

Homemade Red Mole

Mole rojo hecho en casa

Ingredients

Peppers:

- 9-10 dry red peppers (3 ancho, 3 pasilla, 4 cascabel, or other, such as mulato) *
- 2 dry hot peppers, optional (dry chipotle, morita, *de árbol*) **

Seeds and Nuts:

- ¼ cup sesame seed, roasted or raw
- ¼ cup peeled peanuts (with or without red film)
- ¼ cup almonds, or other nuts (hazelnuts, pine nuts)

Fruits:

- 1 plantain, very ripe
- ¼ cup raisins
- ¼ cup prunes, optional ***

Thickeners:

- ½ cup animal crackers (or soda, Maria, or stale bread)
- ½ corn tortilla, optional ****

Seasonings:

- ¼ tsp anise seed
- ¼ tsp ground cinnamon (or a piece of Mexican cinnamon stick)
- ¼ tsp ground cloves (or 2-3 whole)
- 4 cloves garlic
- Salt, to taste

Liquid:

- 1 cup water or broth, or more, as needed; hot

Fat:

- 4 tbsp vegetable oil or lard
- More lard or vegetable oil, as needed

Chocolate:

- 4 oz (112 g) Mexican chocolate tablets (such as Ibarra™, Abuelita™, Mayordomo™). *****

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Peppers: Remove stems and seeds from all the peppers; reserve.

Seeds and nuts: If sesame seeds are raw, toast them in a dry pan (no oil) over medium heat until they change colour and a few seeds start to pop; do not overcook. The almonds may be chosen whole, and the peanuts left with their red film intact.

Fruits and thickeners: The plantain must be as ripe as possible (peel even completely black). Raisins are always included. The plantain is also a thickener, and animal crackers are also on the ingredient lists of traditional recipes (stale bread, soda crackers or corn tortilla could be other options). Peel and slice plantain, and reserve, along with the raisins and crackers.

Seasonings: Anise seeds are an essential part of every single recipe of red *mole*, along with cloves and Mexican cinnamon; fresh garlic and salt complete the seasonings. **Important note:** do not attempt to grind cinnamon sticks unless they are the bark-like, crumbly, Mexican kind; hard cinnamon sticks will be most likely impossible to grind, and could even damage an electric grinder. For better accuracy, measure spices after grinding. As an alternative, use already ground spices.

Liquid and fat: traditional recipes use turkey broth and lard, but water and vegetable oil are good options to make *mole* less perishable and keep it vegetarian.

Chocolate: The star ingredient of red *mole*, chocolate should preferably be in the form of Mexican tablets for hot chocolate. Reserve.

Gathering and prepping the ingredients is half the work. The rest of the recipe consists of frying and/or grinding all these ingredients. First, grind the roasted sesame seeds, either with a spice grinder or with a mortar and pestle; if not possible, just leave them whole. Place in a large bowl or plate, along with the ground spices. In a frying pan, warm up 4 tablespoons of oil (or lard) over medium heat. The nuts, garlic, fruits, thickeners and peppers will be fried in this pan, one by one, in that order, then placed in the bowl. Start with the almonds, stirring until golden brown; continue with the peanuts. After the nuts, fry the garlic, stirring to avoid burning; next fry the raisins, stirring until they swell and look shiny. The plantain slices are next; fry for a couple of minutes, then flip to brown both sides and; continue with the animal crackers. Reserve all these ingredients in the bowl.

Fry the peppers in the same pan, in batches, being careful to flip frequently to avoid burning, just until they swell and turn crispy; place the fried peppers in a separate bowl. Once finished, deglaze the pan with a little hot water (or broth), scraping all bits from the bottom; pour the rest of the one cup of hot liquid in the pan, then add to the peppers. Add chocolate and 1 tsp of salt to the bowl; allow the peppers to soak for a few minutes, also letting the chocolate and salt partially dissolve, and the liquid cool down.

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Place all the contents of this bowl a blender jar, then add all the ingredients from the first bowl. Process in the blender until smooth (add more water or broth if needed).

In a clean pot, warm up more oil (or lard); at least 2 tablespoons. Pour *mole* and stir to avoid sticking to the bottom; bring to boil, then reduce heat and continue cooking and stirring. Correct seasoning with more salt, if needed; the mole turns darker as it cooks. Once the mole has thickened into a paste, transfer to heat-proof containers with lids. This recipe yields about 2 cups of paste; it will keep in the fridge for a few weeks.

To prepare mole sauce from this paste:

Warm up some vegetable oil or lard (about 1/2 tablespoon for each portion) in a pot, over medium heat; add mole paste (1/4 cup for each portion). Cook, stirring constantly until it turns fragrant and dark (not long, about one minute). Immediately add hot water or broth (about 1/4 cup per portion, or more). Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until desired consistency is reached.



Serving suggestions: Chicken in red mole, sprinkled with toasted sesame seeds and served with a side of Mexican style rice (left). Enmoladas (mole enchiladas, right)

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NOTES:

* The traditional ratio of peppers in *mole poblano* is around 4 mulato/3 ancho/2 pasilla. Both mulato and ancho peppers are dried poblano peppers, but anchos are obtained by drying ripe poblanos that have turned red in colour. Mulatos come from special varieties which are very dark in colour, grown for the sole purpose of producing mulato peppers; they are dried from dark green stages, to dark brown, like chocolate. When set next to each other, anchos and mulatos may look similar, but when opened and inspected against light, anchos are reddish and mulatos look very dark brown, almost black. Their flavour profiles are different as well and, together with the pasilla, form the traditional trinity of peppers for red moles. If mulato and cascabel are not available, using equal amounts of pasilla and ancho is another possibility.

** The first peppers are mild to medium hot; 2 dry hot peppers may be added for a spicier taste; I did not use any.

*** Some of the old recipes used fresh plums, but nowadays, most recipes omit them or call for prunes; I did not use them.

**** Some recipes use corn tortillas in addition to the bread; I omitted, but this could be a nice alternative for people with gluten intolerance.

***** Mexican chocolate tablets already contain sugar and often, cinnamon; if it is not possible to find them, substitute by using unsweetened chocolate for baking, adding raw sugar and increasing the amount of cinnamon in the recipe by just a pinch. For this recipe, the equivalent of 4 oz. of Mexican chocolate tablets would be 2 oz. of unsweetened chocolate and 1/4 cup of raw sugar.