

Empanada Recipe Corn Meal



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empanada recipe corn meal is a gateway to a world of delicious, golden-brown pastries, offering a delightful alternative to traditional wheat flour-based wrappers. This comprehensive guide will delve into the art of crafting perfect empanadas using cornmeal, exploring its unique properties, the best cornmeal varieties for empanada dough, and a variety of savory and sweet filling ideas. We'll uncover the secrets to achieving a perfectly crisp yet tender crust, discuss essential techniques for shaping and sealing, and provide tips for baking and frying success. Whether you're a seasoned cook or a kitchen novice, this article is your ultimate resource for mastering the cornmeal empanada, a

versatile and satisfying treat perfect for any occasion.

Understanding Cornmeal for Empanada Recipes

What is Cornmeal?

Cornmeal is a finely ground flour made from dried maize (corn). It is a staple food in many cultures worldwide, particularly in Latin America and parts of the United States. Its production involves grinding dried corn kernels into varying degrees of fineness. The type of corn used and the milling process dictate the texture and flavor of the final cornmeal product. Unlike wheat flour, cornmeal does not contain gluten, which significantly impacts its behavior when used in baking and dough preparation. This absence of gluten is a key factor in how cornmeal empanadas differ from their wheat-based counterparts, often resulting in a distinctively crispier texture.

Cornmeal Varieties and Their Use in Empanada Dough

The selection of cornmeal is crucial for achieving the desired texture and flavor in your empanada recipe corn meal. Different grinds and types of corn lend themselves to various applications, and understanding these differences will elevate your empanada-making experience. The primary distinctions lie in the fineness of the grind: coarse, medium, and fine.

Coarse Cornmeal

Coarse cornmeal, sometimes referred to as polenta, features larger, more distinct particles. This grind provides a substantial, hearty texture. When used in an empanada dough, it can contribute to a slightly chewier crust with a noticeable corn flavor and a delightful crunch. However, it might not bind as cohesively as finer grinds, potentially making the dough a bit more crumbly if not handled correctly. It's often used in combination with other flours or binders for empanada wrappers.

Medium Cornmeal

Medium cornmeal strikes a balance between coarseness and fineness. It offers a good texture that is neither too gritty nor too soft. This is a versatile choice for empanada dough, providing a pleasant chew and a noticeable corn flavor without being overwhelming. It generally binds well, making it easier to work with for shaping and sealing the empanada pockets.

Fine Cornmeal

Fine cornmeal, sometimes called corn flour or masa harina (if specifically treated with lime), results in a smoother, more tender crust. Masa harina, derived from nixtamalized corn, is particularly popular in Mexican cuisine and can be an excellent base for empanada dough, offering superior binding properties and a unique flavor profile. Fine cornmeal is ideal for those seeking a delicate, almost melt-in-your-mouth texture, though it may lack some of the overt crunch that coarser grinds provide. When using fine cornmeal, the dough will likely be more pliable and easier to roll out thinly.

Key Considerations for Cornmeal Empanada Dough

When creating your empanada recipe corn meal, several factors specific to cornmeal dough need careful consideration. The absence of gluten means that cornmeal dough relies on other ingredients and techniques to achieve structural integrity and pliability. Fat content plays a significant role in tenderizing the dough and preventing it from becoming too dry or crumbly. The type and amount of liquid used also affect the dough's consistency; too much liquid can make it sticky, while too little can result in a dry, unworkable dough.

Crafting the Perfect Cornmeal Empanada Dough

Basic Cornmeal Empanada Dough Recipe

Creating a successful empanada recipe corn meal starts with a solid dough foundation. This basic recipe is designed to be versatile, yielding a crust that is both flavorful and structurally sound, perfect for holding a variety of fillings.

- 2 cups fine cornmeal
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup cold unsalted butter, cut into cubes
- 1/2 cup ice water (or as needed)
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil (optional, for added richness)

Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, whisk together the cornmeal and salt.

2. Cut in the cold butter using a pastry blender or your fingertips until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs.
3. Gradually add the ice water, a tablespoon at a time, mixing until the dough just comes together. Be careful not to overmix. The dough should be firm but pliable.
4. If using, mix in the vegetable oil.
5. Gather the dough into a ball, flatten it into a disc, wrap it in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes before rolling.

