

calabacitas

This is a dish that I grew up with. We often had this with beans and rice and tortillas. Calabacitas means little squash. It is a classic Mexican side dish but I don't know where it originates. Squash itself comes from Oaxaca and was an integral part of the pre-Hispanic diet. I remember my grandmother cutting big chunks of sharp cheddar cheese and tucking it into the dish towards the very end. My mom continued on the tradition of making this dish and made it often through my vegetarian teen years. It is a fantastic way to use summer zucchini and tomatoes. It is very simple to make and you can make it vegan by omitting the cheese.

I love adding fresh epazote to mine.

- Nikki Guerrero, Owner & Salsera, [Hot Mama Salsa](#)

INGREDIENTS

2-3 large Roma or paste tomatoes
2 zucchini squash
1 white onion
2 cloves garlic
2 ears of fresh sweet corn or 2 cups frozen corn
1 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. Mexican oregano
epazote (optional)
2 Tablespoons olive oil
1/2 cup sharp cheddar cheese
sea salt

DIRECTIONS

Cut onion in small bite size dice. Mince garlic. Cut zucchini in half lengthwise if small, if your zucchini is large cut it in half lengthwise once again. Shuck corn and cut the kernels off the cob. Dice tomatoes, squeezing out and discarding any extra moisture.

Heat olive oil in a sauté pan and add onions and zucchini. Cook until they just begin to caramelize (about 5 minutes) then add the garlic and stir for another minute. Add cumin and Mexican oregano, crush oregano in your hands as you add it to release the flavors. Do not over do the cumin, a little goes a long way.

Add in the diced tomatoes, reduce heat and cover. Cook until the zucchini is soft. Remove the cover, add the fresh sweet corn and cheese. My grandmother would cut big hunks and tuck it into the squash, you can add it grated as well. Cover again and cover for another two minutes until the cheese has melted and the corn warms through. Stir together and add salt to taste. I like to add fresh chopped epazote when I have it from the garden. Enjoy!

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illustration by Izah Baird