Pumpkin Enchilada Casserole with Red Chile Sauce and Poblano-Pepita Salsa

If you need a vegetarian "star" for the Thanksgiving table, this is it. (But if you have leftover cooked turkey on hand, it would make a delicious addition to the filling.)

Serves 6 to 8

For the Sauce
3 oz. dried California chiles (about 10)
1½ oz. dried ancho chiles (about 2)
6 large cloves garlic, peeled
2 tsp. dried oregano
1 Tbs. olive oil
1 Tbs. all-purpose flour
1 Tbs. light brown sugar
Kosher salt

For the Filling
2 Tbs. olive oil
1 large yellow onion, cut into small dice
4 large cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 Tbs. ground cumin
3 cups ¼-inch-diced peeled, seeded pumpkin
½ cup lower-salt chicken broth
or vegetable broth
2 cups diced leftover skinless roast turkey
or rotisserie chicken (optional)
Kosher salt

For the Assembly
Olive oil
10 6-inch corn tortillas
3 cups packed grated Monterey Jack cheese
(¾ lb.)
1 recipe Poblano-Pepita Salsa (at right)
Crema Mexicana or sour cream, for serving

Make the Sauce

1. Place the chiles, garlic, oregano, and 3 cups water in a 3- quart saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a boil and reduce the heat to low. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the chiles and garlic are very tender, about 30 minutes. Remove from the heat, cover, and let stand for 30 minutes. Purée in a blender.

2. Heat the olive oil in a 4-quart saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour and stir until it begins to color, 2 to 3 minutes. Carefully stir in the chile mixture—it will spatter—and bring to a boil. Stir in the sugar and 2 tsp. salt. Keep warm.

Make the Filling

1. Heat the olive oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring, until nicely browned, about 11 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes. Add the cumin and cook until fragrant, about 10 seconds. Add the pumpkin and stir to coat. Lower the heat to medium, add the broth, cover, and simmer until the pumpkin is just tender, about 10 minutes. Stir in the turkey (if using) and season to taste with salt.

Assemble

1. Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Brush a 9x13-inch baking dish with olive oil. Spread ¼ cup of the sauce evenly over the bottom of the dish.

2. Heat a griddle or large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat and brush lightly with oil. One at a time, heat 5 tortillas until softened and pliable, about 1 minute per side. Arrange the griddled tortillas over the sauce in the pan (you can cut them to fit if necessary). Spread ½ cup sauce over the tortillas. Spoon the filling evenly over the sauce and top with 1 cup cheese. Drizzle ⅛ cup of the sauce over the cheese. Heat the remaining tortillas on the griddle. Arrange the tortillas evenly over the sauce, filling, and cheese. Spread the remaining sauce over the tortillas and sprinkle with the remaining cheese. Bake until the cheese bubbles and the casserole is heated through, 30 to 35 minutes. Let sit for at least 10 minutes before serving with the salsa and crema.

Poblano-Pepita Salsa

Toasted pumpkin seeds add a surprising crunch to this fresh topping for the enchiladas.

Yields about 2½ cups

2 medium poblano chiles
1 lb. tomatillos, husked and rinsed
¼ cup unsalted, roasted, hulled pepitas
(see Test Kitchen, p. 87)
¾ cup packed chopped fresh cilantro
Kosher salt

Char the chiles over a gas burner or under a broiler until blackened on all sides, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to a bowl, cover with plastic, and cool. Peel, stem, seed, and finely chop the chiles.

Heat a griddle or large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Cook the tomatillos, turning occasionally, until dark brown in spots, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a plate to cool.

Coarsely chop the pepitas in a food processor; transfer to a medium bowl. Without washing the food processor, add the tomatillos and process to the consistency of a chunky sauce. Transfer to the bowl with the pepitas. Stir in the chiles, cilantro, and salt to taste.

Make Ahead: The sauce may be made 3 days ahead, the filling 2 days ahead, and the salsa 1 day ahead. Refrigerate separately. Return the salsa to room temperature for serving.

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