dried smoked chili peppers and orange juice, the Philippines, it includes ingredients like coconut milk, soy sauce, and green chiles. But the application is the same.

### **Versatility point #3;**

Adobo tenderizes the meat. The whole point of tenderizing anything is that it begin a small amount of breakdown, which helps with digestion, and to make some tougher cuts of meat more palatable. The salt and acidity in adobo do just that. I try to season my meats well before I am about to cook them, especially larger cuts of meat like roasts. Finer cuts like steaks and chops, which tend to be a bit more leaner, I would season a bit more sparingly.

### **There is still beauty in the powder adobo**

Do not get me wrong, I still use powdered adobo. It is after all a great season-anything blend. Sometimes I create my own, sometimes I buy it already made. In the event you would like to make your own spice blend here is a recipe. Although, buying the already blended adobo might be cheaper, you do get a better product if you make it yourself, only by knowing the quantities of the ingredients you are using. This makes the blend uniquely yours.



# Adobo

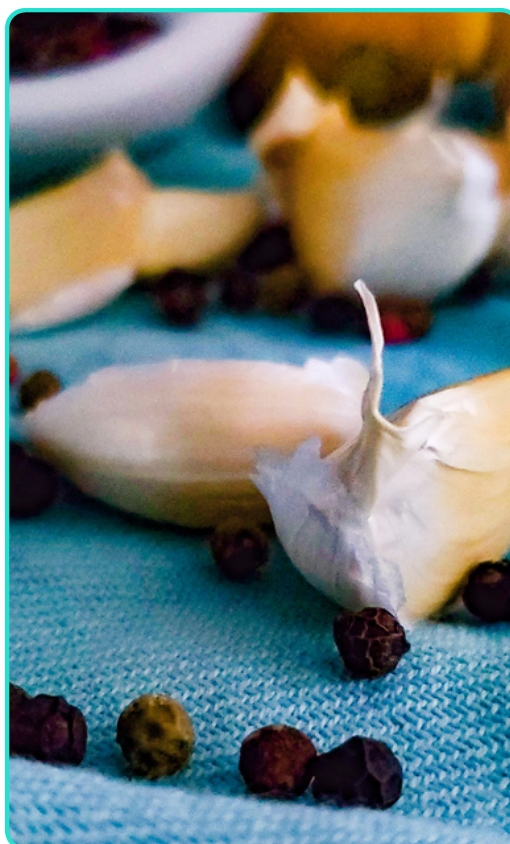
Prep Time 10 minutes  
Cook time: 10 to 20 minutes  
Total time 20 to 30 minutes  
Yield: 20 ounce  
Category: Condiment  
Method: Puree  
Cuisine: Puerto Rican  
Serving Size: 1 tablespoon  
Calories: 32

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 peppercorn (whole black pepper)
- 1/4 teaspoon dried whole oregano
- 1 clove garlic, peeled
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon vinegar or fresh lime juice

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. If you have a pestle and mortar, crush peppercorn, oregano, and garlic. Once paste is created, add salt, olive oil, and vinegar or lime juice.
2. Another option is to place all ingredients in a blender or food processor to create a paste.
3. Rub seasoning into meat thoroughly and set in the refrigerator for several hours.



# Powdered Adobo

## INGREDIENTS

- 3 oz garlic salt
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon of dried oregano
- 3/4 teaspoons of ground pepper
- 1/2 teaspoons cumin
- 1 tablespoon of lemon or orange zest

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine all ingredients and place in an airtight container.
2. This blend should last a few years, but we know that is not how long it will stay in your spice rack.



## RECIPES FOR FLAVOR



### ACHIOTE OIL

My family had just about everything growing in the backyard, and ACHIOTE was not an exception. It is an excellent source of color and flavor in Puerto Rican cooking.

The tree blooms pretty pink flowers, and the "fruit" is a fuzzy red pouch where the many tiny seeds cluster inside it. Just touching these seeds turn your fingers and hands orange.

The annatto seeds are removed from the fuzzy fruit and set out to dry. The dried seeds are then ground into powder. This process could turn into more work than expected since the seeds could be quite hard. The most effective way to use these seeds is by creating Aceite de Achiote/Annatto Oil.

#### **What is Achiote Oil or Annatto oil used for?**

Achiote Oil is an oil infusion used to add color and flavor to food. The oil not only adds a marvelous yellow color to your food, especially rice, but it also adds a depth of flavor to your food.

#### **What is an infusion?**

An infusion is when you take an ingredient, in this case achiote, and let it steep in oil to draw out its color and flavor. The oil used for the infusion has transformed into a specialty flavored oil,

There are two types of infusions; cold and hot. I use the hot method. I warm the oil to about 150 degrees, add the seeds and allow the oil to cool down to room temperature with the seeds steeping inside of it.

#### **How are infusions used?**

Infusions can be used to accent salads and as finishing oils on various dishes like soups. In the case of achiote oil, I add it to the rice while cooking to coat it with bright orange-yellow color and smokey flavor.

#### **What are good oils to use when I am making my achiote oil?**

I use olive oil. Goya Olive oil is one that I grew up using at home as a child. Therefore, even though I might not always buy Goya, I use olive oil for this application. I only cook with olive oil. Seldomly would start my sauteeing process with anything else, but if you do not like to use olive oil, canola, or vegetable oil would work. But, for a healthier choice, try avocado oil instead.

- Avocado oil
- Sunflower Seed Oil
- Grape Seed Oil
- Vegetable Oil
-



## ACHIOTE OIL *continued*

### What are some of Achiote's health benefits

Many of the health benefits that achiote has to offer still require studies, but the potentials are as follows:

- High on Carotenoids which helps with vision health
- Antioxidant properties that neutralize free radicals
- Antimicrobial properties that suggest the aid in the preservation of food.
- Good for heart health by being a great source of vitamin E.

### What could be substitute for Achiote

May reduce inflammation.

