

*For a cheesy cornbread with bold corn flavor, **start with fresh corn***

Bolivian Humintas: Cornbread, Actually



To marry the fresh corn flavor of humintas with classic cornbread texture, we chose baking over traditional boiling.

ON THE HUNT FOR a cornbread with robust corn flavor, gentle sweetness and a moist crumb, we found inspiration in Bolivia, where vendors hawk humintas—snack-size corn cakes laced with spices and sealed in husks—from street stalls.

Make no mistake, humintas are not cornbread as we know it. The savory, slightly sweet cakes often contain no cornflour or cornmeal, the main ingredients of American cornbread. Instead, they rely on ground fresh corn kernels. The result is a cake with clean, fresh corn flavor.

At their most basic, humintas are made by grating fresh corn and mixing it with eggs, sugar, lard and plenty of fresh, unaged cheese. Often, they're spiced with cinnamon and aniseed, with yellow ají chilies providing mild, fruity heat. The cheesy corn filling is traditionally wrapped in corn husks (similar to tamales, their cornmeal-based cousin) before being steamed or boiled.

At Milk Street, we borrowed inspiration from humintas' robust

flavor rather than its labor-intensive technique. Steaming or boiling—never mind wrapping anything in corn husks—was out. We wanted the fresh corn flavor, but we also wanted the ease and texture of a classic American cornbread. This meant sticking with baking.

It also meant keeping the cornmeal; using only grated fresh corn produced a batter with too much moisture for the bread to bake up

A half-teaspoon of cayenne mimicked the gentle kick of the ajís.

For extra flavor, we substituted pepper jack cheese for the more traditional—and neutral—queso fresco. And rather than mixing all of it into the batter, where it might lose its impact, we created a layer of cheese by pouring half the batter into the pan, topping it with chunks of the cheese, then spreading the rest of the batter over the cheese.

*In Bolivia, vendors hawk **spiced, snack-size corn cakes** called humintas from street stalls.*

with a light crumb. We struck a balance by using both fresh corn and cornmeal. The result was a sliceable yet moist cornbread with a subtle sweetness and plenty of corn flavor.

We liked the fruitiness of ají chilies, but they can be hard to find. So we pureed sweet orange bell pepper with fresh corn and milk. We also added aniseed, which worked well with the sweetness of the corn.

The result was a cornbread that had elements both familiar and foreign. The bread was deeply savory and tender-crumbed, but it had a distinctly pronounced corn flavor and a mildly spicy finish from the cayenne and cheese. The pepper jack also enhanced the bread's richness, while the aniseed heightened—rather than distracted from—the sweetness of the fresh corn.

Bolivian Cornbread with Pepper Jack Cheese

*Start to finish: 1¼ hours
(20 minutes active) | Servings: 12*

CORN KERNELS cut from fresh ears work best here. Stand the ear in the center of a large bowl, then use a knife to slice downward along the length of the ear, letting the kernels fall into the bowl. If fresh corn isn't in season, thawed, drained frozen kernels are a fine substitute.

Don't use coarse cornmeal; it is too gritty. —ERIKA BRUCE

363 grams (2½ cups) finely ground cornmeal, plus more for pan
64 grams (⅓ cup) white sugar
1 tablespoon aniseed
2½ teaspoons kosher salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
3 cups corn kernels (cut from 3 to 4 large ears; see note)
1 orange bell pepper, stemmed, seeded and chopped
1½ cups whole milk
4 large eggs
12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) salted butter, melted and slightly cooled
8 ounces pepper jack cheese, cut into ½-inch chunks

▪ **Heat the oven to 375°F** with a rack in the middle position. Mist a 13-by-9-inch baking pan with cooking spray, dust evenly with cornmeal, then tap out the excess. In a medium bowl, whisk together the cornmeal, sugar, aniseed, salt, baking powder and cayenne. Set aside.

▪ **In a food processor**, combine the corn, bell pepper and milk. Process until very smooth, about 2 minutes, scraping the sides as needed. Transfer to a large bowl and whisk in the eggs and butter. Whisk in the cornmeal mixture until smooth. Pour half the batter into the prepared pan and spread in an even layer. Scatter the cheese on top, then add the remaining batter in an even layer.

▪ **Bake until a toothpick** inserted at the center of the bread comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes. Cool in the pan for 20 minutes. Serve warm. ♦