

Title: Resilient *Tamal*

Photographer: Andrea Mercedes Garcia

Description:

This photograph captures the scene of my children engaged in the process of making *tamales*. I began this tradition in my own home six years ago and now make all the *tamales*, with assembly help from my family. *Tamales*, that delightful, steamed deliciousness, wrapped and prepared as a gift for *Noche Buena*, possess a rich heritage deeply rooted in ancient Mesoamerican culture. Originating as a culinary tradition among the Aztec and Mayan civilizations, these savory delights were ingeniously crafted by wrapping a flavorful filling of *frijoles*, cheese, meat, or vegetables infused with zesty *chile* in a softened corn husk. My family roots on my mother's side are New Mexican. Our Hatch green and red *chile* create a unique and undeniable *sazón* that makes my *tamales* unforgettable. The corn husk not only imparts its distinctive shape but also serves as a vessel, preserving the essence of the filling within. At the heart of each *tamale* lies a core ingredient: *masa*, a corn dough meticulously prepared through the ancient nixtamalization process. This technique, involving soaking corn kernels in pickling lime, not only enhances the flavor and nutritional value but also pays homage to the reverence held for maize in Mesoamerican culture. Maize, revered as sacred for millennia, holds a central place in the spiritual and culinary traditions of Mexico, embodying the sustenance and wisdom bestowed by the earth mother. For Latinx families, the making of *tamales* transcends mere culinary preparation; it is a sacred ritual that binds generations together in a shared labor of love. It is an annual tradition that echoes ancestral wisdom and resilience, as each generation honors the heritage passed down through the ages. From the gathering of ingredients to the rhythmic assembly line of filling, wrapping, and steaming, the process of *tamale*-making is imbued with warmth, laughter, and cherished memories. *Tamales* represent more than just a delicious meal; they are a testament to resilience, cultural identity, and decolonial cooking. In a world where Indigenous traditions are often marginalized, the act of preparing and savoring *tamales* becomes an assertion of cultural pride and resistance. It is a reaffirmation of Latinx identity, a celebration of Indigenous wisdom, and a reclaiming of ancestral heritage. *Tamales* embody the spirit of Latinx culture, serving as a tangible link to the past while nourishing both body and soul. With each bite, one tastes the savory flavors and the decolonial legacy of resilience, connection, and cultural pride that transcends generations.