Annatto is often referenced as *the poor man's saffron* for a reason. Annatto gives food the same coloring as saffron for a fraction of the cost. Saffron could cost anywhere between \$5,000 to \$10,000 per pound, as per [businessinsider.com](http://businessinsider.com). A fraction of an ounce, 0.0175 oz, can cost as much as \$4.99.

On the other hand, an ounce of annatto seeds costs about \$1.50. Saffron adds great flavor and color to the foods it is added to, but at a high cost. Many of the dishes which call for saffron, could be prepared by either using annatto seeds or powder. But what happens when you no longer have the seeds or powder. What do you use? Paprika.

Paprika would be my very first choice. The only thing I have found is that I need a lot more paprika to get the color half the amount of annatto could provide. Paprika also has a very different flavor profile that must be considered, as it could have spicy tones that would change the taste originally intended. Chorizo is a great example as a flavor guideline for paprika, since the spice is one of the key ingredients giving chorizo its flavor and color.

A bit off the color scheme is Tumeric. Tumeric will render a bright yellow color to the rice but turn your red beans dark. Thus, making a bowl of rice that is not as appetizing visually as you might expect.

Tumeric does have some of the same health potentials as achiote, and if the substitution is for health reasons, you will not go wrong. In addition, Tumeric, a highly sought after for its anti-inflammatory properties, and using it with rice will be an excellent medium for its consumption. The flavor profile of Tumeric is also similar to achiote, with sweet notes with earthy undertones.

# Achiote Oil

Prep Time 15 minutes  
Cool time: 20 minutes  
Total time 30 minutes  
Yield: 8 ounce  
Category: Condiment  
Method: Infusion  
Cuisine: Puerto Rican  
Serving Size: 1 tablespoon  
Calories: 13

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups of lard, vegetable oil, olive oil, or coconut oil
- 1 cup achiote (annatto) seeds

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the fat in a saucepan. Turn the heat to low, add achiote seeds.
2. Stir occasionally for 5 minutes or until the fat turns to a rich orange-red color.
3. Cool thoroughly.
4. Strain through a colander with absorbent paper and pour into a glass container.
5. Cover, and store in the refrigerator, to be used by tablespoons, as called for in certain recipes.





# RECIPES FOR STEWING, DIPPING AND MARINATING

## RECIPES FOR STEWING, DIPPING, AND MARINATING

This section is dedicated to traditional sauces. These sauces are used as a garnish for meats and vegetables, or as dipping sauces

### **Mojo Isleño**

Mojo is a delicious sauce used with many different proteins like chicken, pork, beef, and even vegetables like okra. But Mojo Isleño is well known for its pairing with white fish, especially with CHILLO (*chee-yoh*, Red Snapper).

I also go over some of the other applications I have come across this sauce, like the use of it as a marinade, plus I share my version of a powder version of the sauce to use as a seasoning or a marinade.

### **Ají-li-mojíli**

Some people consider this sauce to be a mojo. As a matter of fact, I am one of those people. But as I have gone through my research, I have learned that there is a difference.

Still Ají-li-mojíli is a great sauce to know.

This is a great dipping sauce for tostones, roast pork, and any boiled root vegetables.

### **Escabeche**

Escabeche is a sauce full of tang and flavor.

Super simple but full of depth. Again, it is very versatile in what it is used with green bananas, yuca, chicken, or fish.

Escabeche also has dual use. It can be served both hot and cold. Creating a great dish for potlucks and gatherings.



# RECIPES FOR STEWING, DIPPING AND MARINATING



## MOJO ISLEÑO

This is my version of the sauce which we know in Puerto Rico as Mojo Isleño.

### **What is Mojo Isleño?**

Mojo is a tasty mixture of tomatoes, garlic, onions, olives, and citrus. Mojo can be used as a garnish for any meat or seafood or a dipping sauce for fritters. At least that is how I use it, lol.

Cultural appropriation is not bad all the time.

Sometimes, it takes someone from outside to see a potential that has been missed all along. In this case, is the use of mojo as a marinade.

I have worked at many restaurants and at least one supermarket. At the supermarket, I had to cook rotisserie chickens, one of which the seasoning was called mojo. This particular supermarket has both mojo pork and chicken, yet they both seemed a bit different in appearance. The seasoning for the chicken looked orange, while the pork was more garlic and citrus.

The truth is, I believe we all call two different sauces by the same name. The mojo isleño I am writing about is one that was created in Salinas a long time ago. It is served with fish. I like it so much that I serve it with chicken and pork.

The other "mojo" sauce is the recipe that follows this one, Aji-li-mojili. Aji-li-mojili is a sauce with a citrus and garlic base used for dipping roasted pork. The reason there is confusion is that the latter is a dipping sauce and in translation *to dip* is "*mojar*." the root word for the term *Mojo*.

### **So which one is it?**

I guess it is whatever you grew up calling it, but if this is all new to you, then a Mojo Isleño is a tomato-based sauce with onions, olives, and capers. This sauce is used when making Bacalao a la Vizcaina since our Vizcaina sauce is tomato-based instead of pepper-based.

### **Applications to use the sauce**

Another tasty way to use this sauce is as a marinade. Omit the olives and puree the sauce to marinate pork or chicken.

### **Mojo as a marinade**

Back to the supermarket, I realized that my supermarket uses two different "mojos" for two other recipes. At first, I thought, "silly market, mojo is a sauce." but then, I grew curious. Their mojo was a powder mixture, not a sauce. Can I utilize my mojo sauce as a marinade? Indeed you can!

## MOJO ISLEÑO *continued*

I took all the ingredients for my marinade, except for the capers, olives, and bay leaves. I blended them until I achieved a smooth liquid. I wanted my marinade a little more citrusy, so I added enough lemon juice and orange juice to get my desired flavor.