Tips for Working with Cornmeal Dough

Cornmeal dough behaves differently than wheat flour dough due to its lack of gluten. This means specific techniques are essential for success.

- **Chilling is Key:** Always chill the dough sufficiently. This allows the gluten (if any is present from other flour additions) to relax and the fats to solidify, making the dough easier to handle and less prone to tearing.
- **Don't Overwork:** Overworking cornmeal dough can make it tough and crumbly. Mix only until the ingredients are just combined.
- **Moisture Control:** The amount of liquid can be tricky. Start with the recommended amount and add more very slowly if needed. The dough should be moist enough to hold together but not sticky.
- **Rolling Techniques:** Rolling cornmeal dough between two sheets of parchment paper or plastic wrap can prevent sticking and make it easier to transfer to your baking sheet or empanada maker. Aim for a thickness of about 1/8 inch.
- **Binding Agents:** For a more pliable dough, consider adding a small amount of all-purpose flour (e.g., 1/4 cup per 2 cups of cornmeal) or using masa harina, which has natural binding properties. An egg yolk can also be added for extra richness and binding.

Variations on Cornmeal Empanada Dough

Experimenting with your empanada recipe corn meal dough can lead to exciting new flavor profiles and textures. Here are a few popular variations:

- **Masa Harina Dough:** Replace all or a portion of the fine cornmeal with masa harina for a traditional Mexican flavor and superior pliability.
- **Herbed Dough:** Incorporate finely chopped fresh herbs like cilantro, parsley, or oregano into the dry ingredients for an aromatic touch.
- **Spicy Dough:** Add a pinch of cayenne pepper or chili powder to the dry ingredients for a subtle heat that complements savory fillings.
- **Whole Wheat Blend:** Combine fine cornmeal with whole wheat flour for a nuttier flavor and added fiber.

Delicious Empanada Fillings for Cornmeal Wrappers

The beauty of a cornmeal empanada lies not only in its crust but also in the incredible diversity of fillings it can embrace. The slightly rustic, corn-forward flavor of the crust pairs wonderfully with both classic and innovative fillings. When choosing your filling for an empanada recipe corn meal, consider moisture content; excessively wet fillings can make the crust soggy.

Savory Empanada Filling Ideas

Savory empanadas are a global phenomenon, and cornmeal wrappers offer a unique canvas for a wide array of flavorful concoctions.

- **Picadillo:** A classic ground beef filling seasoned with onions, garlic, olives, raisins, and spices. Ensure the picadillo is cooked until most of the moisture has evaporated.
- **Chicken and Vegetable:** Shredded chicken cooked with peas, carrots, potatoes, and a creamy, savory sauce. A binder like a roux or a bit of cornstarch can help thicken the sauce.
- **Spinach and Cheese:** Sautéed spinach mixed with ricotta cheese, Parmesan, and a touch of nutmeg. Ensure excess moisture from the spinach is squeezed out.
- **Corn and Cheese:** Sweet corn kernels mixed with cheddar cheese, jalapeños, and a hint of cilantro for a vibrant, Tex-Mex inspired filling.
- **Beef and Potato:** Diced beef and potatoes, seasoned with paprika, cumin, and onions, cooked until tender.
- **Lentil and Vegetable:** A hearty vegetarian option with cooked lentils, diced carrots, celery, onions, and herbs in a savory tomato-based sauce.

Sweet Empanada Filling Ideas

The natural sweetness of corn can also be enhanced by dessert-style fillings, making cornmeal empanadas a delightful treat.

- **Dulce de Leche and Banana:** A simple yet decadent combination of creamy dulce de leche and sliced bananas.
- **Apple Cinnamon:** Diced apples sautéed with cinnamon, sugar, and a touch of lemon juice.
- **Guava and Cheese:** A popular Latin American pairing of sweet guava paste and mild cream cheese.
- **Pumpkin Spice:** Cooked and mashed pumpkin seasoned with cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and a touch of brown sugar.

Preparing Fillings for Cornmeal Empanadas

Proper preparation of your filling is paramount for a successful empanada recipe corn meal. Fillings should be cooked thoroughly and cooled before assembling the empanadas. Crucially, any excess liquid must be drained or thickened to prevent the cornmeal crust from becoming soggy or breaking apart during cooking.

