

POLKANES

CORN, BEAN AND SQUASH SEED FRITTERS

Pol'kan is Maya for "snake head" (*pol* means "head" and *kan* means "serpent" – giving new meaning to the name Cancun or *kan-kun*, which in Maya means "snake pit"!)) This scrumptious Mayan fritter takes its name from its shape: an elongated egg shape resembling the threatening head of the rattlesnake – an important deity in Mayan culture. *Pol'kanes* obviously date to the pre-conquest era, although until the Spanish introduced the domesticated pig and lard, they were cooked on a *comal* or griddle instead of deep-fat fried. The dish is typically prepared with *ibes* – a local fresh white bean found only in the Yucatán. Substitutions are suggested below.

10 SERVINGS

☞ PREPARE THE TOKSEL ☞

- **6 oz. (175 g) green pumpkin seeds**, toasted in a heavy skillet until light brown and then ground in a food processor
- **9 oz. (250 g) ibes** (Substitute: lima beans or Great Northern), cooked in salted water until just tender
- **3 oz. (80 g) spring onion**, finely chopped
- **1¹/₄ oz. (35 g) chives**, chopped
- **1 chile habanero**, finely minced (Substitute: Scotch Bonnet chile)
- **1 oz. (20 g) cilantro**, chopped
- **Salt to taste**

- **18 oz. (500 g) masa** (Substitute: masa prepared according to the instructions on the packaging of "masa harina")
- **1/4 cup (75 ml) melted lard** (Substitute: vegetable oil)
- **1³/₄ oz. (50 g) flour**
- **1/2 tsp. (2.5 ml) baking powder**
- **2 tsp. (10 ml) powdered chicken bouillon**, mixed with 2 Tbs. (30 ml) boiling water
- **2 cloves garlic**, finely chopped
- **3 oz. (8 g) salt or to taste**

- **2 cups (500 ml) vegetable oil or lard**
- **1 recipe X'nipek**, or the salsa of your choice

STEP 1 PLACE GROUND PUMPKIN SEEDS in a medium cast iron skillet over high heat. Add beans, onion, chives and chile, stirring constantly to avoid sticking. Cook 3-5 minutes or until mixture is hot and onions are softened. Add cilantro; stir and check for seasonings. Remove to a bowl and set aside (do not leave in skillet; the residual heat can scorch the pumpkin seeds). This mixture is known as *toksel*, and can be used as a side dish or as a filling for Mayan tamales.

☞ PREPARE THE MASA ☞

STEP 2 PLACE ALL INGREDIENTS in the bowl of an electric mixer. Mix at high speed for 5 minutes or until mixture is lightened.

☞ FORM POLKANES ☞

STEP 3 SHAPE MASA INTO 2-OZ. (55 G) BALLS. Pat one ball into a 3" tortilla in the palm of your hand. Top the tortilla with 1 heaping tablespoon (15 ml) of the *toksel*. Fold in half, sealing edges. Form into smooth elongated egg shape. Set aside and continue with remaining balls.

☞ FRY AND SERVE ☞

STEP 4 HEAT THE FAT IN A SMALL SKILLET until hot but not smoking. Add 3-4 of the polkanes at a time, being careful not to overcrowd. Fry until golden brown; flip and fry the other side. Drain on paper towels until fritters are at room temperature. Serve with *X'nipek* or the salsa of your choice. To eat, invite diners to slit the *polkan* along one side, open, and spoon in the salsa.