

COOKERY

Mexican Cookery

Nixtamalization's real chemistry, a gluten-free dough tradition, tortillas, dried chiles, salsa and mole building, tamales, and ceviche — closing with a capstone build-your-own taco spread, a genuine fourth structural model for this Subject.

10 Chapters

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Generated with Claude

CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATIONS & THE MEXICAN PANTRY

Mexican Cookery

Chapter 1 · Foundations & the Mexican Pantry

Seventh in this Cookery Subject, and built around real technique that shares almost nothing with the six courses before it — a genuine chemical process behind this course's own dough, a gluten-free dough tradition, and chile varieties where the fresh and dried versions of the same pepper can taste like two completely different ingredients.

Fresh Chiles

CHILE	HEAT	COMMON USE
Poblano	Mild	Dark green, often roasted whole and stuffed
Jalapeño	Medium	The everyday chile — raw, pickled, or cooked
Serrano	Hotter than jalapeño	Often used raw, especially in fresh salsas
Habanero	Very hot	Fruity heat, common in Yucatán-style dishes

Dried Chiles

CHILE	CHARACTER
Guajillo	Mild to medium, fruity, common in sauces
Ancho	Mild, sweet, raisin-like — this is a dried poblano
Chipotle	Smoky, medium-hot — this is a smoked, dried jalapeño

THE SAME PEPPER, TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT INGREDIENTS

Ancho and chipotle aren't separate chile plants — they're dried poblano and smoked-and-dried jalapeño respectively. Drying (and, for chipotle, smoking) changes a chile's flavour so completely that the fresh and dried versions of the exact same pepper are

genuinely worth treating as two different ingredients, not interchangeable stand-ins for each other. Chapter 5 covers dried chiles' own real technique in full.

Corn: A Preview

Corn is this course's own foundational starch — but it isn't used the way rice or wheat are used elsewhere in this Subject. Chapter 2 covers a genuinely unique real chemical process, nixtamalization, that transforms dried corn before it's ever ground into the dough this whole course is built around.

Lime: The Defining Acid

Where Italian Cookery leans on tomato, French Cookery on wine and butter, and Hungarian Cookery on sour cream's own tang, Mexican cooking's defining acid is lime — used both as a cooking ingredient and as a raw finishing squeeze. Chapter 9 covers a real, genuinely striking use of it: citrus acid alone, "cooking" raw fish with no heat involved at all.

The Comal

The comal is a flat, ungreased griddle — traditionally clay, commonly cast iron or steel today — and it's this course's own dual-purpose central tool. Unlike Indian Cookery's tava or Chinese Cookery's wok, each built for one real role, the comal does two real jobs: cooking tortillas dry, with no oil at all (Chapter 4), and toasting dried chiles and spices to develop their own flavour (Chapter 5).

Equipment

ESSENTIAL

- A comal, or a flat, heavy cast-iron or steel griddle/pan as a substitute
- A blender, for salsas and mole

NICE TO HAVE

- A tortilla press, for Chapter 4 — hand-pressing between two sheets of plastic works too

- A molcajete (a traditional stone mortar and pestle) — a blender is a genuine, practical substitute

SKIP FOR NOW

- Specialty Mexican cookware beyond the comal — everything else in this course works in an ordinary, well-equipped kitchen

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Taste a fresh jalapeño and a fresh serrano side by side, a small slice of each, and compare the real difference in heat.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Smell a dried ancho chile and a dried chipotle chile side by side, and note how different they smell from each other and from a fresh poblano or jalapeño, if you have one on hand to compare.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Squeeze fresh lime juice onto a few different foods — a slice of avocado, a piece of fish or chicken, a spoonful of beans — and taste how the same acid changes each one.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — FOUNDATIONS & THE MEXICAN PANTRY

- Fresh chiles: poblano (mild) → jalapeño (medium) → serrano (hotter) → habanero (very hot)
- Dried chiles carry real, distinct flavours from their fresh form — ancho is dried poblano, chipotle is smoked, dried jalapeño
- Corn is this course's own foundational starch, transformed by a real chemical process covered fully in Chapter 2
- Lime is the defining acid — both a cooking ingredient and a raw finishing squeeze
- The comal is a dry, dual-purpose tool — tortillas (Chapter 4) and toasting dried chiles/spices (Chapter 5)

Next — Chapter 2: Nixtamalization — The Real Chemistry Behind Masa

Corn kernels cooked in an alkaline cal solution — a genuinely unique process with no equivalent anywhere else in this Subject.