Shaping and Sealing Cornmeal Empanadas

The technique for shaping and sealing empanadas is critical, especially with a gluten-free dough like cornmeal. A secure seal is essential to keep the flavorful filling contained during baking or frying.

Rolling the Dough and Cutting Circles

Once your cornmeal dough is chilled and ready, the next step is to roll it out. As mentioned, using parchment paper or plastic wrap is highly recommended. Roll the dough to an even thickness, approximately 1/8 inch. For consistent empanada sizes, use a round cutter or a small bowl to cut out circles. Typical empanada circle sizes range from 5 to 7 inches in diameter, depending on your preference and the amount of filling you plan to use.

Adding the Filling

Place a tablespoon or two of your prepared and cooled filling onto one half of each cornmeal circle, leaving a small border around the edge. Be careful not to overfill, as this can make sealing difficult and increase the risk of the empanada bursting during cooking.

Sealing Techniques: The Crimp and the Fork

Achieving a good seal is vital. Here are the common methods:

- **The Crimp (Repulgue):** This is the traditional decorative edge. Moisten the edge of the dough circle with a little water or egg wash. Fold the unfilled half of the dough over the filling to create a half-moon shape. Press the edges together firmly to seal. Then, starting from one corner, take small pieces of the edge and fold them over onto the main seal, pressing down to create a decorative, corrugated edge. Practice makes perfect with this technique.
- **The Fork Seal:** A simpler method involves moistening the edges, folding the dough over the filling, and pressing the edges together firmly. Once sealed, use the tines of a fork to press around the entire edge, creating a secure and somewhat decorative seal. This is a reliable method for ensuring the filling stays inside.

Baking vs. Frying Cornmeal Empanadas

Your empanada recipe corn meal can be cooked using two primary methods: baking or frying. Each method yields a slightly different texture and flavor profile.

Baking Cornmeal Empanadas

Baking is a healthier option and often results in a crisper, drier crust. Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C). Place the shaped empanadas on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. For a golden-brown finish, brush the tops with an egg wash (one egg beaten with a tablespoon of water or milk) or a little melted butter. Bake for 20-25 minutes, or until golden brown and cooked through.

Frying Cornmeal Empanadas

Frying results in a richer, more uniformly golden and often puffier crust. Heat a neutral oil, such as vegetable or canola oil, in a deep pot or fryer to 350°F (175°C). Carefully place a few empanadas into the hot oil, ensuring not to overcrowd the pot. Fry for 3-5 minutes per side, or until golden

brown and heated through. Drain on a wire rack lined with paper towels to absorb excess oil.

Serving and Storing Cornmeal Empanadas

Cornmeal empanadas are best served warm, allowing the flavors of the filling to meld beautifully with the crisp crust. They can be enjoyed on their own or served with accompanying sauces or dips, depending on the filling.

Serving Suggestions

- **Savory Empanadas:** Serve with a side of chimichurri, a spicy salsa, sour cream, or guacamole.
- **Sweet Empanadas:** Dust with powdered sugar, serve with a dollop of whipped cream, or a scoop of ice cream.

Storage Instructions

Once cooled, empanadas can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. For longer storage, they can be frozen. Place them on a baking sheet in a single layer until frozen, then transfer them to a freezer-safe bag or container. Reheat baked empanadas in a preheated oven, and fried empanadas can be reheated in the oven or an air fryer until warmed through.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the key difference between a traditional flour empanada and one made with cornmeal?

The primary difference lies in the dough. Traditional empanadas use a flour-based dough, while cornmeal empanadas utilize cornmeal, which results in a different texture – often a bit coarser and more crumbly – and a distinct corn flavor.

Are there specific types of cornmeal that work best for empanada dough?

Medium or coarse grind cornmeal is generally preferred for empanada dough as it provides a better texture and structure compared to fine cornmeal. Some recipes might also incorporate a blend of cornmeal and flour for a balance of flavor and texture.

What are common filling ingredients for cornmeal empanadas?

Cornmeal empanadas can be filled with a wide variety of ingredients, similar to flour empanadas. Popular choices include seasoned ground meat (beef or chicken), vegetables like corn, peas, and peppers, cheese, or even sweet fillings like guava and cheese.

How do you ensure cornmeal empanadas don't become too dry or crumbly?

To prevent dryness, ensure your dough has enough fat (like butter or lard), consider adding an egg or milk to the dough for moisture, and be careful not to overbake. Keeping the filling moist also helps.

