Bread & baking / Mexico

Masa Harina Corn Tortillas

Thin discs of masa pressed by hand and cooked on a dry comal until they puff with trapped steam — the puff is not decoration, it is proof that the inside is alive and light, that the steam pocket will hold your fillings without crumbling.

Time 60 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 250 g Masa harina (Maseca or equivalent)
- ☐ 300 ml Warm water (around 50°C)
- ☐ 5 g Fine salt
- ☐ 10 g Lard or vegetable shortening

Let's make it.

01 Combine the masa harina and salt in a wide mixing bowl. Add the warm water all at once and use your hands to bring the mixture together, squeezing and pressing until a uniform dough forms. Add the lard or shortening in small pieces and work it in by folding and pressing until completely incorporated. The dough will seem too wet at first — keep working. The masa harina is very thirsty and will absorb the water within 2 to 3 minutes of active mixing. Once it comes together, knead for 2 full minutes. Cover with a damp kitchen towel and rest for 15 minutes — this rest is not optional. During this time the nixtamalized corn particles finish absorbing water and the fat distributes evenly, resulting in tortillas that are pliable rather than crumbly. After resting, test the dough by pressing it: it should not crack at the edges and should not stick aggressively to your palm. If it cracks, add water one teaspoon at a time. If it sticks heavily, lightly dampen your hands and work the moisture in without adding more water to the bowl.

02 Divide the dough into equal portions, approximately 35 to 40 grams each, and roll each into a smooth ball between your palms. Keep all balls covered under the damp cloth to prevent drying. To press: cut two circles from a zip-lock bag or use plastic wrap pieces slightly larger than a tortilla. Place one plastic circle on the bottom plate of a tortilla press. Place a dough ball slightly off-center toward the hinge side. Cover with the second plastic circle and close the press firmly, applying even, steady pressure through the handle. Open and rotate the tortilla 180 degrees, then press again to even out any thickness variation. The tortilla should be approximately 2 mm thick and 15 to 16 cm in diameter. If you do not have a tortilla press, place the dough ball between the two plastic sheets and press with the flat bottom of a heavy skillet, using your body weight leaning forward — the result is identical. Peel the plastic from one side, lay the tortilla on your palm, and peel the remaining plastic.

03 Heat a comal, cast-iron griddle, or heavy skillet over medium-high heat for at least 3 minutes until very hot — a drop of water should evaporate in under 2 seconds. Do not grease the surface. Lay the tortilla flat on the dry comal and cook for 45 to 60 seconds until the underside has a few light brown spots and the edges have lost their raw look. Flip and cook the second side for 45 to 60 seconds. At this point the tortilla will look mostly done but pale. Flip a final time and cook for 20 to 30 more seconds. During this final flip, if all has gone well, the tortilla will inflate dramatically — a large steam bubble puffing the two halves apart. This puff is the goal. It indicates the internal structure is complete and steam is trapped evenly between two fully cooked layers. Press any un-puffed spots gently with a folded cloth to encourage inflation. Transfer to a basket lined with a clean kitchen towel and fold the towel over the tortillas to trap steam and keep them soft.

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