CHAPTER 2: NIXTAMALIZATION: THE REAL CHEMISTRY BEHIND MASA

Mexican Cookery

Chapter 2 · Nixtamalization: The Real Chemistry Behind Masa

Every technique so far in this Cookery Subject has been about heat, time, or proportion. This one is genuinely different — a real alkaline chemical reaction, transforming raw corn before it's ever ground into the dough this whole course is built around.

CAL, NOT LIME

Chapter 1 covered lime the citrus fruit as this course's defining acid. This chapter's own "cal" is something completely different — calcium hydroxide, also sold as "pickling lime," a food-grade alkaline mineral with no relation to the fruit at all.

What Nixtamalization Actually Does

Dried corn kernels are simmered in water with food-grade cal, then left to soak in that same alkaline water for several hours or overnight. The real chemistry does three genuine things at once:

EFFECT	WHY IT MATTERS
Softens and loosens the hull	The corn's tough outer skin (pericarp) breaks down enough to rub off during rinsing
Gelatinizes the starch	The corn's texture changes enough that it can be ground into a smooth, workable dough — not just crushed into grit
Releases bound niacin	A real nutritional effect — raw corn's own niacin (vitamin B3) is chemically locked and not bioavailable until this process frees it

A REAL, HISTORICAL NUTRITIONAL CONSEQUENCE

Societies that adopted corn as a staple food without also adopting nixtamalization — corn was carried from the Americas to parts of Europe and Africa without the accompanying technique — genuinely suffered from pellagra, a real niacin-deficiency

disease. Mesoamerican peoples, who developed and relied on nixtamalization for millennia, did not have this problem. This is a real, documented consequence of one technique's presence or absence, not just a flavour or texture choice.

The Process

1 Simmer dried corn kernels with cal and water

Use the correct real proportion of cal — too much can leave the corn tasting genuinely soapy, too little won't properly nixtamalize it. Simmer for roughly 30-60 minutes, depending on the corn.

2 Let it soak

Remove from the heat and let the kernels steep in the same alkaline water for several hours, or overnight.

3 Rinse thoroughly

Rinse the softened corn — now called nixtamal — in several changes of water, rubbing the kernels to loosen and wash away the softened hulls, which float off as you rinse.

4 Grind into masa

Grind the rinsed nixtamal — traditionally on a stone metate, today more commonly in a food processor or specialized mill — into fresh masa, ready for Chapter 3's own dough work.

MASA HARINA IS A REAL, LEGITIMATE SHORTCUT

Dried, powdered nixtamalized corn — masa harina — just needs water added to reconstitute into a workable dough. It's widely used even within Mexico, not a lesser Western substitute — though fresh masa ground directly from real nixtamal carries a more complex flavour.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Nixtamalize a batch of dried corn from scratch — simmer with food-grade cal, soak, rinse thoroughly — and inspect the corn's own real texture and colour change before and after.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Soak a small portion of dried corn in plain water, with no cal at all, alongside a properly nixtamalized batch, and compare how each grinds.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Read the ingredient label on a bag of store-bought masa harina, and confirm it lists nixtamalized (cal-treated) corn as the real process behind it, connecting the packaged product back to what this chapter just described.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — NIXTAMALIZATION

- Cal (calcium hydroxide/pickling lime) is a real food-grade alkaline mineral — unrelated to the citrus fruit
- Simmering corn with cal, then soaking it, softens the hull, gelatinizes the starch, and releases bound niacin
- A real, documented historical consequence: corn adopted without nixtamalization caused pellagra elsewhere in the world
- Rinsed nixtamal is ground into fresh masa — the dough Chapter 3 covers in full

- Masa harina, dried and reconstituted with water, is a real, legitimate shortcut, not just a lesser substitute

Next — Chapter 3: Masa Dough — A Sixth Dough Tradition With No Gluten At All

A moist, pliable dough held together by starch rather than gluten, pressed rather than rolled.

CHAPTER 3: MASA DOUGH: A SIXTH DOUGH TRADITION WITH NO GLUTEN AT ALL

Mexican Cookery

Chapter 3 · Masa Dough: A Sixth Dough Tradition With No Gluten At All

Every dough this Subject has covered so far — rolled, stretched, pressed into a tortilla press yet to come — is held together by gluten. Corn has no gluten-forming proteins at all, so masa holds together a completely different way.

Six Dough Traditions, One Genuinely Different Mechanism

COURSE	DOUGH	WHAT HOLDS IT TOGETHER
Italian Cookery	Fresh pasta	Gluten — genuinely sought and developed
French Cookery	Pâte brisée	Gluten — deliberately avoided
Chinese Cookery	Dumpling dough	Gluten — moderate
Indian Cookery	Roti/chapati	Gluten — moderate
Hungarian Cookery	Rétes (strudel)	Gluten — maximum, hand-stretched
Mexican Cookery	Masa	No gluten at all — gelatinized starch alone

Every prior dough chapter in this Subject has been a story about how much gluten to develop, and how. Masa breaks that pattern entirely — corn simply doesn't contain the proteins gluten is made from. What holds masa together is the starch itself, already gelatinized by Chapter 2's own nixtamalization.

