

POLLO PULQUERO

One of my favorite Christmas presents is a new cookbook—and this year I got two of them. One of them is the latest by one of the best Mexican cooks around, Rick Bayless, chef and proprietor of Chicago's Frontera Grill. His new book is *Mexican Everyday*, and is full of delicious, easy to make recipes. Here's a one-dish chicken dinner which I made just last week. It's easy and delicious. The name, *pollo pulquero*, means chicken cooked in the style of the pulque-makers—pulque being a drink, like tequila, made from the leaves of the agave cactus. The dish is basically a slow-cooked chicken dish made with tomatillos, potatoes, fresh cilantro and pickled jalapenos. Here's how to do it.

Preheat your oven to 400 degrees. Peel and slice a medium to large white onion into quarter inch thick rounds. Cover the bottom of a Dutch oven with the onion rounds. Sprinkle with salt. Slice about a pound of Yukon Gold potatoes into quarter inch slices and layer them over the onions. Don't bother peeling them. Sprinkle the potatoes generously with salt. Layer a pack of boneless and skinless chicken thighs over the potatoes, and sprinkle the thighs with salt.

Rinse a bunch of cilantro and pull a loosely packed cup's worth of cilantro leaves off the stems, and sprinkle the cilantro over the chicken thighs. Peel the papery outer husks off of about 10 medium tomatillos, about a pound and a quarter. Cut them in quarter inch rounds and layer them over the cilantro. Sprinkle the tomatillo slices with salt. So now you've got a layer of onions, a layer of potatoes, a layer of chicken thighs, a layer of cilantro, and a layer of tomatillos.

Open a can of sliced pickled jalapeno peppers. You can get them in the Mexican food section of any local supermarket. Sprinkle about ¼ cup of the pickled peppers over the tomatillos, and sprinkle a couple of tablespoons of the pickling juice over everything. Cover and bake in your 400 degree oven for about 45 minutes, then uncover and bake for another 15 or 20 minutes longer to reduce the juices. Serve directly from the pot onto plates, ladling some of the juices over everything. This serves four. And you can substitute sweet potatoes for regular potatoes if you like.

If you own a slow cooker or crock pot, you can make this dish in that. Just layer everything as I described into the crock pot, cover and slow-cook on high for 6 hours or so. If there is a lot of liquid left in the pot, you may want to spoon it off or pull it off with a bulb baster into a small saucepan and boil it down so that it becomes thicker and rich. Use more of the pickled jalapenos if you like things really spicy. Serve some tortillas on the side.

That's all there is to it, and all you need to accompany it is a Mexican salad. Make a salad dressing with ¾ of a cup of olive oil, 1/3 cup fresh lime juice, about ½ teaspoon of grated lime rind, (the green party only), ½ cup chopped cilantro, and some salt, about a scant teaspoon. That's olive oil, lime juice, grated lime rind, cilantro and salt. Mix together a couple of cups of arugula or watercress with the same amount of romaine lettuce. Peel one jicama and cut it into sticks about a quarter of an inch thick and a couple of inches long—more or less. Toss the jicama with the greens and about ¼ cup of the dressing. Add more salt if needed, and serve.

This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Cook.