### How to serve the sauce

One of the easiest ways to make fish with mojo isleño is by making the sauce first and in a separate pan. Next, sear the fish, ladle the sauce onto the fish, and cook for a few minutes before serving. Fish is a very delicate protein that flakes off when overcooked. Searing and making the sauce in separate pans will ensure that the fish will not overcook while the sauce is coming together.

Chicken and pork are hardier than fish, therefore searing these meats and building the mojo in the same pan is a lot easier.

### Key ingredients for Mojo Isleño Sauce

Tomatoes. Vine ripe, raw plum tomatoes work great in this application, but I prefer canned tomatoes. I like fresh products over canned, but I use canned instead of fresh when making quick tomato-based sauces.

1. Cost. I could buy three cans of diced tomatoes (about six tomatoes) for the price of a pound of tomatoes.
2. Canned tomatoes have already been peeled in the process of canning. When using fresh tomatoes, if the tomatoes are not peeled before the cooking process, the peel will come loose through cooking and float in your sauce.
3. Convenience and availability. I do not think I would have a hard time finding tomatoes at the supermarket, but still having a few cans of diced tomatoes in my pantry allows me to create quick tomato-based sauces on a whim.

Onions. I use Vidalia whenever possible. I enjoy the milder, sweeter flavor of this variety over the regular yellow. If Vidalia is not available, my go-to onion is the familiar yellow onion, followed by white.

I do not use red onions in this recipe. It would not work, but if it is the only onion available, I would use it. In this application, the color wouldn't matter, but I find the white and yellow varieties to hold their ground when it comes to flavor, plus they contrast nicely with the tomatoes. For this sauce, I like to slice my onions into thin strips.

Garlic. If you have read any of my posts, you will know that I have a love affair with garlic.

Whenever possible I add garlic by the handfuls, and sometimes I don't even chop it, but for this sauce I like it sliced. It helps to add dimension to the sauce.

Because I use garlic so much, I buy my garlic already peeled. I find it in bags in the leading grocery store and 16-ounce tubs in the Latin markets.

Olives and capers add a bit of tart and tang to the sauce. This dynamic duo are regular players in Puerto Rican cuisine, making appearances in rice dishes, stews, beans, and sauces. Because of their briny profile, adjust the salt or wait until almost done cooking to add any salt.

Acid. Lemon juice, vinegar, and wines are all great acids used to make this sauce. You can use one or a combination of acids. I have used it all before, and the sauce still tastes delicious. The acids balance the acidity of the tomatoes in a like-balances-like way, allowing the fruitiness of the tomatoes to shine.

Oregano and culantro. Oregano adds a peppery/firey flavor to the sauce, while culantro adds a hint of freshness. I use dried oregano and fresh culantro. If culantro is not available, cilantro or parsley are great substitutions.

The recipe below could be made either as a stand-alone sauce or in the same pan as where the protein is cooked.

# Mojo Isleño

Prep Time 20 minutes  
Cool time: 30 minutes  
Total time 50 minutes  
Yield: 32 ounce  
Category: Sauce  
Method: Sautee and Boil  
Cuisine: Puerto Rican  
Serving Size: 1 cup  
Calories: 417

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- 2 1/2 pounds onions, peeled and sliced
- 4 cloves of garlic, sliced
- 24 olives, stuffed with pimientos
- 2 tablespoons capers
- 1 can diced tomato
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 tablespoons vinegar, lemon juice, or white wine
- 1 can (4 ounces) pimientos, cut in tiny slices, in their juice, optional
- Salt and Pepper to taste

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a saute pan heat the olive oil.
2. Add onions and saute, until they become translucent. for about 5 minutes.
3. Add garlic. Cook until light golden brown. 3 to 5 minutes.
4. Add olives, capers, bay leaves, and diced tomato. Cook covered for about 10 minutes.
5. Add acid. I prefer white wine, but vinegar or lemon juice would work.
6. If using pimientos, add at this point. Taste for salt and pepper. Cook for another 5 minutes.





# Mojo Isleño Powder

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons of tomato powder
- 1 tablespoon cumin
- 1 tablespoon minced onion
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon Spanish paprika
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons pepper
- 2 teaspoons coriander

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a coffee grinder or blender. pulse all ingredients together.
2. Pour powder into an airtight container

## TO USE AS A MARINADE

1. Mix powder with lemon juice or orange and olive oil to create a marinade.  
Cover desired protein in the liquid for at least 30 minutes.



# RECIPES FOR STEWING, DIPPING AND MARINATING



## AJI-LI-MOJILI

This is also my version of this dipping sauce. Aji-li-mojili is usually served with Roast pork as a dipping sauce. This sauce is also served with Tostones, viandas, or boiled root vegetables, and any salad that needs a quick citrusy vinaigrette. .

Aji-li-mojili is sometimes confused with mojo only because of the applications used. The word mojo translates to *wet* or *to wet*, which is how this sauce is used, whereas Mojo sauce is a complementary sauce for many proteins.

### What is Aji-li-mojili?

It is no more than a delicious combination of ingredients; fresh garlic, salt, pepper, lemon, spicy peppers, and oil. The garlic and peppers are either small diced or roughly chopped and pounded in the mortar. Then, lemon, oil, citrus, salt, and pepper are mixed to create a light vinaigrette. The sauce is served in small bowls or in a squirt bottle.

### Key ingredients

Peppers. If you read my posts and recipes you might notice that I rarely use bell peppers. Neither my husband nor I like them too much, and honestly, we do not miss them.

I'm not particularly eager to use peppers for this recipe either, but I do know I might get called out if I do not, at least, mention them. After all, the word *Aji* refers to spicy peppers.

Aji peppers are tiny pepper, which I remember as red little peppers no bigger than an inch. These peppers are known as *Aji Caballeros*, or Getleman's pepper. Our *pique* or hot sauce is made of these powerful chiles as well.