Mixing and Testing the Dough

Combine fresh-ground masa (or masa harina reconstituted with water) with just enough additional water to form a soft, moist, pliable dough.

- 1 Form a small ball and flatten it slightly between your palms

This is masa's own real consistency test.

2 Check the edges

If they crack or crumble, the dough needs more water. If the dough sticks heavily to your hands, it's too wet.

3 Adjust and retest

Add small amounts of water or masa harina as needed, retesting each time, until a flattened piece holds a smooth, crack-free edge.

NO SUCH THING AS OVERWORKING MASA

Because there's no gluten to develop or toughen, masa genuinely can't be overworked the way a wheat dough can — mixing it more won't make it tough or elastic the way overkneading pasta or pastry would.

Keeping It From Drying Out

Masa's own real vulnerability isn't overworking — it's drying out. With no gluten forming a protective surface, exposed masa loses moisture and starts cracking noticeably faster than a resting wheat dough would. Keep it covered with a damp cloth whenever it isn't actively being worked.

A DIFFERENT PROTECTIVE STEP FROM HUNGARIAN COOKERY'S OWN RÉTES DOUGH

Rétes dough is coated in oil to stay pliable during its rest. Masa needs the opposite kind of protection — a damp cloth to keep moisture in, since it's the dough's own high water content, not a gluten structure, doing the work of holding it together.

Every prior dough in this Subject has been rolled, at minimum, or in Hungarian Cookery's case stretched by hand. Masa is never rolled at all — Chapter 4 covers pressing it in a tortilla press or by hand between the palms.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Mix a full batch of masa dough — from fresh nixtamal or masa harina and water — and use the ball-and-flatten test to check and adjust the consistency until the edges hold clean.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Leave a small ball of masa uncovered on the counter, and keep a second, equal ball covered with a damp cloth. Check both every few minutes and compare how quickly each starts to dry and crack.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Mix one portion of masa with minimal handling, and knead a second portion vigorously for several minutes, as if trying to develop gluten the way you would with a wheat dough. Compare the two.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — MASA DOUGH

- Masa is held together by gelatinized starch, not gluten — corn has none of the proteins gluten is made from
- Test consistency by flattening a small ball: cracked edges mean too dry, sticking hands mean too wet
- Masa genuinely can't be overworked the way a gluten dough can
- Its real vulnerability is drying out — keep it covered with a damp cloth, the opposite protective step from rétes dough's own oil coating

- Masa is never rolled — it's pressed, covered fully in Chapter 4

Next — Chapter 4: Tortillas — Pressing & the Comal

Pressing masa into thin rounds, cooking on a dry comal with a real three-flip technique, and a light, honest puff compared against Indian Cookery's own roti.

CHAPTER 4: TORTILLAS: PRESSING & THE COMAL

Mexican Cookery

Chapter 4 · Tortillas: Pressing & the Comal

A properly cooked tortilla puffs slightly on the comal — the same real trapped-steam physics behind Indian Cookery's own dramatic roti puff, but a genuinely lighter, more modest effect, for a real reason grounded directly in Chapter 3's own no-gluten lesson.

Pressing the Masa

Portion the masa into small balls, keeping the rest covered under a damp cloth as Chapter 3 describes. Place one ball between two sheets of plastic on a tortilla press, and press down in one firm, even motion — several partial presses tend to produce uneven thickness or ragged edges.

Without a press, the traditional method is patting the ball back and forth between the palms, rotating it as you go to gradually flatten and widen it into an even round — a real skill that genuinely takes practice to master evenly, but a real traditional technique in its own right.

Cooking on the Comal: A Real Three-Flip Technique

1 First side, on a dry, hot comal

Cook until the tortilla releases cleanly from the comal on its own and shows light colour or spotting — roughly 30-60 seconds.

2 Second side

Flip and cook the second side a little longer, developing a bit more colour.

3 Flip back to the first side, briefly

This final flip is what encourages the tortilla's own light puff.

Why the puff is genuinely lighter than Indian Cookery's roti

The underlying physics is the same one Indian Cookery's own roti chapter describes — trapped steam, built up between two sealed layers, pushing them apart. But gluten's own real elasticity is exactly what lets a wheat dough stretch into roti's full, dramatic balloon without tearing.

Masa has no gluten at all — its more crumbly starch structure can only inflate lightly before it would tear rather than stretch further, so a corn tortilla's own real puff is a modest bubble, not a full balloon.

