

# FLAVORS OF PARAGUAY

## A COOKBOOK

101 AUTHENTIC PARAGUAYAN RECIPES



WRITTEN AND EDITED  
BY  
LYNN VAN HOUTEN

ANTEATER  .....PRESS  
Petaluma, CA

### EMPANADAS DE ESPINACA (Spinach Empanadas)

In Paraguay yuca, also called manioc, is much appreciated not only as a root vegetable, but as a base for empanada dough. Although there are no eggs in this dough, it has incredible elasticity, which comes from the yuca. This recipe calls for a spinach filling, but other vegetables, such as Swiss chard or broccoli also work quite well (See Variations at end of recipe.)

#### Dough

12 ounces yuca, boiled  
4 tablespoons unsalted butter  
2 teaspoons coarse salt  
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

#### Filling

2 1/2 pounds fresh spinach, stems removed, washed, and drained, or 2 10-ounce packages frozen spinach, defrosted and drained  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
4 slices bacon, minced  
2 large cloves garlic, peeled and minced  
1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and finely chopped  
2 medium onions, peeled and finely chopped (2 cups)  
1/8 teaspoon grated nutmeg  
1 teaspoon ground fennel  
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves  
1/8 teaspoon ground mace  
1 teaspoon coarse salt  
3 sprigs fresh tarragon or basil or oregano, finely chopped

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1/4 pound fresh mozzarella or Fontina or Jarlsberg,  
coarsely grated or finely chopped  
2 quarts vegetable oil for frying  
Lemon wedges

1. After the yuca has been cooked and cored, and while it is still hot, place it in the bowl of a food processor. Add the butter and salt and blend until smooth. Add 1 cup of the flour and blend for a few seconds longer to make a dough. Add the remaining flour, 1/2 cup at a time, blending after each addition until all of the flour has been thoroughly absorbed. Transfer the dough to a bowl, dredge it with additional flour all around, and set aside in a cool place, undisturbed, for about 20 minutes, or until the dough has cooled to room temperature.

2. In a pot containing boiling water, blanch the fresh spinach for 1 second. Remove the spinach from the water to a colander and let drain. When cool enough to handle, squeeze out the water from the leaves, chop them, place them in a clean cloth, and squeeze, extracting and discarding any remaining water. Set aside.

3. If using defrosted frozen spinach, remove and discard the stems, chop the leaves, place them in a clean cloth and squeeze out all the water. Set aside. In a frying pan, heat the olive oil. Add the bacon and sauté over medium heat until the bacon has released most of its fat, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and hot pepper and stir. Add the onions, nutmeg, fennel, cloves, mace, and salt and cook until the onions start to get golden around the edges, about 8 minutes. Add 1/2 cup of water and the tarragon, lower the heat and continue

cooking until the water has evaporated, about 5 minutes. Add the spinach and cook, stirring for a few minutes longer. Remove from heat and set aside to cool. Just before assembling the empanadas, mix in the cheese and correct seasoning and salt to taste.

4. On a floured pastry board, knead the dough, dredging with flour as needed, for a minute or so, or until it is smooth, soft, and not sticky. Roll out the dough about 1/8 inch thick, shaping it into a 16-inch square. Cut into 4-inch squares, knead and re-roll the scraps to make additional squares. Place 1 full tablespoon of filling in the center of the square. Brush the edges with water and fold a corner of the dough over the filling to make a triangle. Press the edges together with your fingertips or the tines of a fork to seal. Repeat until all the empanadas are assembled.

5. In a fryer, heat the vegetable oil to between 365 and 375 degrees. Gently drop the empanadas into the hot oil and fry them until they are golden brown, about 6 minutes. Remove them from the oil, drain them on towels or paper towels and serve immediately, accompanied by lemon wedges.

#### Variations

For Swiss chard empanadas, substitute the same amount of Swiss chard for the spinach and follow the recipe exactly.

For broccoli empanadas substitute 1 to 1/2 pounds of broccoli for the spinach. Wash and chop the broccoli but do not blanch it. Add it instead of the spinach.

from *The Art of South American Cooking* by Felipe Rojas-Lombardi Harper Collins Publishers 1991 p.74.