Another pepper we utilize is the *Aji Dulce*, or sweet chili pepper. This one resembles the firey Scotch Bonnet pepper but with a fraction of the heat. The only issue is, it resembles the Scotch Bonnet so well, that they can easily be mistaken, and you might end up with a product that is hotter than expected.

Garlic. To me, garlic is king. So good for you and gives food such great flavor. Because this dipping sauce is not cooked, you end up with the heat of raw garlic. I advise you to dice or mince your garlic well before adding it to the sauce; it allows for the garlic's flavor to come through and its natural heat.

Acid. Lemon is my favorite, but vinegar does a great job in this recipe. The sauce is used as a dipping accompaniment for roasted pork and fried foods like tostones, fried yuca, or fish. The acid helps to cut through the fat of the foods that you are dipping into the sauce. Acid also helps to draw out the flavors of the other ingredients.

# AJI-LI-MOJILI *continued*

## Types of acids

I already mentioned lemon, but here are a few others to consider;

- lime
- sour orange, if sour orange is not available a combination of lime and orange juices make a great substitution.
- orange juice
- vinegar. White vinegar is widely used for this application but feel free to experiment with flavors like
  - apple cider
  - malt
  - white balsamic
  - rice
- soy sauce. Yes, soy sauce is not a Puerto Rican native ingredient, but it can add great punch to this sauce, especially when accompanied with ginger and lemongrass

## Can Aji-li-mojili be used as a marinade

Of course. The sauce has all the key ingredients for a great marinade, but keep in mind the acid will cook tender flesh like fish.

I use aji-li-mojili as a base for my ceviche recipe. I do not use soy sauce, but I do use lemongrass and ginger for the added punch, and I add cubanelle peppers too.



# Aji-li-mojili

Prep Time 20 minutes  
Cool time: 0 minutes  
Total time 20 minutes  
Yield: 20 ounce  
Category: Sauce  
Method: Mix and Marinade  
Cuisine: Puerto Rican  
Serving Size: 1 oz  
Calories: 114

## INGREDIENTS

In a blender, pulse together:

- 8 large garlic cloves, peeled
- 8 peppercorns (whole black peppers or peppercorn blend)
- 12 sweet chili peppers, seeded
- 1/2 cup vinegar
- 1/2 cup lime juice
- 4 teaspoons salt
- 1 cup olive oil

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Blend all ingredients in a blender, and pulse thoroughly.
2. Stir well before serving.



# RECIPES FOR STEWING, DIPPING AND MARINATING



## ESCABECHE

The word ESCABECHE translates to pickled. So, when you read in the menu; guineos, fish, or chicken *en escabeche*, it means that it is cooked in a pickled sauce.

### **Is this the same type of pickling as pickling cucumbers?**

Not at all. I think it is called pickled by the flavor profile of the sauce. The process is relatively simple. Onions, peppers (if you choose to use them), and garlic are lightly sauteed in oil with lemon or vinegar (I use both), olives, and peppercorns. The flavor is quite tart but satisfying. I consider escabeche a great summer dish due to its bright flavor profile

### **How can this sauce be used?**

This sauce is normally used to serve boiled green bananas, or *Guineos En Escabeche*, but escabeche can be applied to any of the root vegetables, Chicken, Fish and seafood (especially *bacalao* or cod fish and shrimp).

### **How to serve escabeche cold**

The one recipe that is normally served cold is *Guineos en Escabeche*. This recipe is great hot or cold, and it is ideal for gatherings and potlucks, because of its duality in service.

I start by cooking the green bananas by boiling them in a pot with salted water. While the bananas are cooking I cut my onions into thin strips, and slices the garlic. I sauté the onions and garlic until soft. I then add pimento stuffed green olives, capers, lemon juice, salt, pepper, vinegar, and olive oil.

When making the sauce, you want the sauce to have plenty of liquid especially if the item to be tossed in the sauce is starchy like green bananas. Green bananas and root vegetables will absorb all the liquid.

Keep the sauce warm, until the bananas are cooked through. You know your bananas are ready when pierced with a fork the bananas slide off the fork or the break into sections easily. Drain the bananas and add to the sauce. Toss the bananas in the sauce to cover. Serve. For cold service, spread the bananas with the sauce onto a rimmed cookie baking sheet or a 9 X 13 baking dish. Try that the bananas are not clumped over each other. Place the dish or cookie sheet into the refrigerator and allow to cool for 30 minutes to an hour

# Escabeche

Prep Time 20 minutes  
Cool time: 20 minutes  
Total time 40 minutes  
Yield: 1 quart  
Category: Sauce  
Method: Sautee and Boil  
Cuisine: Puerto Rican  
Serving Size: 1 cup  
Calories: 62

## INGREDIENTS

- Olive Oil
- Onions
- Garlic
- Cubanelle Peppers
- Green Manzanillo Olives
- Capers
- Peppercorns
- Lemon
- Vinegar
- Oregano
- Bay Leaves

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a frying pan, heat oil.
2. Add onions and peppers and cook until translucent.
3. Add garlic. Cook until garlic is aromatic and golden in color.
4. Add the rest of the ingredients and cook for about 5 minutes.
5. Toss in cooked green bananas, chicken, or salted cod and serve







# GLOSSARY OF INGREDIENTS

## TYPICAL PUERTO RICAN INGREDIENTS

### **What you will find in this section**

In Puerto Rico, we utilize about the same ingredients as the rest of the world. But there are a few ingredients that we love for our daily cuisine.

My goal has been to re-introduce myself to Puerto Rican cuisine and its ingredients. The following is a small list of vital components that make Puerto Rican cooking so delicious.

Some of these ingredients are sometimes hard to find in the mainland of the United States.

Only because depending on the area's Hispanic population, many grocers might not offer the ingredients we need for our recipes.

