



# A Real Spice Girl

D.C. food star Pati Jinich brings Mexican cuisine home with a new book

Recipes for iguana — grilled, in tomato sauce, with peanuts — star in a cookbook in the packed library at Mexican-born, Chevy Chase, Md.-based chef Pati Jinich's house. But the South of the Border dishes Jinich trots out at her popular local cooking classes and on her PBS show, "Pati's Mexican Table" (season 3 starts in the fall), tend to be less exotic and far easier to prepare.

"Iguana can be tough, and it takes forever to cook," says Jinich, crinkling her gray-green eyes as she laughs. "What I look to do is cook the things I grew up with — beans, salads, vegetarian things — that break down the myths of Mexican cooking. It's not laborious, fatty or greasy."

It helps that Jinich, a vivacious, 40-something blonde, boasts a charming burner-side manner, all self-deprecating jokes, infectious laugh and insider info delivered in a lilting accent.

Many of her favorite homey, way-beyond-taco-salad-and-chimichanga

## Recipe File



### MEXICAN-STYLE PASTA (FIEDO SECO)

- **1½ pounds ripe tomatoes**
- **1 garlic clove**
- **½ cup coarsely chopped white onion**
- **¾ teaspoon kosher or coarse sea salt, or to taste**
- **¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**
- **3 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- **8 ounces spaghetti or angel hair, broken into smaller pieces**
- **2 cups chicken or vegetable broth**
- **2 bay leaves**
- **1 canned chipotle chile in adobo sauce, seeded if desired, plus 1-2 tablespoons adobo sauce (optional)**
- **½ cup Mexican crema, crème fraîche or sour cream**
- **½ cup crumbled queso fresco, Cotija, farmer cheese or mild feta**
- **1 ripe Hass avocado, halved, pitted, meat scooped out and sliced**

### Makes Four Servings

Place the tomatoes and garlic in a medium saucepan, cover with water, and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Simmer until the tomatoes are thoroughly softened and the skins have started to split, about 10 minutes.

Transfer the tomatoes and garlic, along with ½ cup of the cooking liquid, to a blender or food processor and let cool slightly. Add the onion, salt and pepper and puree until smooth.

Heat the oil in a large pot or casserole over medium heat. Add the pasta pieces and saute for 1 to 2 minutes, stirring constantly, until they are nicely browned and smell toasty; take care not to burn them. Stir in the tomato puree; it will sizzle and splatter. Cook, stirring often, until the puree thickens and darkens, 5 to 6 minutes.

Add the chicken broth, bay leaves, chipotle chile and the optional adobo sauce, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the pasta is tender and the tomato sauce has thickened further, 10 to 12 minutes. Discard the bay leaves.

Serve with the cream, cheese and avocado garnishes on top.



Reprinted with permission from "Pati's Mexican Table: The Secrets of Real Mexican Home Cooking" (\$30, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

recipes show up in her new cookbook, "Pati's Mexican Table: The Secrets of Real Mexican Home Cooking" (\$30, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). There's not a lizard casserole in sight. Instead, Jinich fills the pages with easy-to-prepare, nonstereotypical cuisine: Jicama-Orange Salad, Creamy Poblano Mahi Mahi and Mexican-Style Pasta (recipe, left).

Jinich, a Latin American policy analyst by trade, got passionate about her homeland's cooking after moving to the U.S. with her husband, Daniel, in the 1990s. "I became insanely nostalgic for Mexico and its food," she says. "I couldn't stop thinking about it."

### Party With Pati

Meet Pati Jinich as she signs her book, "Pati's Mexican Table: The Secrets of Real Mexican Home Cooking," at 2 p.m. Saturday at Barnes & Noble, Tysons Corner Center, 703-506-2937. Jinich will chat with Washington Post food writer Tim Carman at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday and dish up snacks at the Mexican Cultural Institute, 2829 16th St. NW. Free; reservations required; [rsvp@instituteofmexicocdc.org](mailto:rsvp@instituteofmexicocdc.org)

She apprenticed with barbecue pro Stephen Pyles on his Dallas PBS show before moving to Washington, D.C., in 2000. Though she had a day job, Jinich's heart was in flans and frijoles. She launched a series of cooking classes at D.C.'s Mexican Cultural Institute in 2007. Now, three or four times a year, she leads crowds of 100 people in plate-based virtual tours of Mexico.

"I jump not only into recipes, but also into the culture and history," Jinich says. This means sessions devoted to particular regions (the fish-centric Yucatan peninsula) or types of food (dishes prepared in convents). Backdropped by the institute's blue-and-white tile room, Jinich whips up salsa, soups and more on portable burners, reeling off anecdotes as she chars peppers or blends sauces.

Jinich's easygoing patter and doable recipes helped her land "Pati's Mexican Table" on PBS in 2011. It starts filming a third season soon, featuring similar how-to's in Jinich's sunny, Mexican-pottery filled kitchen.

"I just think Mexican food fits the American lifestyle," says Jinich, laughing. "It's accommodating, generous and not fussy." Kind of like Jinich herself.

JENNIFER BARGER (EXPRESS)