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▸Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle.
▸Holding both ends of a banana leaf, drag leaf slowly over a burner on medium-high heat until it changes color slightly and becomes shinier (see Kitchen Notebook at gourmet.com). Repeat on other side of leaf, then toast remaining banana leaves.
▸Cut off tough edges from banana leaves with kitchen shears, then cut 8 (11-inch-square) pieces from leaves, discarding remainder. Put each leaf on a 12-inch-square piece of foil, then arrange 2 pieces of meat and some sauce in center of each leaf, using all of sauce, and top each mound with a bay leaf (or, if using California leaves, with half a bay leaf). Fold in all 4 sides of each banana leaf to enclose meat, then wrap tightly in foil. Arrange packages, seam sides up, in 1 layer in a large roasting pan and add just enough water to measure ⅛ inch in bottom of pan (about 2 cups).
▸Bake, adding more water as necessary to prevent pan from becoming dry, until meat is tender and falling off the bone (open 1 package to test), about 3½ hours for beef or 2½ hours for lamb. Discard foil and bay leaves and serve meat in banana leaves if desired (do not eat banana leaves).
COOKS' NOTES: Meat can be marinated, in bowl or enclosed in banana-leaf packages, up to 24 hours.
• Meat is best eaten from freshly baked banana-leaf packages, but leftovers keep 3 days. Reheat, wrapped in foil, in a 350°F oven, 20 to 30 minutes.

MEXICAN WHITE RICE

SERVES 8
ACTIVE TIME: 30 MIN START TO FINISH: 1¾ HR

Though this rice mainly functions to sop up the meat's red sauce, a quick sauté with garlic and onion and the use of chicken broth as well as water means it can hold its own.

- **3 cups long-grain white rice (1½ lb)**
- **1 cup finely chopped white onion**
- **2 large garlic cloves, finely chopped**
- **3 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- **1 cup reduced-sodium chicken broth**
- **4 cups water**

▸Bring about 6 cups water to a boil and pour over rice in a bowl. Soak rice until it has turned a more opaque white, 2 to 3 minutes. Drain well and spread out on a clean kitchen towel to dry, at least 1 hour.
▸Cook onion and garlic in oil in a wide 4- to 5-quart heavy pot or deep skillet over medium heat, stirring, until softened, about 3 minutes. Add rice and cook over medium-high heat, stirring, until pale golden, about 5 minutes, then add broth, water, and 2 teaspoons salt and bring to a boil. Cover tightly and cook over low heat until rice is tender, 18 to 20 minutes. Let stand, covered, 5 minutes, then fluff with a fork.
COOKS' NOTES: Rice can be soaked up to 4 hours.
• Rice will stay warm, covered, for about 30 minutes.

TOMATILLO GUACAMOLE

Adapted from Roberto Santibañez, Rosa Mexicano, New York City
MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS
ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 15 MIN

Epazote and tomatillo bring a bright zing to this guacamole, which cuts beautifully through the deep flavors of the beef in the mixiote de carne *(page 148).*

- **1½ teaspoons minced fresh serrano chiles, including seeds, or to taste**
- **1½ tablespoons chopped fresh epazote leaves or 1 teaspoon dried**
- **1 large garlic clove, minced**
- **1 tablespoon fresh lime juice, or to taste**
- **3 (8-oz) firm-ripe avocados**
- **6 oz small fresh tomatillos (about 6), husked, rinsed, and finely chopped**
- **⅓ cup minced white onion**

▸Stir together chiles, epazote, garlic, lime juice, and 1 teaspoon salt in a bowl, mashing slightly with a fork. Halve and pit avocados, then scoop flesh into chile mixture. Stir in tomatillos and onion, mashing avocado coarsely with fork.

SUSPIROS DE NOVIA

"SIGHS OF THE BRIDE" FRITTERS
Adapted from Estela Salas Silva
SERVES 8
ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 40 MIN

Their tongue-in-cheek name hints at the delicacy of these light, crisp disks, and a dusting of powdered sugar further emphasizes the analogy; but they also soak up some of the lime syrup from the mixed fruit (recipe follows) deliciously, taking on its cinnamon-floral qualities.

- **½ cup warm water**
- **2 large egg yolks**
- **2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted**
- **½ cup all-purpose flour**
- **About 1 cup olive oil for frying**
- **Confectioners sugar for dusting**

ACCOMPANIMENT: mixed fruit in cinnamon lime syrup (recipe follows)

▸Blend water, yolks, butter, flour, and ¼ teaspoon salt in a blender just until smooth.
▸Heat ¼ inch oil in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until it shimmers. Spoon ½ tablespoons of batter into oil, about 8 at a time, and fry (batter will flatten into thin 2-inch-wide disks), turning over once, until crisp and golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes total per batch. Transfer to paper towels to drain.
▸Cool fritters completely on a rack set over a tray. Dust generously with confectioners sugar and serve over fruit.
COOKS' NOTE: Fritters can be made 2 hours ahead and kept at room temperature.

MIXED FRUIT IN CINNAMON LIME SYRUP

Adapted from Estela Salas Silva
SERVES 8
ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 50 MIN

You won't believe how subtle lime can be here, bringing out the best in summer fruits without dominating them. Mexican cinnamon laces the fruit with its mild spice, and toasted pecans add a nutty crunch.

- **1 cup water**
- **1 cup sugar**
- **3 tablespoons fresh lime juice**
- **1 (8-inch) piece Mexican cinnamon stick (*canela*), broken into 4 pieces, or 1 (3-inch) piece regular cinnamon stick (cassia), halved**
- **3 lb mixed fresh fruit such as peaches, plums, and figs, cut into wedges**
- **1 lime, thinly sliced**
- **½ cup pecans, toasted (see Tips, page 203)**

▸Bring water, sugar, lime juice, and cinnamon to a boil in a small saucepan, stirring until sugar is dissolved, then simmer, uncovered, 5 minutes.
▸Stir together fruit and hot syrup in a shallow serving dish. Let stand at least 30 minutes. Just before serving, top with lime slices and pecans.
COOKS' NOTE: Fruit salad can be made 2 hours ahead and chilled. Bring to room temperature before serving.