Can I make cornmeal empanada dough ahead of time?

Yes, cornmeal empanada dough can typically be made ahead and refrigerated for a day or two. It's best to wrap it tightly to prevent it from drying out. Allow it to come to room temperature slightly before shaping.

What are the best cooking methods for cornmeal empanadas?

Cornmeal empanadas can be baked or fried. Baking results in a slightly crispier, less greasy empanada, while frying yields a more golden and traditionally crunchy exterior.

What are some traditional flavor profiles associated with cornmeal empanadas?

Cornmeal empanadas are often found in Latin American cuisines, particularly in regions with a strong corn tradition. Flavor profiles might include aji amarillo, cumin, paprika, oregano, and a variety of savory or spicy fillings.

Are there gluten-free empanada options using cornmeal?

Yes, by using 100% cornmeal (or a blend of cornmeal and other gluten-free flours like rice flour or tapioca starch), you can create gluten-free empanadas. Ensure all other ingredients in the filling are also gluten-free.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to cornmeal empanadas, each starting with :

1. Igniting the Flavor: Cornmeal Empanadas from Around the Globe

This cookbook explores the diverse world of cornmeal-based empanadas, showcasing recipes from Latin America, the Caribbean, and beyond. It delves into the unique flours and seasonings that define each regional variation, offering insights into their cultural significance. Readers will discover techniques for achieving the perfect crispy or tender dough, along with creative filling ideas.

2. Into the Hearth: Mastering Cornmeal Dough for Empanadas

Focused on the foundational element of cornmeal empanadas, this book provides in-depth guidance on creating exquisite doughs. It covers various cornmeal grinds, hydration levels, and mixing methods to achieve ideal textures for baking and frying. The book offers troubleshooting tips and emphasizes the importance of quality ingredients for the best results.

3. Inventive Fillings: A Cornmeal Empanada Culinary Journey

This title celebrates the art of crafting delicious and imaginative fillings that complement cornmeal empanada doughs. It moves beyond traditional choices to explore innovative combinations of meats, vegetables, cheeses, and spices. The book encourages culinary experimentation, offering a foundation for readers to develop their own signature fillings.

4. Illustrated Delights: The Visual Guide to Cornmeal Empanadas

Beautifully photographed, this book is a feast for the eyes, guiding readers through the creation of visually stunning cornmeal empanadas. Each recipe features step-by-step illustrations and tips on shaping, crimping, and finishing techniques for attractive presentation. It's ideal for those who appreciate the aesthetic aspect of cooking.

5. In Your Kitchen: Simple Cornmeal Empanada Recipes for Everyone

Designed for home cooks of all skill levels, this accessible cookbook offers straightforward recipes for cornmeal empanadas. It breaks down complex processes into easy-to-follow steps, ensuring success even for beginners. The book focuses on readily available ingredients and time-saving techniques for delicious, homemade empanadas.

6. Ignorance to Expertise: The Cornmeal Empanada Blueprint

This comprehensive guide aims to transform novice bakers into cornmeal empanada masters. It covers the science behind dough preparation, common pitfalls to avoid, and advanced techniques for achieving professional-quality results. The book provides a solid understanding of the principles involved in making perfect cornmeal empanadas.

7. In Pursuit of Perfection: The Ultimate Cornmeal Empanada Cookbook

This book is dedicated to achieving the pinnacle of cornmeal empanada creation, offering meticulously tested recipes and refined techniques. It explores various cooking methods, from traditional frying to innovative oven-baked variations, and discusses ingredient pairings for optimal flavor. It's for those who strive for culinary excellence in every bite.

8. Inspired Flavors: A Celebration of Savory and Sweet Cornmeal Empanadas

This vibrant collection explores the versatility of cornmeal empanadas, featuring a wide array of both savory and sweet fillings. It provides recipes for classic comfort food options alongside more adventurous flavor profiles. The book highlights how cornmeal's subtle sweetness and texture can enhance a variety of culinary creations.

9. International Comfort: Global Cornmeal Empanada Traditions

This book takes readers on a culinary tour of cornmeal empanadas from various international locales, emphasizing their role as comforting and traditional dishes. It shares authentic recipes passed down through generations, offering insights into the cultural contexts and historical significance of these beloved pastries. Readers will discover the heartwarming stories behind each empanada.

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