

Verde Chicken Enchiladas

Ingredients

Chicken thighs, bone-in	3 lb.	Fresh cilantro, chopped	1/2 cup
Mexican spice blend	5 Tbsp.	Lime juice	2 Tbsp.
Water	3 cups	Ground cumin	1 tsp.
Better Than Bouillon, chicken	1 Tbsp.	Mexican oregano	1 tsp.
Tomatillos, canned	28 oz.	Salt (divided)	1 1/2 tsp.
Jalapeños, medium	2	Black pepper	1/2 tsp.
White onions, medium (divided)	3	Vegetable oil (divided)	3 Tbsp.
Red bell pepper	1	Corn tortillas (6-inch)	14–16
Bay leaf	1	Monterey Jack cheese, shredded	16 oz.
Tangerine or mandarin	1	Queso fresco, crumbled	4 oz.
Garlic cloves (divided)	10		

Directions

Preheat oven to 400°F — Grease a 9 inch×13 inch baking dish — Drain **tomatillos**, reserving 1 cup liquid; set **tomatillos** and reserved **tomatillo liquid** aside in *Medium Bowl #1* — Finely chop 1 **white onion** and 1 **red bell pepper**; set aside in *Medium Bowl #3* — Halve **jalapeños** lengthwise and remove seeds and ribs — Quarter 1 **white onion** — Peel 4 **garlic cloves** — Combine **jalapeños**, quartered **onion**, and **garlic cloves** in *Medium Bowl #2* (roasting aromatics) — Chop **cilantro**; set aside in *Small Bowl #1* — Juice **lime**; set aside in *Small Bowl #2* — Crumble **queso fresco**; set aside in *Small Bowl #3* — Combine 1 tsp. **cumin** and 1 tsp. **oregano** in *Small Bowl #4* (sauce spices) — Shred **Monterey Jack cheese**; set aside in *Large Bowl #1*

1. Prepare **chicken broth**: Combine 3 cups **water** and 1 Tbsp. **Better Than Bouillon** in a measuring cup, stirring until dissolved.
2. Heat a large frying pan over *medium-high* heat until hot. Place $2\frac{1}{2}$ lb. **chicken thighs** skin-side down in the dry pan (no oil). Cook for *6–8 minutes* until skin is crisp and releases easily from the pan. Flip **chicken** and cook for *5 minutes* on the other side until lightly browned. Transfer **chicken** to a plate and set aside.
3. Reduce heat to *medium* and sauté finely chopped **onion** and **bell pepper** (*Medium Bowl #3*) in the rendered **chicken fat** for *5–7 minutes* until softened and beginning to brown. Transfer to *Large Bowl #2* and set aside.
4. Rough chop 1 **white onion** and place in Instant Pot. Smash 6 **garlic cloves** and add to the pot. Add 1 **bay leaf**, 5 Tbsp. **Mexican spice blend**, the juice of 1 **tangerine or mandarin**, and 3 cups prepared **chicken broth**. Stir to combine. Place **chicken thighs** from the pan on top. Seal Instant Pot and cook on *high* pressure for *15 minutes*, then wait *10 minutes* before manually releasing remaining pressure.