Another stumble I have encountered has been that I have not known the correct name of the ingredient or recipe. I also know I am not alone in this. Be it because we have not been on the island long enough to learn what they are or how to use them, or because the people who have cooked for us never passed on their knowledge. I hope this section of the book helps to close that gap by telling you what it is, how to use it, and how to substitute it.

### **Better understanding the ingredients used most in Puerto Rico**

It has been my experience of knowing and understanding our ingredients, either native or imported, that will grow a better understanding of our food, culture, and history.

A year ago, I made a batch of adobo. I excitedly posted the picture on a social media group of Puerto Rican cooking. But, ironically, it was not well received. The comment was, adobo is the powder you buy at the supermarket, not a garlic paste.

This is an example of not knowing where you come from or even what you are consuming. It is effortless to buy a packet of seasoning or a jar of sauce or marinade and call it a day, but do we know what makes up that sauce or seasoning?

### **Creating your personal taste**

I hope the next time you go to the store and see some of these ingredients, you are excited to try them. To find your likes and dislikes, and to create your own set of flavors to cook. I hope this book becomes the springboard to the release of your creativity.

# AGUACATE

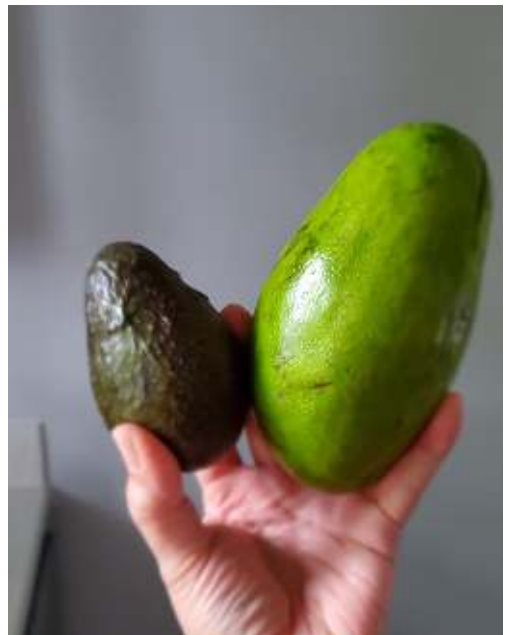
## Avocado (*Persea americana*)

The pear-shaped tropical fruit also called "alligator pear" is usually marketed unripe. There are many varieties of avocados, but the most common are the Hass and the Fuerte variety, which is larger and brighter in color.

Avocados are rich in good fats; saturated, monounsaturated, and oleic, palmitic, and Linoleic acids.

Avocados range in flavor, texture, and color—some range in taste from sweet and nutty to fruity. There are different types of skin textures when it comes to avocados. Some might be thick, some are thin, and some have a texture reminiscent of alligator skin.

The flesh is almost always moist and juicy, but a few varieties could be a bit drier. For example, Fuerte varieties tend to have bright yellow flesh while the Hass has a greener color.



# AJIES Y PIMIENTOS

## Chiles, and peppers

### Sweet Chili Pepper (*Capsicum annuum*)

This dwarf pepper has a mild, sweet, and distinct flavor, ideal for seasoning dishes. Not be confused with its hot pepper doppelganger, the habanero pepper.



### Cubanelle Pepper (*Capsicum annuum*)

When unripe, the cubanelle is light yellowish-green but will turn bright red if allowed to ripen. It has thinner flesh, it is longer, and has a slightly more wrinkled appearance than bell peppers. The flavor is bright and sharp. Not as mild as bell pepper, but milder than a jalapeño.





# BACALAO

## Salted Cod

Bacalao is known by many different names in different parts of the world. Here are a few of its names; Bacalhau in Portuguese, baccalà in Italian, Bakalar in Croatia, klippfisk in Norway, saltfiskur in Iceland, and moure in France. So as you can see, salted fish or salted codfish is quite popular.

The word Bacalao derives from the Latin word bacalus, which means stick or staff. In Norway, the fish is dried by setting it out to dry on the wind to the point that it gets as hard as a stick. Next, salt is added to the fish to infuse flavor and to preserve the fish further. In addition, salt has great antibacterial properties that help keep the fish from spoiling. There are three methods of processing the fish; brining, salting, or pickling.



# GUINEOS, PLATANOS, AND BANANA LEAVES

## Bananas, plantains, and banana leaves

### Bananas

Although we use the word banana in Puerto Rico, we regularly refer to this delicious fruit, whether green or ripe, as GUINEO.

I will not spend too much time explaining bananas, except for going through some of their varieties.

Bananas are a great food source for Puerto Ricans since we eat the fruit at many different stages.

We cook the green bananas in an ESCABECHE sauce, which is served both hot and cold. At least in my house, we have eaten guineos en escabeche as a cold salad and a hot side dish with Bacalao.

Bananas come in a variety of sizes, sweetness, and starchiness. The variety pictured on the right is what we affectionally call guineos niños, baby or kid bananas, due to the relatively short size compared to the standard banana.



## Bananas,cont.

These guineos niños are also quite starchy, even when ripe, they are not as silky to the tooth as regular bananas.

## Plantains

Platanos is another word used to refer to bananas in other Latin American countries, but for Puerto Ricans, a platano means Plantain.

The beauty of plantains and bananas is that when they grow you do not just get one fruit. There could be up to twenty fruits in one banana bouquet or RAMILLETE. We also call the bouquet MANO, because the bananas (I am using this term to refer to all banana varieties) look like an open hand with fingers. Like bananas, we eat platoons, or plantains at all stages of ripeness.

Green plantains are great to make MOFONGO, a quick fried and smashed plantain dish with pork rind or bacon and garlic, TOSTONES sliced plantains which are fried and pressed into discs great as a snack or side dish, or ARAÑITAS shredded plantain mixed with batter and then fried which resembles hay stacks or their namesake spiders.





## **Plantains, cont.**

Another way of eating green plantains is by boiling them and serving them with olive oil and garlic, like potatoes.

