

Salt and Serenity

Classic Chicken Tortilla Soup

Serves 6

2 medium dried New Mexico or Ancho chiles
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 medium onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, finely minced
1 fresh jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely diced
1 teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon diced oregano
¼ -½ teaspoon chipotle chile powder
1 teaspoon kosher salt
2 white corn tortillas, torn into pieces
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 28-ounce can Italian plum tomatoes, coarsely chopped or just squished with your hands!
6 cups chicken stock
1 rotisserie chicken from supermarket, skin and bones discarded, meat shredded
3 ears fresh corn on the cob, corn cut from cob, or 2 cups frozen corn
Juice of half a lime

For garnish:
1 lime, cut into wedges
1 cup whole cilantro leaves, washed and dried
1 avocado, peeled and diced
6 white corn tortillas, cut into ¼ inch wide strips
Vegetable oil (for shallow frying tortilla strips)

1. Heat a small heavy skillet over moderate heat until hot and toast dried chiles, one at a time, pressing down with tongs for a few seconds on each side to make more pliable. Wearing rubber gloves, seed and de-vein chiles. Put chiles in a medium heatproof bowl and cover with boiling water. Let sit to soften for about 20 minutes. Remove chiles from hot water and set aside.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons vegetable oil in a large (5-6 litre) heavy bottomed soup pot or Dutch oven. Add diced onions and cook on medium heat for

- about 7 minutes, until translucent. Add garlic and diced jalapeno and cook for another 3 minutes. Add cumin, oregano and chile powder. Stir well and cook for another 2 minutes.
3. Transfer onion mixture to blender. Add reserved rehydrated dried chiles, 2 torn corn tortillas, about 1/2 of the canned tomatoes and ½ cup of chicken stock. Puree mixture, starting blender on low and then gradually increasing speed until totally smooth.
 4. Add pureed mixture back to the soup pot. Add remaining canned tomatoes, and chicken stock. Add shredded chicken and simmer for 15 minutes on low heat. Add corn and simmer for an additional 10 minutes. Add juice of ½ a lime, just before serving.
 5. While soup is simmering, pour about 2 inches of vegetable oil in a shallow heavy bottom pan (a cast iron pan is ideal for this). Heat oil to 350°F. Add half the tortilla strips and fry until golden brown. Remove to a paper towel lined baking sheet. Sprinkle with salt while hot. Repeat with remaining tortilla strips.
 6. Ladle soup into bowls and top with cilantro, avocado and tortilla strips.