

Caldo de Siete Mares (Soup of the Seven Seas)



SERVES Serves 6 to 8

Why This Recipe Works

Traditionally prepared by Mexican fisherman, caldo de siete mares, or “soup of the seven seas,” combined the freshest catch of the day along with a few vegetables in a mildly spicy seafood broth. Today, the specific ingredients vary according to the region and the time of year, so for our version, which we collaborated on with Jonathan Zaragoza, we settled on a combination of mussels, catfish, and shrimp, all of which are native to the Gulf of Mexico.

Cooking down a pureed mixture of toasted guajillo and ancho chiles and aromatics gave us a complex base for our broth, but it lacked real seafood flavor. To remedy this, we created a quick seafood stock by cooking shrimp shells with our aromatic spice mixture, then simmering the mixture in a combination of

clam juice and chicken broth. The addition of carrots, potatoes and corn, staples of the Mexican diet, made the soup feel hearty and satisfying. To ensure that every element was perfectly cooked, we simmered the carrots, corn, potatoes, and mussels in the fragrant broth until just cooked through, then removed them before adding the shrimp and catfish.

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Gather Your Ingredients

- 4 guajillo chiles, stemmed, seeded, and torn into ½-inch pieces (½ cup)
- 1 dried ancho chile, stemmed, seeded, and torn into ½-inch pieces (¼ cup)
- 2 plum tomatoes, cored, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 white onion (8 ounces), quartered
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled

Before You Begin

- * If you can't find catfish, sole is a good substitute. Discard any mussel with an unpleasant odor or with a cracked or broken shell or a shell that won't close. We prefer to use Mexican oregano, but Italian or Mediterranean oregano can be used.

Instructions

1. Toast guajillos and ancho chiles in Dutch oven over medium-high heat, stirring frequently, until fragrant, 2 to 6 minutes; transfer to food processor. Add tomatoes, onion, garlic, oregano, cumin, sugar, bay leaves, and pepper to processor and pulse until coarsely chopped, about 15 pulses.
2. Heat oil in now-empty pot over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add chile mixture,

- **1** tablespoon dried Mexican oregano
- **2** teaspoons ground cumin
- **2** teaspoons sugar
- **2** bay leaves
- **1** teaspoon pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon table salt
- **3** tablespoons vegetable oil
- **1** pound large shrimp (26 to 30 per pound), peeled, deveined, tails removed, and shells reserved
- **5** cups chicken broth
- **2** (8-ounce) bottles clam juice
- **2** ears corn, husks and silk removed, cut into 1-inch rounds
- **2** carrots, peeled

shrimp shells, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt and cook, stirring frequently, until liquid has evaporated and mixture has darkened in color, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in broth and clam juice, scraping up any browned bits, and bring to simmer. Reduce heat and simmer gently until flavors meld, 10 minutes. Strain broth through fine-mesh strainer pressing on solids to extract as much liquid as possible; discard solids. Return strained broth to again-empty pot and bring to simmer.

3. Stir in corn, carrots and potatoes and return to simmer and cook until carrots and potatoes are just tender, 8 to 10 minutes. Increase heat to medium-high, stir in mussels, cover, and simmer briskly until mussels have opened, 3 to 4 minutes (discard any unopened mussels). Using slotted spoon, transfer mussels, corn, carrots and potatoes to individual bowls.
4. Return broth to gentle simmer. Add catfish, cover, and cook for 3 minutes. Add shrimp to pot, cover, and cook until catfish and shrimp are opaque throughout, about 3 minutes longer. Off heat, gently stir in cilantro and season with salt and pepper to taste. Ladle broth, shrimp, and catfish over mussels and vegetables. Serve with lime wedges, passing tortillas separately.

and cut into ½-inch pieces

1 pound russet potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces

1 pound mussels, scrubbed and debearded

1½ pounds skinless catfish fillets, about ½-inch thick, cut into 2-inch pieces

2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro

Lime wedges

8 corn tortillas, warmed