

Chilorio Tacos

Ingredients

Boneless pork shoulder	3 lbs.	Cider vinegar	¼ cup
Fresh orange juice	2 cups	Kosher salt	3 tsp.
Dried ancho chiles	8 medium	Lard	¼ cup
Garlic cloves	8	Corn or flour tortillas	24
Mexican oregano	2 tsp.	Tomatillo salsa	1½ cups
Black pepper, ground	1 tsp.	White onion, chopped	1½ cups
Ground cumin	½ tsp.	Fresh cilantro, chopped . . .	1½ cups

Directions

Preheat oven to $325^{\circ}F$ — Trim **pork shoulder** of about half the visible fat — Cut **pork** into 1-inch cubes — Stem and seed **ancho chiles** — Tear **chiles** into large pieces — Peel and roughly chop **garlic** — Juice fresh **oranges** — Chop **onion** and **cilantro** for serving

1. Heat a dry cast-iron skillet or comal over medium heat. Working in batches, toast **ancho chile** pieces for *15-30 seconds* per side until fragrant and slightly darkened. Be vigilant—burned **chiles** turn bitter. Transfer to a bowl.
2. In a blender, combine **orange juice**, toasted **ancho chiles**, **garlic**, **oregano**, **black pepper**, **cumin**, **vinegar**, and 3 tsp. **kosher salt**. Blend on high until completely smooth, about *1-2 minutes*. Strain through a medium-mesh sieve into a bowl, pressing solids to extract maximum flavor. Discard solids.
3. Heat a large Dutch oven (at least 6-quart capacity) over medium-high heat. Working in batches to avoid crowding, sear **pork cubes** on at least two sides until deeply golden brown, about *3-4 minutes* per side. Remove to a plate. The rendered **pork fat** left in the pot will contribute to the final dish—do not discard.

4. Pour the strained **chile mixture** into the Dutch oven. Return all **pork** to the pot, stirring to coat evenly. The liquid should come about halfway up the **pork**—add water if needed. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat.
5. Cover tightly with lid and transfer to 325°F oven. Braise for $2\frac{1}{2}$ -3 hours, checking occasionally, until **pork** is completely tender and easily pulls apart with a fork. Internal temperature should reach 195 - 205°F . The braising time allows tough shoulder fibers to break down into tender strands.
6. Transfer **pork** to a large bowl using a slotted spoon. Let the **braising liquid** settle for 5 minutes, then skim excess fat from the surface (reserve this fat—it's flavorful). If more than 1 cup of **braising liquid** remains, return pot to stovetop and reduce over high heat to approximately 1 cup.
7. Using two forks or your fingers, shred the **pork** into coarse pieces. Discard any large pieces of fat or connective tissue.
8. Heat **reserved fat** and/or **lard** in a very large (12-inch) skillet over medium-high heat. When shimmering hot, add the shredded **pork** in a single layer (work in batches if necessary). Let it sear undisturbed for 2-3 minutes, then stir and continue cooking until the **pork** develops brown, crispy edges, about 3-4 minutes total.
9. Add 1 cup of the reduced **braising liquid** to the skillet. Cook, stirring frequently, until the liquid reduces to a thick glaze that coats the **pork**, about 5-7 minutes. The **chilorio** should appear glossy and concentrated, not soupy.
10. Taste and adjust seasoning with additional **salt** if needed—usually about $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. more. The finished **chilorio** should be intensely flavored, with pronounced smoky-sweet notes from the **chiles** and caramelized **pork** edges.
11. Serve immediately with warm **tortillas**, **salsa**, and the **onion-cilantro** mixture. **Chilorio** is traditionally served in flour tortillas, though corn tortillas are equally appropriate.