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5. While **chicken** cooks, roast the aromatics: Arrange **jalapeños**, quartered **onion**, and **garlic cloves** (*Medium Bowl #2*) on a rimmed baking sheet, placing **jalapeños** cut-side down. Drizzle with 1 Tbsp. **vegetable oil** and toss to coat. Roast at 400°F for *15-20 minutes* until **jalapeños** are blistered and slightly charred, **onion** is softened and browned at edges, and **garlic** is golden and tender. **Jalapeños** are done when skin is blistered and peppers feel soft when pressed. Remove from oven and let cool slightly.
6. When Instant Pot is ready, wait *10 minutes*, then manually release remaining pressure. Transfer **chicken** to a plate and let rest for *5-10 minutes* until cool enough to handle. Strain the **broth** through a fine-mesh sieve and reserve 1 cup in *Large Bowl #2* for the filling, and the remainder in *Medium Bowl #2* for the verde sauce.
7. Discard skin and bones from **chicken**, then shred into bite-sized pieces; set aside in *Large Bowl #2*.
8. Add the reserved 1 cup **chicken broth** to the shredded **chicken** and sautéed **onion** and **bell pepper** in *Large Bowl #2*. Combine well. Set aside.
9. Transfer roasted **jalapeños**, **onion**, and **garlic** to a blender. Add **tomatillos** and 1 cup reserved **tomatillo liquid** (*Medium Bowl #1*), 1 tsp. **cumin** and 1 tsp. **oregano** (*Small Bowl #4*), 1 tsp. **salt**, and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. **black pepper**. Blend on high for *1-2 minutes* until completely smooth.
10. Heat 2 Tbsp. **vegetable oil** in a large saucepan over medium-high heat until shimmering. Carefully pour in the blended **sauce** (it will sputter). Stir in remaining reserved **chicken broth** (*Medium Bowl #2*). Reduce heat to medium and simmer, stirring occasionally, for *20 minutes* until sauce darkens slightly, loses its raw flavor, and reaches the desired consistency. The sauce is ready when it coats the back of a spoon without running off immediately, is thick enough to cling to the tortillas when dipping, but still pourable for spreading over the enchiladas. Remove from heat and stir in **cilantro** (*Small Bowl #1*) and **lime juice** (*Small Bowl #2*). Taste and adjust **salt** (add remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. if needed).
11. Transfer approximately 2 cups of warm **sauce** to a wide, shallow bowl or pie pan for dipping tortillas; keep remaining sauce warm in the saucepan.
12. Warm **corn tortillas** in the microwave wrapped in a damp paper towel for *1 minute*, or heat briefly on a griddle until pliable. Working one at a time, dip each **tortilla** completely in the warm **sauce** from the bowl, coating both sides (about 2-3 seconds total). Let excess drip off briefly.
13. Place sauce-coated **tortilla** on a plate. Spoon 2-3 Tbsp. **filling** (*Large Bowl #2*) down the center, then sprinkle with 1 Tbsp. **Monterey Jack cheese** (*Large Bowl #1*). Roll tightly and place seam-side down in the prepared baking dish. Repeat with remaining **tortillas**, arranging them snugly in the pan.
14. Pour only enough warm **sauce** from the saucepan to cover the **enchiladas** fully and evenly; reserve the remainder in the saucepan for serving. Sprinkle remaining **Monterey Jack cheese** (*Large Bowl #1*) evenly over the top, then scatter **queso fresco** (*Small Bowl #3*) over the cheese.
15. Reduce oven temperature to 375°F . Bake for *25-30 minutes* until cheese is melted and bubbly, sauce is bubbling around edges, and enchiladas are heated through. Enchiladas are done when cheese is golden brown in spots, sauce is actively bubbling, and center of pan feels hot when tested with a knife. Continue baking in *2 minute* increments if needed.
16. Let rest for *5 minutes* before serving. Pour reserved warm sauce over individual servings. Garnish with additional cilantro if desired. Serve hot.

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Yield

- Serves 4-6 as main course
- Makes 12-14 enchiladas in a 9 inch×13 inch baking dish

Equipment Required

- Instant Pot (6-quart or larger)
- Large frying pan (12-inch or larger)
- Rimmed baking sheet
- Large saucepan (3-4 quart)
- High-powered blender
- Fine-mesh strainer
- 9 inch×13 inch baking dish
- Wide shallow bowl (for dipping tortillas)
- Small prep bowls (4)
- Medium prep bowls (3)
- Large prep bowls (2)
- Tongs or slotted spoon
- Measuring cups and spoons

Mise en Place

- Small Bowl #1 — chopped **cilantro** ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup)
- Small Bowl #2 — **lime juice** (2 Tbsp.)
- Small Bowl #3 — crumbled **queso fresco** (4 oz.)
- Small Bowl #4 — sauce spices: 1 tsp. **cumin**, 1 tsp. **oregano**
- Medium Bowl #1 — drained **tomatillos** and reserved **tomatillo liquid** (1 cup)
- Medium Bowl #2 — **jalapeños**, quartered **onion**, and **garlic cloves** for roasting (used in step 5), then reserved **chicken broth** for verde sauce (remainder after 1 cup reserved for filling, after step 6)
- Medium Bowl #3 — finely chopped **white onion** and **red bell pepper** (used in step 3)
- Large Bowl #1 — shredded **Monterey Jack cheese** (16 oz.)
- Large Bowl #2 — sautéed **onion** and **red bell pepper** (after step 3), then reserved **chicken broth** for filling (1 cup, after step 6), then shredded **chicken** (after step 7), then **filling** (after step 8)
- Prepare **chicken broth** with Better Than Bouillon before starting
- Roast aromatics while **chicken** cooks in Instant Pot

