Main dishes / Spain

# Gambas al Ajillo

Spain's most seductive tapa — prawns seared in an inferno of olive oil, garlic, and dried chile until the shells spit and sizzle, eaten straight from the clay cazuela with torn bread to drag through the garlicky oil.

**Time** 15 min **Servings** 4

## What you'll need.

- ☐ 400 g Raw prawns, shell-on and deveined
- ☐ 6 cloves Garlic, thinly sliced
- ☐ 60 ml Dry sherry (fino or manzanilla)
- ☐ 15 ml Fresh lemon juice
- ☐ 100 ml Extra-virgin olive oil
- ☐ 2 whole Dried guindilla peppers or red chile
- ☐ 15 g Fresh flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped
- ☐ 4 g Fine sea salt

## Let's make it.

**01** Pour the olive oil into a cazuela, heavy skillet, or cast-iron pan. Set over the highest heat your stove allows. Wait patiently — the oil needs to be genuinely ripping hot, shimmering and almost smoking, before anything else goes in. A thermometer reads around 180 C (356 F). This extreme heat is not optional: it's what causes the prawns to sear rather than steam, and the garlic to perfume rather than burn.

**02** Add the sliced garlic and whole dried chiles to the blazing oil in one confident movement. They will spit and sizzle violently — this is correct. Swirl the pan or use a wooden spoon to keep the garlic in constant motion. The window is narrow: you want the garlic golden at the edges, just slightly translucent at the center, with a nutty fragrance rising from the pan. About 30–45 seconds total.

**03** Season the prawns lightly with salt, then add them to the pan in a single layer. Do not crowd — if your pan is small, work in two batches. The prawns must make contact with the hot oil, not with each other. Let them sear undisturbed for 60–90 seconds until the underside has turned coral-pink and opaque halfway up the flesh. The shells should be starting to char at the edges. Then flip each prawn.

**04** Flip all prawns, then immediately pour in the dry sherry. The pan will roar and steam dramatically. The alcohol will flare briefly if you are on a gas stove — this is fine. Swirl the pan to dissolve the caramelized fond from the bottom and coat the prawns. Cook for 30 seconds more until the prawns are fully pink and the sherry has reduced to a glossy emulsion in the oil.

**05** Off the heat, squeeze the lemon juice directly over the prawns and scatter the chopped parsley. Swirl the pan once more to combine. The acid from the lemon will cut through the richness of the oil and lift the entire dish. Transfer immediately to a warmed cazuela or serve directly from the pan — gambas al ajillo must arrive at the table still sizzling, with the garlicky oil pooled at the bottom for bread.

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