

Stuffed Poblano Peppers with Kabocha, Black Beans, and Goat Cheese

Here's a slightly simplified take on *chiles rellenos* that makes me want fall to stick around. The peppers are baked to soften, instead of roasted and painstakingly peeled. I use kabocha squash, which doesn't require peeling either, and pan-fry the stuffed peppers in a simple egg and cornmeal coating, instead of deep-frying them.

If you're pressed for time, you can substitute a drained can of black beans for the dried ones I used; if you have more time, make your own tomatillo salsa.

I made these in two batches, stuffing all the peppers the first night, and battering, frying, and baking half of them the first night, half the second. It worked well. I imagine the stuffed peppers could be frozen, well wrapped, and simply thawed overnight before finishing – do let us know if you try freezing.

TIME: 2 1/2 hours, start to finish (with plenty of inactive time)

MAKES: 8 servings

1 cup dried black or red beans (such as Rio Zape)
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1 (3-pound) kabocha squash (green- or orange-skinned), scrubbed clean
8 poblano peppers (about 2 pounds total), left whole
3 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons olive oil
3/4 cup chopped onion
1 large garlic clove, finely chopped
1 teaspoon chopped fresh oregano
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
4 ounces goat cheese, crumbled
1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon heavy cream
2 large eggs
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup cornmeal
2 (12-ounce) jars smooth green salsa (mild to hot, per your preference)
2 cups shredded Monterey Jack or cheddar cheese (or a pre-shredded Mexican blend)

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Place the beans in a large pot with 5 cups water and 1/2 teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil, turn heat to low, and simmer until beans are tender, about 1 1/2 hours or more, depending on the beans. (The beans are done when blowing on them causes the skins to curl up away from the flesh.) Drain and set aside.

Meanwhile, line a large baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicon baking mat. Cut the squash into four quarters with a large knife. Scrape the seeds out with an ice cream scoop. Place the squash on the baking sheet, along with the peppers, and roast: The squash should bake until the skin is completely soft and slightly puffy, and a skewer

poked into the flesh goes all the way through without resistance, about 45 minutes. The peppers are done when the skins are wrinkled and the peppers begin to collapse, about 35 to 40 minutes. Transfer the peppers to a cutting board and set aside until cool enough to handle, and when the squash is soft, set aside to cool. Turn oven off.

While the vegetables cool, heat 2 teaspoons of the olive oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. When hot, add the onion, and cook for 5 minutes, until soft. Add the garlic, cook for a minute more, and remove from heat.

Working with one pepper at a time, use a small, sharp knife to make a 3” cut in the side of each pepper, starting near the stem. Using your fingers or the tip of the knife, carefully break the seed bunch off the stem (keeping the stem attached to the pepper, if possible), pull out all the seeds, and discard them. (Don’t worry if you don’t get every single seed.) Pour any liquid out of the pepper, and set aside.

Remove the squash’s tough stem and cut into roughly 1” pieces, skin and all – the squash will be mushy. Transfer the squash to a large mixing bowl, and add the drained beans, the reserved onion mixture, oregano, cumin, goat cheese, and 1/4 cup of the cream. Stir well to blend, and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Using a small spoon, gently stuff peppers with the squash mixture, folding the peppers back up over the filling so you can’t see any orange.

Preheat oven again to 350 degrees. Whisk the remaining tablespoon cream with the eggs to blend in a small bowl, then pour the egg mixture into a rimmed plate or wide, shallow bowl. Place the flour and cornmeal into two additional rimmed plates, and season all three plates with salt and pepper.

Heat a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Add 2 tablespoons olive oil. Working with one pepper at a time, roll the pepper first lightly in flour, then in the egg mixture, then in cornmeal, then add to the hot oil. Coat 3 more peppers and add to the pan. Cook for 3 to 5 minutes per side, until toasty brown all over, adjusting the heat as necessary. Transfer fried peppers to a paper towel-lined plate to drain. Add the remaining tablespoon of oil to the pan, and repeat with the remaining peppers.

Spread the salsa in a 9” by 13” baking dish (or divide it between two smaller dishes). Arrange the peppers on top of the salsa, top each pepper with about 1/4 cup cheese, and bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until the cheese is melted and bubbling. Serve immediately, with the salsa scooped on top.