

## Tamale Fillings You Should Try

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When planning to [make tamales](#), you will need to decide which filling or fillings you will prepare. Many a Mexican grandmother will vociferously assert that the most important part of a *tamal* is not the filling, but the corn dough or *masa*—its ingredients, texture, and preparation. There are, after all, tamales that have no fillings at all that are *completely* composed of dough, but there can be no tamale without some sort of masa.

Most of us, however, while conceding that the masa is of great importance, would consider it undeniable that the filling also has a great influence on a person's tamale experience. Even when it is used in small quantities as almost a garnish for the dough, the tamale's name often refers to what is inside the corn: *tamales de salsa verde* (green sauce), *tamales de rajas y queso* (chile strips and cheese), *tamales de pollo con mole* (chicken and mole sauce), etc.

Tamale fillings are as numerous as the stars in the sky and can be as unique as the individuals making them. What follows are a few basic tried-and-true savory Mexican fillings to get your own creative tamales "juices" flowing. As most of these fillings include an extra step of cooking the beef, chicken, shrimp, or beans or roasting and seeding the chiles, you will need to allow the time for that part of the tamale-making process.

**Fun Fact:** The correct singular form of the word *tamales* in Spanish is not *tamale* but rather ***tamal***. Un tamal, dos tamales, tres tamales, etc.

### Authentic Beef Tamale Filling

The cooking time to prepare the ingredients for this filling includes 7 hours for the beef in the crockpot or 4 to 5 hours in the oven, 30 minutes for the potatoes.

#### Stir together:

- 3 cups shredded beef
- 8 large roasted [fresh green chiles](#), skin, seeds and veins removed and flesh coarsely chopped
- 1 white onion, peeled and chopped
- 6 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed.
- 1 fresh [jalapeño pepper, seeded and diced](#)
- 3 potatoes, peeled, boiled and chopped into cubes
- 1 cup [Mexican cooking sauce](#), homemade or from a jar

### **Green Chile Tamale Filling**

Cooking time to prepare the ingredients for this filling is the time to roast the peppers, which is 5 to 8 minutes under the broiler or over charcoal or in the microwave.

#### **Combine:**

- 1 cup roasted, peeled, seeded, and chopped fresh green chiles
- 3 cups shredded Oaxaca string cheese or shredded Jack cheese
- 1/2 cup green cooking sauce, homemade or from a jar

Additionally, mix 1/2 cup whole corn kernels into the dough.

### **México del Sur Tamale Filling**

Cooking time to prepare the ingredients for this filling is the time to cook the chicken breasts, which is 20 minutes if you poach them on the stovetop or 2 to 3 hours in a slow cooker on high or 4 to 5 hours in a slow cooker on low.

#### **Mix together:**

- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken, seasoned with [\*hoja santa\*](#)
- 1 cup fresh, whole corn kernels
- 1 cup finely diced tomatoes
- 1/2 cup red [cooking sauce or table sauce](#)

### **Yucatan Tamale Filling**

Cooking time for the ingredients for this filling is the time to cook the cubed chicken, which is approximately 30 minutes.

#### **Stir together:**

- 2 cups cubed, cooked chicken marinated in citrus flavors
- 1/2 cup chopped cilantro
- 1/2 cup crumbled Cotija cheese
- 2 fresh serrano chiles, finely diced
- 1/4 cup bitter orange juice or half lime juice and half sweet orange juice

### **Black Bean and Cheese Tamale Filling**

Cooking time for the ingredients for this filling is the time to cook the beans, which is approximately 2 hours, but you should check them after 1 hour.

#### **Combine:**

- 2 cups cooked, seasoned black beans
- 1/4 cup liquid from beans (bean broth)
- 1/2 cup chopped cilantro
- 1 cup shredded [panela cheese](#)
- 1/2 cup peeled and chopped onion

### **Mariscos (Seafood) Tamale Filling**

Cooking time for the ingredients for the filling depends on the seafood used. Shrimp can be cooked in approximately 5 minutes.

Mix together.

- 2 cups cooked shrimp or lobster meat
- 1 cup shredded Oaxaca string cheese or Jack cheese
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped cilantro leaves
- 1/2 cup mariscos sauce: 1/4 cup heavy cream mixed with 1/4 cup mayonnaise, seasoned with 1 teaspoon garlic powder and 1 tablespoon lime juice.