Most of the same methods of cooking green plantains apply for ripe except for tostones and arañitas, because the ripe plantain are too soft to press in that manner.

The most popular way of preparing the ripe plantains is by frying them as a side dish. When the plantains are ripe we call them MADUROS, or AMARILLOS. I personally remember calling them maduros while growing up.

With the maduros, if sliced lengthwise, they could be used to make pastelón which is a meaty pie with cheese and vegetables.

## **Banana Leaves**

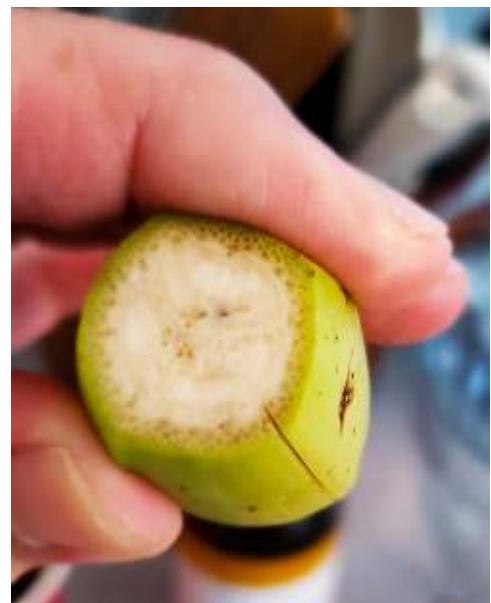
Banana leaves are used in our cooking as a food wrap during the cooking process. It adds moisture and flavor to your food. One great dish in which the leaves is as important as the items we are wrapping is PASTELES. We also use the leaves to cover ARROZ CON GANDULES.



# HOW TO PEEL BANANAS AND PLANTAINS

**This method works well for any green banana or plantain.**

1. Cut bananas off of the banana hand. Also, cut the bottom of the banana. For this method, I will refer to the end that attaches to the "hand" as the top and the dark end the bottom.
2. Then cut the skin only, without cutting into the fruit, lengthwise.
3. Gently insert the knife's blade into the slit and carefully pry the skin off of the fruit.
4. The bananas could also be cooked with the skin on, which makes them a little easier to remove later.



# HABICHUELAS Y FRIJOLES

## Beans and Peas, the other half of the dynamic duo

Although I am not going to cover rice in this book, I will cover rice's most favorite partner, beans and peas. We cannot have rice without beans!!! Ok, we can, but it doesn't feel right, lol.

### Colora, Red Kidney Bean

Every culture has a preferred legume. For Puerto Ricans? The Red bean, COLORA, but more specifically the red kidney bean, which we affectionally call MARCA DIABLO, the devil's brand, named due to its prominent dark red color.

The Taino Indians have been cultivating various species of *Phaseolus vulgaris* before the Spanish Conquistadors arrived. The one variety that has stuck for centuries has been the red kidney. White rice and red beans is the most popular combination found throughout the island in eateries and homes alike.





## **Gandul (es), Pigeon Peas**

Before the Industrial Revolution, the world lived by the seasons. We (as in the entire world) knew that there was a season for certain fruits and vegetables due to climate changes. Therefore we had specific dishes for specific seasons. Well, even in tropical Puerto Rico there was no exception.

The gandul or gandules were the beans available to many Puerto Ricans during the winter season. Yes, believe it or not, temperatures would change enough to have the tiny pigeon pea be more prominent during the winter months of November to February. Does this mean that we didn't have the pea available throughout the year? Or the red beans didn't grow during those months? Not really, but we developed a rice and pigeon pea combination that reflects "party" whenever served, ARROZ CON GANDULES

The gandul is a tiny greenish-brown pea. In comparison to the red bean, the gandul, or pigeon pea contains great nutritional value.



## **Gandul (es), Pigeon Peas**

Besides being another tasty B vitamin complex capsule, and source for vitamin C, manganese, iron, and phosphorus. Gandules are packed with potassium, protein, folate, and dietary fiber. All of these great vitamin and minerals help with digestion, growth, bone density, anemia, energy, and immunity. All in a tiny pill-size pea!

Thanks to the industrial revolution, we now have gandules available all year round. But we still make arroz con gandules for major festivities and celebrations.

## **Garbanzos**

We love garbanzos! We stew them and serve them with white rice. Ok, we do that with all beans and peas.

We make soups, we serve them cooked mixed with rice, and we serve them as a salad. But garbanzos or Chick Peas, were not indigenous to the island. Garbanzos are a transplant brought to us by the Spaniards, along with the recipes which we use to cook them.





## **Garbanzos**

Let's throw a blanket statement that says, beans are nature's multi-vitamins. They are full of vitamins B, manganese, folate, and iron. Many are full of dietary fiber which helps with weight management and blood sugar balance.



## **OTHER BEANS AND PEAS WE LOVE**

### **Frijoles de Carita or Frijoles Bizcos, Black-eyed Peas**

Brought to Puerto Rico by the African slaves to maintain a connection to their motherland and from the colonizers to feed them. The black-eyed pea hails from Africa and has created a home in the Caribbean.



### **Frijoles Negros, Black Beans**

Preferred by our Cuban brothers and sisters. The black beans are also appreciated in Puerto Rico. I actually enjoy black beans and I would eat them more than the traditional red beans.





## **Lentejas, Lentils**

You will find all the different varieties of lentils in the island.

## **Habichuelas Blancas, Navy Beans**

Prepared almost the same as garbanzos, these little beans are full of flavor!

## **Habas, Broad Beans**

The word HABA in Spain translates to bean. For us in Puerto Rico an Haba is what we call a Broad bean.

## **Habichuelas Rosadas, Pink Beans**

The pink variety of the red beans

## **Habichuelas Pintas, Pinto Beans**

Pinto beans are pink beans with speckles.



