

Salsa of the Year

You also might want to try this with other types of smoked chiles if you can't find the mirasol or smoked serranos (or you can mail order from Tierra). I also want to try it with chiles de arbol (not smoked that I know of). Play around a bit and get to know the different flavors and characteristics of the different chilies. I'm sure some of you chile geeks can offer up some other recommendations for substitutions as well.

3 T. vegetable oil

1 ounce dried [mirasol \(milder\) or smoked serrano \(more heat\) chilies](#)

garlic, 12 small to medium cloves - peeled

Another 3 T. vegetable oil

1 1/4 cups vegetable broth

Start by rinsing the chiles. Pat them dry with a paper towel. Heat 3T. vegetable oil in a thick-bottomed or cast iron skillet over medium-high heat. When hot add chiles and the garlic cloves. Cook, stirring regularly until the chiles puff up and the garlic browns a bit and begins to soften up, about 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer the chiles to a bowl filled with very hot water - soak until soft and pliable, roughly 20-30 minutes (if the water starts to cook - just drain and refill with more hot water). Drain, and remove the stems, veins and seeds of the chilies (I use a small paring knife for this). Puree the chilies, garlic, and broth with a hand blender or food processor. Heat the second 3T. of oil in the skillet over medium high heat. When hot add the chile puree (be careful, the oil is very hot, and the puree should really sizzle when it hits the pan). Stir constantly for 5 minutes or so as the salsa reduces and thickens up a bit. When it starts to stick to the bottom of the pan it is done. Remove from heat and season with salt to taste.

Enjoy this straight: with chips or on fresh tortillas, tacos, and just about anything coming off the grill.

Through the following variations you can really control the strength of the chile flavor as well as the overall spiciness - essentially through dilution.

- Stir in 1/3 cup cream (or to taste) - for a slightly creamy sauce that will add a bit of kick to a wide range of recipes. (this is the sauce you see in the pictures on this post). Drizzle on savory crepes, egg dishes, casseroles, etc.

- Stir a couple tablespoons into light or vegan mayo for a spicy sandwich spread.

- Spread on panini: with all sorts of fixings.

Makes about 1 cup.