Equipment Required

- 6-quart (or larger) Dutch oven with tight-fitting lid
- Cast-iron skillet or comal for toasting chiles
- High-powered blender (at least 500 watts)
- Medium-mesh strainer or china cap
- Large (12-inch) skillet for finishing
- Slotted spoon or spider
- Two forks for shredding
- Large mixing bowl
- Sharp chef's knife
- Cutting board
- Kitchen tongs
- Instant-read thermometer
- Fat separator (optional, for braising liquid)

Mise en Place

- Trim **pork shoulder** the day before and refrigerate overnight—this allows surface moisture to evaporate, promoting better searing
- Bring **pork** to room temperature *30-45 minutes* before cooking
- Toast and blend **chile mixture** up to *24 hours* ahead; refrigerate until needed
- Prepare all garnishes before beginning the finishing step
- Have all equipment and ingredients measured and ready—the finishing stage moves quickly

Ingredient Tips

- **Pork shoulder:** Select well-marbled meat with visible fat striations. Avoid pre-trimmed "lean" cuts—fat equals flavor and moisture. Bone-in shoulder works but requires longer cooking; boneless is easier to cube uniformly
- **Ancho chiles:** Choose pliable, leathery **chiles** that bend without cracking. Avoid brittle, dusty specimens—they're stale and bitter. Fresh **anchos** have a slightly fruity aroma. Store in cool, dark pantry up to *6 months*
- **Mexican oregano:** Distinct from Mediterranean oregano—more citrusy and less minty. If unavailable, substitute half the amount of dried marjoram plus a pinch of dried thyme
- **Orange juice:** Fresh-squeezed is vastly superior. The natural sugars caramelize during reduction, adding depth. Avoid juice with added sugar or preservatives
- **Lard:** Provides authentic flavor and high smoke point. Leaf lard (from kidney region) is highest quality. Vegetable oil works but lacks the richness traditional **chilorio** demands
- **Cumin:** Toast whole seeds in a dry pan, then grind fresh for maximum aromatics. Pre-ground **cumin** loses potency rapidly

Preparation Tips

- **Chile toasting:** Watch constantly—**anchos** toast quickly. You'll smell a pronounced aroma when done. Dark spots are acceptable; black, acrid smoke means burned

- **Searing:** Don't crowd the pot. **Pork** releases moisture initially; give space for evaporation. The fond (browned bits) stuck to the pot adds critical flavor—the **braising liquid** will deglaze it
- **Braising:** Resist the urge to check frequently. Each lid removal drops temperature *25-30°F*, extending cooking time. Check once at *2 hours*, then at *30-minute* intervals
- **Shredding:** Don't over-shred. Coarse chunks hold texture better during the final sear. Aim for rustic, irregular pieces
- **Finishing:** High heat is essential. The **pork** should sizzle audibly. This Maillard browning develops the characteristic crispy edges and concentrated flavor
- **Glaze consistency:** The **braising liquid** should coat the back of a spoon. Too thin means insufficient reduction; too thick becomes sticky rather than glossy
- Leftover finished **chilorio** keeps *5 days* refrigerated. Reheat gently in a skillet with a splash of water to restore glaze
- Do not freeze finished **chilorio**—the crispy texture degrades
- **Chile adobo:** The strained sauce freezes beautifully for *6 months*. Portion into ice cube trays for convenient use in other dishes

Serving Suggestions

- Traditional Sinaloa service: **Flour tortillas**, **arbol-tomatillo salsa**, diced **white onion**, **cilantro**, and **lime** wedges
- Alternative applications: Burritos, tortas (Mexican sandwiches), quesadillas, tostadas, or served over rice with **refried beans**
- Beverage pairing: Mexican lager, hibiscus agua fresca, or a crisp white wine (Albariño or unoaked Chardonnay) to balance the rich fat and chile heat
- Complementary sides: Pickled jalapeños, curtido (fermented cabbage slaw), or grilled scallions
- For breakfast: Serve with scrambled eggs, fried potatoes, and warm tortillas
- Garnish finished tacos with crumbled queso fresco or Cotija for salty contrast
- The rendered **pork fat** skimmed from **braising liquid** can be saved and used to fry tortillas for chilaquiles or to enrich **refried beans**

Make Ahead & Storage

- Complete through step 7 (braising and shredding) up to *3 days* ahead. Refrigerate **shredded pork** and **braising liquid** separately
- For longer storage, freeze **shredded pork** in **braising liquid** up to *3 months*. Thaw overnight in refrigerator
- Perform the final searing and glazing just before serving for optimal texture