

# DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS

Ellise Pierce, a homesick American in Paris, parlays her love of Tex-Mex cuisine into a book of delicious down-home recipes



## CHICKEN EMPANADAS WITH CILANTRO YOGURT

Makes about 4 dozen

### INGREDIENTS

- 2¼ cups flour
- 1 tsp sea salt
- ½ cup butter, cut into small pieces and refrigerated
- 2 eggs
- ⅓ cup ice water (or a little less)
- 1 tbsp white vinegar
- canola oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 1 roasted red bell pepper, diced, homemade or purchased
- ½ tsp cumin
- ¼ tsp cayenne pepper
- Cilantro Yogurt (recipe below)

1. First, make dough. Whisk together the flour and salt. Add the pieces of cold butter – either with a pastry cutter or pulsing in a food processor – cut in the butter only until the mixture resembles coarse meal with small pieces that look like pebbles.

2. Whisk one of the eggs with the water and vinegar in a small bowl. Add this to the flour mixture, and blend just until the wet and dry ingredients are incorporated, but it's still a bit crumbly. Don't overmix. Dump the dough directly onto a piece of plastic wrap, fold over the plastic wrap, and form dough into a disc. Refrigerate for 1 hour.

3. While the dough is chilling, make the filling. Put a little canola oil into a large skillet, along with the onion and garlic, and turn the heat to medium-low. Cook for a few minutes, just until the onion becomes translucent. Then add the chicken, bell pepper, cumin, cayenne and pinch of sea salt. Stir, reduce the heat to low and after about 10 minutes, turn off the heat. Let the chicken cool completely before you stuff the empanadas.

4. To make the empanadas, preheat the oven to 375° F, and line a couple of cookie sheets with parchment paper. Roll out the dough and, using a biscuit cutter, cut out 3¼-inch circles, and place these on the cookie sheets. Top each with a spoonful of the chicken mixture, fold the dough over and press the edges together with a fork. Whisk the second egg with a little water and brush this over the dough, especially around the edges to seal them. Cook for about 10 minutes or until the edges begin to brown. You can freeze the empanadas; simply reheat later for about 25 minutes at the same temperature.

### Cilantro Yogurt

Makes about 1½ cups

- 1¼ cup Greek yogurt
- a small handful of fresh cilantro, chopped
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh chives
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- juice of 1 lime
- pinch of cumin
- pinch of cayenne pepper
- sea salt

Mix everything together in a small bowl and refrigerate for 1 hour. Taste again before serving and adjust seasonings to taste.



## FISH TACOS WITH MANGO-AVOCADO SALSA

Makes 10 to 12 tacos

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 mango, chopped
- 1 avocado, chopped
- 2 tbsp finely chopped red onion
- 1 jalapeño, finely chopped
- small handful of fresh cilantro, chopped
- juice of 1 lime
- pinches of sea salt, divided
- ½ cup cornmeal

- ¼ tsp cayenne pepper
- ¼ cup buttermilk
- 1 lb medium-firm white fish fillets, such as halibut, cut into 2-inch chunks
- corn oil, for frying
- 10 to 12 corn tortillas
- 3 to 4 limes, sliced into wedges, for serving

1. Gently toss together the mango, avocado, red onion, jalapeño, cilantro and lime juice. Taste and add a pinch or two of salt.

2. Whisk together cornmeal and cayenne pepper with a big pinch of salt. Pour buttermilk into a bowl. Dip fish pieces in buttermilk, and then roll them around in the cornmeal mixture. Shake off excess. Add just enough corn oil to the bottom of a large skillet to coat it and turn heat to medium-high. When it's hot, add fish, turning when one side is brown. This whole process will only take a couple of minutes, since fish cooks quickly. Top corn tortillas with a few pieces of fish and serve with mango salsa and lime wedges. ▶



## RICE PUDDING WITH SALTY CARAMEL SAUCE

Serves 8

### INGREDIENTS

- 4¾ cups milk
- 7 tbsp sugar, divided
- ¾ cup Arborio or another short-grain rice
- ½ tsp sea salt
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 cup cream
- Salty Caramel Sauce (recipe below)

1. Combine the milk, 5 tbsp of sugar, rice and sea salt in a heavy saucepan over medium-high heat and bring to a boil.

2. After it boils, reduce heat to a simmer and cook until the rice is tender and the mixture is thick and porridge-like, but still has some liquid. The rice will continue to absorb the milk after it has cooled. Stir every now and then; be patient as this will take 20 to 35 minutes. When it's ready, remove from the heat, pour into a bowl and add the vanilla. Let cool before covering with plastic wrap, making sure to press the plastic

down on to the top of the pudding, so you don't get "pudding skin." Refrigerate for a few hours or until it's completely cool.

3. A half-hour before you want to serve the pudding, beat the cream and remaining 2 tbsp of sugar until medium peaks form. Fold into the chilled pudding and refrigerate. Serve rice pudding in big bowls with warm caramel sauce on the side.

### Salty Caramel Sauce

Makes about 2 cups

- 1½ cups sugar
- ¼ cup water
- ½ cup butter
- ¾ cup crème fraîche or sour cream
- 1 tsp sea salt (see Cowgirl Tip)

1. Use a long wooden spoon, and your heaviest, deepest pot to reduce caramel splatters.

2. Put the sugar and water in the pot, give it a stir or two so it combines and turn the heat to medium-high. Now, just leave it alone. It will

bubble continuously. Don't even think about stirring the pot. The less you mess with caramel, the better. After 10 to 15 minutes, you'll notice the sugar beginning to darken around the edges of the pot. Do not stir, but you may pick up the pot and give it a gentle swirl. The sugar may look odd and crackly at this point, but don't worry. Soon, the bubbling sugar will turn into a bubbling foam, which means that you're getting very close.

3. Watch for the colour to turn to amber, and when it does, remove from the heat, add the butter and crème fraîche (or sour cream) and sea salt. Stand back so you don't get splattered. It will bubble up like crazy, but it will calm right down. Once it does, stir with wooden spoon until the butter and crème fraîche (or sour cream) is completely incorporated.

4. Pour this into a glass bowl to cool and then refrigerate. To serve, simply rewarm over very low heat.

**Cowgirl tip** Use fleur de sel, if you can, for your Salty Caramel Sauce. It's light and will make a huge difference.



When Texas journalist Ellise Pierce fell in love with a Frenchman and moved to Paris, she thought settling in would be as easy as unpacking her cowboy boots. But she found herself out of work, disoriented and in despair. To cope, Ellise sought solace in the kitchen, making cherished meals

from back home. Her spicy southwest-inspired creations – with a haute French twist, naturally – soon became so popular with fellow ex-pats that she was able to whip up a new life in France as a caterer and cooking teacher. Her first book, *Cowgirl Chef*, shares her unique fusion fare. From the Tex-Mex Tart to the Crunchy Carrot Salad With Lime, these delectable dishes give you the best of both French and Texan flavours. – TARA HENLEY **H**