SALSA ROJA

MAKES
ABOUT 2 CUPS

TIME 45 TO 50 MINUTES

This classic red Mexican salsa is more versatile than ketchup or mustard. Use it anywhere you want a bold, smoky, spicy flavor. The guajillo chiles here deliver all that with moderate heat. For a milder salsa, substitute ancho chiles.

INGREDIENTS

2 large guajillos or other medium-hot dried chiles, toasted, soaked, and cleaned (see below), soaking water reserved
1/4 cup good-quality vegetable oil
2 large onions, chopped
1 tablespoon chopped garlic
2 pounds tomatoes, peeled, seeded, cored, and chopped, with their liquid (about 3 cups; canned are fine)
1 tablespoon sugar
Salt and pepper
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
3 tablespoons fresh lime juice

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Chop the chiles. Put the oil in a medium saucepan or deep skillet over medium-high heat. When it's hot, add the chiles, onions, and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions soften, about 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, sugar, some salt, and plenty of pepper.

2. Adjust the heat so the mixture bubbles gently and cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture has thickened and come together, about 20 minutes. If the salsa gets too thick, thin it with some of the reserved chile-soaking water or plain water.

3. Stir in the cilantro and lime juice. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary. Serve hot or at room temperature or refrigerate for up to 2 days.
Toasting Dried Chiles
Toasting dried chiles in a dry skillet over medium heat before using them is the best way to bring out their smoky flavor. It takes only a couple of minutes on each side. I usually bother with it only when the chile will be featured prominently.

Soaking Dried Chiles
Especially for use in soups and stews, dried chiles are often soaked. Cover the chiles with boiling water and soak until they're soft and pliable, which may take as little as 15 minutes or as much as 30, depending on the age of the chiles. Then remove the seeds and veins. The flesh of some of the larger chiles will separate from the tough skins, so remove the skins too. Strain and save the soaking water (which can be very potent) if you want. Chop and use the chiles or purée them, and proceed with the recipe.

Recipe from How to Cook Everything: Completely Revised 20th Anniversary Edition