Andrew's Chicken Empanadas

INGREDIENTS

- 1 whole chicken breast (1 pound), skin removed
- 1/2 white onion, halved
- 1 dried bay leaf
- 1 fresh poblano chile
- 6 tablespoons (48 ounces) vegetable oil
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon ground canela (Mexican cinnamon) or regular cinnamon
- 4 canned plum tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- 2 canned chipotle chiles in adobo, coarsely chopped
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon pepitas (pumpkin seeds), toasted and coarsely chopped
- Empanada Dough
- 1/2 cup shredded queso blanco
- 1/4 cup sugar, for sprinkling
- Crema pura or sour cream, for serving (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. Make filling: Place chicken breast, half the onion, and the bay leaf in a medium saucepan. Cover with cold water, and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low, and poach until chicken is cooked through, about 15 minutes. Transfer chicken to a plate; reserve 1 cup cooking liquid, and discard onion and bay leaf. When chicken is cool enough to handle, shred meat from the bone with a fork; set aside.

2. Roast poblano chile directly over a gas flame, turning as each side blackens and blisters. (Alternatively, roast chile under the broiler.) Transfer to a bowl, and cover with plastic wrap; let steam 10 minutes. Remove plastic wrap; peel off and discard blackened chile skin. Remove stem, seeds, and ribs; discard. Slice chile into 1/4-inch strips; set aside.

3. Finely chop remaining onion. Heat 2 teaspoons oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add chopped onion and garlic; saute until soft and translucent. Stir in cumin and canela; cook 1 minute. Add shredded chicken, tomatoes, chipotle, poblano, and reserved cooking liquid. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally until liquid has thickened, about 25 minutes. Remove from heat. Season with salt and pepper; stir in cilantro and pepitas. Set aside to cool.

4. Make empanadas: Break off a 1 1/2-inch ball of empanada dough. On a clean work surface, roll dough into a circle about 1/8 inch thick. Using a 3 1/2-inch cookie cutter, cut out a round of dough. (Or use an inverted glass as a guide, cutting around it with a sharp paring knife.)

5. Place 1 teaspoon filling in center of each round; sprinkle with cheese. Using a pastry brush, moisten edges of dough with water; fold dough over to seal, pressing gently. Crimp edges with a fork; set aside. Repeat with remaining dough. Gather scraps and reroll. (Only do this once, to avoid toughening the dough.)

6. Pour remaining oil into a medium saucepan; oil should be 2 inches deep. Place over medium heat until oil reaches 375 degrees on a deep-fry thermometer. Working with a few empanadas at a time to avoid overcrowding, fry until golden, turning once, about 1 minute. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to drain on a paper-towel lined baking sheet. While still hot, sprinkle tops with sugar. Serve immediately with crema pura or cream on the side, if desired.

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