# HOW TO REHYDRATE DRIED BEANS

1. Measure out one cup of select dried beans
2. Spread the beans onto a large plate or cookie sheet.
3. Pick through (ESPULGAR—meaning to look through something with care) all the broken, warped beans. Also, look for any debris or stones that get into the bags through the hulling process.
4. Rinse the beans with clear running water about three times.
5. Place the rinsed beans in a 4 quart container with a lid. Add 2 cups of water, and soak overnight, or for at least eight hours.
6. The next day or after eight hours, rinse the beans once again about three times.
7. Place the beans in a saucepan with two cups of water, and bring to a simmer. Cook for about an hour, adjusting the water if necessary until the beans are soft to the tooth without being mushy.
8. The beans could be cooled down for later use. If stewing the beans that evening, check out my recipe for stewed beans at [girlmeetsfire.com](http://girlmeetsfire.com)





# ALCAPARRAS, CAPERS

Alcaparras or capers are the unopen buds of the flowers of the caper bush.

These buds are preserved in a brine. The taste is salty, briny, with a very distinct pungent flavor. Capers are a Mediterranean ingredient



## HERBS

Herbs are a way to infuse your cooking with subtle flavors. In Puerto Rico like in most Latin America we have our regulars.

### Culantro

Culantro is related to lettuce and parsley. It actually looks like dandelion in the manner of growth and appearance. It has long leaves that attach to a rosette base. Another name we give this herb is RECAO (short for recado which means message, which could be a name given to it as the cook would send someone to go find the herb in the backyard. I know it sounds trivial)





## **Culantro**

The flavor of culantro is quite stronger than that of cilantro but I do not find it as "soapy" as some people would describe cilantro. Culantro is the main ingredient in Sofrito, and Recao condiments.



## **Cilantro**

Cilantro is another herb used in the island. My mother would use it as a substitution for Culantro when we didn't have any in the backyard, (yes, I was the one running to the backyard looking for culantro when my mom cooked)



## **Cumin**

Cumin is a tiny brown seed related to parsley. It is ground or used whole, and it gives food a peppery flavor along with flowery tones.



## **Coriander**

Coriander is another tiny seed that could be used whole or ground. This seed is related to the carrot. It has an even more flowery flavor than coriander and is quite fragrant

## **Oregano**

Oregano is like the wonder herb.

When added to food it adds spikes of spicy flavor, due to very pungent and quite medicinal natural oils in the oregano plant.

Oregano brujo is a variety of oregano with bright green leaves that grows wild in the island and it is used in the production of sofrito.



## **Hojas de Laurel, Bay Leaves**

My mom had a Laurel bush in the backyard and she had me pick the leaves as I was a little girl.

Bay leaves are used not only in Puerto Rico but thorough all the Mediterranean, Latin America, and France. Bay leaves gives the food a sweet floral bouquet.



## **Perejil, Parsley**

Like many of the other herbs mentioned above, parsley is used through out the world as great flavor agent.





## Parsley

The key flavor of parsley is its freshness. The best combination for parsley is to pair it with fresh lemon for a great punch of freshness.



## Calabaza

Calabaza or pumpkin is another highly used vegetable in Puerto Rican cuisine. Unlike the American bright orange pumpkin, our calabazas are primarily green with occasional light brown skin ones.

Calabazas are also known as winter squashes in the United States.

You can purchase calabaza at Puerto Rican grocers and markets either whole, half, or quarter.

Calabaza is utilized as a thickener for stews and sauces, especially stewed beans. The calabaza softens and dissolves into the liquid as the sauce boils, rendering a sweet flavor and a thicker consistency to the final product.





## Calabaza

Calabaza is high in beta-carotene, hence the bright orange flesh. The body transforms beta-carotene into vitamin A. Vitamin A is an excellent antioxidant that reduces inflammation, boosts the immune, and helps maintain and grow skin, hair, and vision.

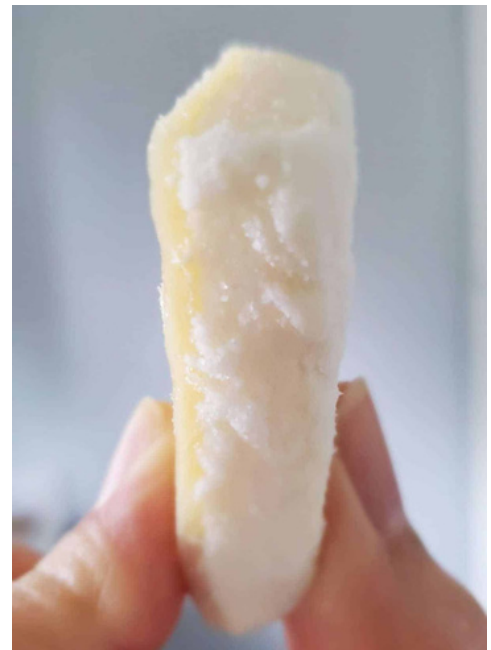


## Tocino, Fatback

### Uncured Bacon

Salted pork is one of those ingredients that we still hold dear in Puerto Rican cuisine.

Tocino, aka salt pork. If you cannot find it at your local supermarket, look for it at a Latin market or bodega. What I see at my supermarket is a much thicker cut of bacon labeled salt pork. Salt porks are part of the bacon-belly area of the pork, but what Puerto Ricans consider salt pork looks like the picture below.



## TOCINO

As you can see, salt pork is the fat just below the skin with the skin still attached. I only use a strip about a quarter-inch thick and score it or partly cut it until I reach the skin. This is added to the frying pan and rendered for fat. Cooked long enough, the fat will shrink considerably, but your pan will have the liquid product that could be used to sweat onions, peppers, and garlic.—giving your final product depth in flavor. Also, I cut down the amount of salt I would typically use because the salt pork has added its own. I can go on and on about this topic, and perhaps it will be another post altogether, so stay tuned.

## CHORIZO

A true link to our Spanish heritage.