Ingredient Tips

- **Chicken:** Bone-in thighs provide richer broth and more flavor; boneless work but reduce broth amount
- **Mexican spice blend:** Your prepared blend adds depth; adjust amount based on heat preference

- **Tomatillos, canned:** Look for firm tomatillos in water (not heavy brine); 28 oz. is standard can size
- **Jalapeños:** 2 medium jalapeños with seeds removed yields mild-medium heat; add seeds for more heat
- **Monterey Jack:** Melts beautifully and provides creamy texture; can substitute with Colby Jack
- **Queso fresco:** Adds texture contrast and mild saltiness; feta can substitute but is saltier
- **Corn tortillas:** Slightly day-old tortillas absorb sauce better; warm thoroughly before dipping
- **Cilantro:** Add at the end to preserve bright, fresh flavor
- **Lime juice:** Fresh is essential for brightness; bottled lacks complexity

Preparation Tips

- Roasting **jalapeños**, **onion**, and **garlic** creates depth and mellow raw flavors; blistered skin on peppers indicates proper roasting
- Blending sauce until completely smooth ensures even texture; no chunks should remain
- Frying the blended sauce concentrates flavor and cooks out raw taste; sauce darkens and thickens as it reduces
- Simmering with **chicken broth** integrates flavors and adds body; sauce should coat a spoon without being too thick
- Adding **cilantro** and **lime juice** at the end preserves brightness; adding too early causes them to lose vibrancy
- Dipping **tortillas** in warm sauce makes them pliable and prevents cracking during rolling
- Don't overfill **enchiladas**—2-3 Tbsp. **chicken** per tortilla prevents bursting
- Note: There may be leftover **filling** depending on tortilla size and filling amount used; reserve for another use or serve alongside **enchiladas**
- Arranging **enchiladas** snugly in the pan prevents them from unrolling during baking
- Sauce should cover **enchiladas** completely but not pool excessively; adjust amount if needed
- Resting after baking allows sauce to set slightly and makes cutting easier
- Recipe makes approximately 4-5 cups sauce; use 2 cups for dipping, remainder for topping

Make Ahead & Storage

- **Chicken** can be cooked and shredded 1 day ahead; store separately from broth
- **Verde sauce** can be made 1-2 days ahead; refrigerate and reheat gently before using
- Add **cilantro** and **lime juice** to sauce just before using if made ahead

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- Assembled **enchiladas** can be refrigerated *4 hours* before baking; add *5 minutes* to baking time
- Leftovers keep *3-4 days* refrigerated; reheat individual portions at *350°F* for *10-15 minutes*
- Sauce can be frozen for *3 months*; thaw and reheat gently, adding fresh **cilantro** and **lime juice**
- **Enchiladas** don't freeze well—corn tortillas become mealy when frozen and thawed
- **Avocado** slices or **guacamole** complement the tangy sauce
- **Pickled jalapeños** add heat and acidity
- Serve with a crisp green salad with lime vinaigrette for contrast

Serving Suggestions

- Serve immediately while **cheese** is bubbly and **enchiladas** are hot
- Traditional serving is *2-3* **enchiladas** per person as a main course
- Pair with **Mexican rice** and **refried beans** for a complete meal
- Garnish with additional **cilantro**, **lime wedges**, and **diced white onion**
- **Sour cream** or **Mexican crema** adds richness and cools heat

Heat Level Options

- Mild: Use *2* **jalapeños** with all seeds and ribs removed (as written)
- Medium: Use *2* **jalapeños** with seeds from *1* pepper included
- Medium-Hot: Use *2* **jalapeños** with all seeds included, or add *1* **serrano pepper**
- Hot: Use *3* **jalapeños** with seeds, or substitute *2* **serrano peppers**
- Heat comes primarily from **jalapeños**; roasting mellows heat slightly
- Taste sauce after blending and add more heat if desired before simmering