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Cooking Tools & Equipment in a Mexican Kitchen

Mexican cooking doesn't require a lot of special equipment, you'll generally have a lot of what is needed in your kitchen already - such as electric blenders, mixer, strainers and skillets. You do, however, need a few items to increase your efficiency and make the time spent in the kitchen more fun. Below are a few of the most common used items in a Mexican kitchen that you might not have at hand, yet.

COMAL: A griddle basically, looks like a cast iron skillet but without the sides and with a handle. It is used dry, with no oil. A comal is essential for cooking tortillas

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and roasting ingredients that do not use oil. When a comal is not available, you can use a skillet or a flat griddle.

JUICE PRESSER: These are neat gadgets, made of cast iron with a cup to hold half a lime, orange or grapefruit, with a lever to press against the fruit to extract its juice, leaving the skin and seeds behind. Of course, a manual or electric juicer can also be used.

MOLCAJETE AND TEJOLOTE: Mortar and pestle, important for grinding herbs, seeds and spices. The bowl and grinder still in use all over Mexico goes back to ancient times as they are made from porous volcanic rock. The molcajete and tejolote need to be cured: first rinse well with water, no soap; with the pestle grind small amounts of rice several times until the resulting gray sand and grit is ground away. Rinse again and allow to air dry. Use to grind nuts, seeds, herbs, spices and to make salsa the ancient Mexican way.

TAMALE STEAMER: Sold in Mexican markets or you can make your own. First, you need a large stockpot, the largest size you can find and fit a metal colander on the bottom. Generally, the bottom is filled to several inches of water and brought to a boil, then the colander is placed on top with a foil lining to prevent contact with the water and the tamales are placed on the colander. The tamales are covered with a clean kitchen towel, then the pot is tightly covered to trap the steam and to cook the tamales.

ROLLING PIN: If you want to try your hand at flour tortillas, you need to roll them with a pin. Practice does make that perfect circle, eventually.

TORTILLA PRESS: Utensil consisting of two hinged flat plates of metal or wood with a handle that is pressed to flatten a ball of dough for corn tortillas.

From My Mexican Kitchen:
Techniques and Ingredients

Appetizers, Salsas and Snacks

Eggs, Cheeses, Sauces

Salads and Vegetables

Soups

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Tortillas and Breads

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PATI'S MEXICAN TABLE
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Comal

POSTED IN: KITCHEN TOOLS , THE BASICS
TAGS: ALUMINUM , CAST IRON , CLAY , COMAL , GRIDDLE , KITCHEN TOOL , NON STICK , PAN , TEFLON , UTENSIL
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An essential cooking tool in Mexican kitchens, a comal is a flat plate or griddle, typically made with cast iron and a rim around the edges. They are usually round and found in many sizes, though there are some rectangular versions too. There are also comales made with aluminum, and in later years it has become quite popular to use the non-stick/teflon versions as they are more user friendly.

Comales were traditionally made, for centuries, with clay. In the countryside there are plenty of homes and fondas that still use clay comales and tend to have one for making tortillas and corn masa foods and another for charring or toasting vegetables and spices (continue for more information and photos).

Here you can see the three different types of comales. In the back is a rectangular teflon, followed by an aluminum comal which is happily showing seasoning and aging signs, and up front is an old cast iron comal. Whichever comal you have, clean it lightly, with warm water, soap and a gentle sponge, so that if it is cast iron or aluminum it will slowly season and if it is teflon it will not scratch.

ABOUT ME

I am a cooking teacher, food writer and chef of the Mexican Cultural Institute in Washington D.C.

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Here is a more close up view...



Comales tend to be passed down through generations and are deeply esteemed. The comal that I treasure the most, up front in the above photos, comes from my mothers' kitchen. It has about of 40 years of cooking life, has a beautiful black color with dark brown areas and it is not completely flat. It has dents, chips and texture developed through time and travels, which speak its history every time I cook in it.

When I went to Yucatán in December of 2008 I got a very large silver colored aluminum

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When I went to Yucatán in December of 2008, I got a very large silver colored aluminum comal which is already starting to develop blackened areas throughout, but it will take a while for it to be seasoned and to flavor foods as intensely as my older comal.

Comales are used for many things such as cooking tortillas, sopas, quesadillas and other related masa foods; charring tomatoes, **tomatillos**, fresh chiles, onion and garlic; toasting seeds, nuts, dried chiles and other spices; cooking vegetables like nopales or catcús paddies, corn, big Texas style onions and scallions, among other things.

You can substitute a comal with any other kind of cast iron plate or griddle or a heavy dry skillet, preferably non-stick if making tortillas.

However, there are benefits from having your own comal. For one thing, as other Mexican kitchen tools such as molcajetes, aluminum and cast iron comales age with you, season with time and retain a memory of the flavors from their cooking life that permeates future foods cooked in them. Another benefit is that the comal infuses food with a rustic griddle flavor, lighter than a grill or smoker, but peculiar, rich and deep in its own way.

Comales are such an integral part of Mexican cuisine and culture that a town of one of Mexico's most famous novels is named after it. If you like reading, I recommend it! It is called *Pedro Páramo* by **Juan Rufo**. It tells the story of a man who travels to the hometown of his dying mother, and along the way he runs into a ghost town called Comala, which translates to a place that makes comales. The fictional town of Comala (though there is a real town called Comala too, if not more...) has probably become larger than the novel and even the author in Mexican folklore and culture. It is said that the author gave it this name because the fictional town was eternally burning hot, just like a comal, which is typically used for long periods of time, many times a day and takes a long while to cool off.

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Comments

I inherited my comal from my suegra and now I have no idea how I would live without it.

Lilly | August 28, 2009 12:14 PM | Reply

¡Hola, Patricia! Te escribo desde Puerto Rico. Encontré tu blog hace dos días cuando buscaba información sobre los comales. Tengo uno, que atesoro, el cual compré en una visita que hice a Guatemala. En una de las conexiones que brinda Google sale tu blog. Para mí ha resultado un tesoro descubierto.