Chorizo is packed with flavor and heat. Mostly used as a flavor agent not the main focus of the dish. Some of the main ingredients in a Chorizo link includes but not limited to herbs and spices like cumin, coriander, garlic, and paprika. As well as choricero pepper for heat. Adding chorizo to any dish adds depth and zing. A great component for the unexpected.



# ACEITUNAS

## OLIVES

The name ACEITUNAS literally tells you what the by product of these amazing fruits is.

In Puerto Rico, the number one olive is the MANZANILLA Olive. The pearly green olives, which are stuffed with pimento peppers, and sold by the jar in the pickle section of the supermarket.

These little olives are added to almost everything we cook. Beans, beef stews, escabeche, mojo, and rice. We even eat them as a snack.

This is one of those ingredients that is so ingrained into our cooking that when they are not used, they are highly missed.

# ACEITE DE OLIVA

## OLIVE OIL

Aceite de oliva is our do all kind of oil. Our prefer producer of olive oil is Spain, but we will use Italian as well.





## OLIVE OIL

I find slight changes in tastes when the oil is either from Spain or Italy, but there are so many variables in the manufacturing of oil, which I am not going to go through them at this point

Olive oil is used in salads, for cooking, and to make marinades.

One of my favorite ways of eating bacalao is sauteeing it with onions and then drizzling a bit of a robust olive oil just before serving.

## TYPES OF OLIVE OIL

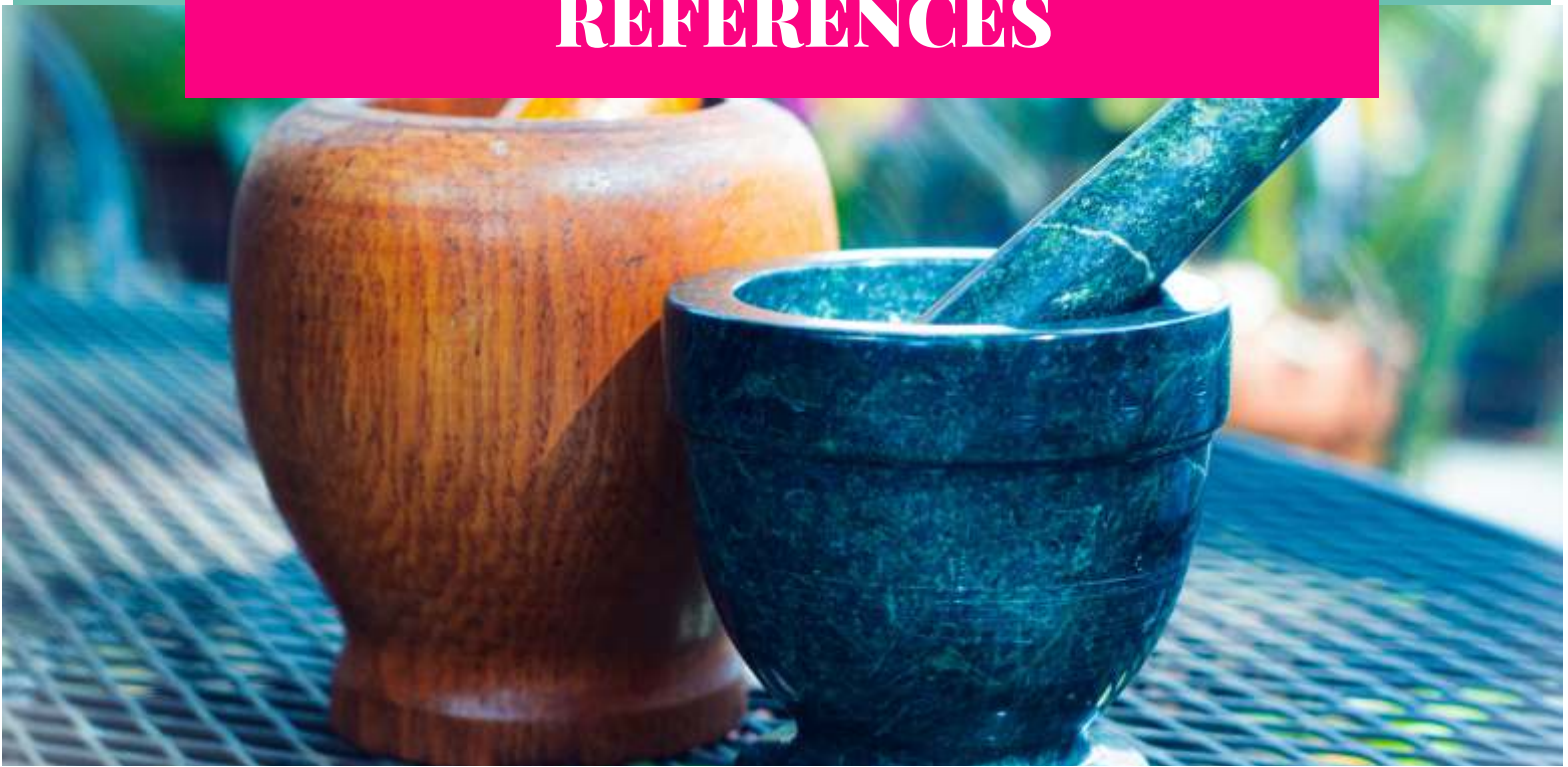
I extracted this little bit of information from [theolivetap.com](http://theolivetap.com). I find it quite informative and helpful when selecting olive oils.

Five types of Olive oil and their uses

- Extra-Virgin: Seasoning or Salads
- Virgin: Cooking, Sauteeing, Baking, Salads
- Refined: Only for Cooking
- Pure: Cooking, Body Massage, and Preparing Herbal Oils
- Olive Pomace: Cleaning Purposes (Furniture polish). Not good for eating but sometimes used for high heat cooking.



# REFERENCES



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