Sauces / Peru

Ají Amarillo Paste

Peru's essential sunshine-yellow chili paste — fresh ají amarillo peppers blanched to tame their heat, then blended to a vivid, tropical-fruity, moderately spicy paste that defines the flavor of Peruvian cuisine.

Time 30 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 500 g Fresh ají amarillo peppers (or jarred, drained)
- ☐ 100 g White onion, roughly chopped
- ☐ 20 g Garlic cloves
- ☐ 30 g Neutral vegetable oil
- ☐ 5 g Fine sea salt
- ☐ 2000 g Water (for blanching)

Let's make it.

01 Working with gloves to protect your hands from the capsaicin, stem each ají amarillo and slice it lengthwise. Scrape out and discard the seeds and inner white membrane with a small spoon — this is where most of the capsaicin is concentrated. The flesh itself is moderately fruity-hot; removing seeds and membrane drops the heat from face-punching to assertive-pleasant. If the peppers are jarred, simply drain them, rinse once under cold water, and slice open to check for seeds to remove. You'll notice the vivid, saturated orange-yellow color of the flesh — this is annatto and capsanthin, and it's what will give your finished paste its extraordinary color.

02 Bring a large pot of unsalted water to a rolling boil. Drop the cleaned pepper halves in and blanch for exactly 3 minutes, then lift them out with a spider or slotted spoon and drain. Return fresh cold water to the pot (or use a second pot), bring it back to a boil, and blanch the peppers a second time for another 3 minutes. This double-blanching draws out a significant portion of the volatile capsaicin and the slight bitterness of the raw pith while preserving the vivid color and fruity-tropical character of the pepper. Taste a small piece after the second blanch: it should be pleasantly fruity-hot, not eye-watering. If it's still excessively hot, blanch a third time in fresh water. The bright orange-yellow color may deepen slightly to a richer gold.

03 Heat the vegetable oil in a small skillet over medium heat. Add the roughly chopped white onion and cook, stirring occasionally, for 6–8 minutes until it is soft, translucent, and lightly golden at the edges. Add the garlic cloves and cook for another 2 minutes, stirring, until the garlic is soft and fragrant but not browned. Add the drained, blanched ají amarillo peppers and stir to combine. Cook together for 3–4 minutes more, allowing the peppers, onion, and garlic to meld their flavors in the oil. The pan will smell intensely of the yellow pepper's fruity, warm character — a smell that is unmistakably Peruvian.

04 Transfer the contents of the pan — peppers, onion, garlic, and all the aromatic oil — into a blender. Add the salt. Blend on high speed for 90 seconds, stopping once to scrape down the sides. Blend until you have a completely smooth, vivid, deeply golden-orange paste with no visible pepper skin or onion pieces. Taste for salt. Transfer to a clean jar; a thin layer of oil poured over the surface before sealing will prevent oxidation. The paste keeps refrigerated for two weeks and frozen for three months. At its best, this paste smells like mango and chili and sunshine, and it defines the flavor of lomo saltado, causa, and ají de gallina.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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