A DIRECT, PHYSICS-GROUNDED PAYOFF OF CHAPTER 3

This is a genuine, concrete consequence of masa's own gluten-free structure, not a separate technique fact to memorise — the same real distinction Chapter 3 established now shows up directly in how the finished tortilla behaves on the heat.

TOO HOT OR TOO LONG MAKES A TORTILLA BRITTLE

A properly cooked tortilla stays soft and pliable, folding without cracking. Overcooking it — too high a heat, or leaving it on too long — dries it out and makes it stiff and prone to cracking when folded, genuinely different from the soft, foldable texture a real tortilla should have.

Keep finished tortillas wrapped in a clean cloth or a tortilla warmer as you cook the rest of the batch — the same real principle Indian Cookery's own roti chapter uses to keep flatbread soft.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Press (or hand-pat) and cook a full batch of tortillas, using the real three-flip technique on a dry comal, checking for the light puff and a soft, pliable, fold-without-cracking texture.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Press one tortilla deliberately unevenly — noticeably thicker on one side — and cook it the same way as a properly even one. Compare how each cooks and puffs.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Cook one tortilla properly and one deliberately left on the comal far too long, then fold both in half and compare — does either one crack?

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — TORTILLAS

- Press masa in one firm motion, or hand-pat it, keeping the rest covered while you work
- Cook first side, second side, then flip back to the first side briefly to encourage a light puff
- The puff shares roti's own trapped-steam physics, but stays modest since masa has no gluten to stretch into a full balloon
- A properly cooked tortilla stays soft and folds without cracking — overcooking makes it brittle
- Keep finished tortillas wrapped in a cloth to stay soft while cooking the rest of the batch

Next — Chapter 5: Dried Chiles — Toasting & Rehydrating

Briefly toasting whole dried chiles on a dry comal to develop flavour without scorching, then rehydrating in hot water before blending.

CHAPTER 5: DRIED CHILES: TOASTING & REHYDRATING

Mexican Cookery

Chapter 5 · Dried Chiles: Toasting & Rehydrating

Hungarian Cookery's own paprika chapter warns against scorching a ground powder in hot fat. This chapter's own warning looks similar on the surface — don't scorch it — but applies to a completely different object, in a completely different way.

A Real, Genuinely Different Kind of Burn Window

	HUNGARIAN COOKERY'S PAPRIKA	THIS CHAPTER'S DRIED CHILES
Form	A ground powder	Whole dried pods
Medium	Stirred into hot fat	Pressed directly against a dry, hot surface — no fat at all
Real risk	Scorching in liquid fat, off the heat	Scorching on direct dry heat

A SHARED CAUTION, A GENUINELY DIFFERENT TECHNIQUE

Both chapters warn against the same real outcome — a burnt, bitter flavour that ruins the finished dish — but the two techniques don't actually resemble each other beyond that shared warning. Paprika's own risk comes from residual heat in liquid fat; dried chiles' own risk comes from direct dry contact with a hot surface.

Toasting

- 1

Heat the comal dry

No oil at all — the same dry surface Chapter 4's own tortillas used.
- 2

Press the chile flat against the hot surface

Using a spatula or tongs, press each whole dried chile flat against the comal for just a few seconds per side.

3 Watch closely — this takes seconds, not minutes

The chile is ready once it becomes fragrant and slightly pliable or lightly blistered.

SMOKING OR BLACKENING MEANS IT'S ALREADY SCORCHED

If the chile starts smoking, or its colour shifts from a deep red or brown toward black, it's gone too far — the flavour turns genuinely bitter, and there's no real way to recover it once that's happened.

Rehydrating

Once toasted, remove the stems and most of the seeds (some or all can be left in for extra heat, if you want it). Soak the toasted chiles in hot — not boiling — water for a real 15-20 minutes, until softened and pliable, then drain before blending.

TOAST FIRST, THEN REHYDRATE — NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND

Toasting a chile that's already wet risks steaming it unevenly against the hot comal rather than developing a clean, real toasted flavour. Dry toasting has to come first, with rehydration as a separate, later step.

This is a real, distinct process from Indian Cookery's own whole-spice roasting (Chapter 2 of that course) — Indian spices are small, uniform seeds roasted then ground into a dry powder, while these are larger, irregular pods, toasted dry and then softened wet, never ground dry at all before blending.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Toast a batch of dried chiles properly — a few seconds per side, watching closely — then rehydrate in hot water, drain, and inspect the texture and smell.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Deliberately over-toast one chile — leave it on the comal until it blackens or smokes — and compare it directly against a properly toasted one.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Rehydrate a chile first, then try to toast it while still wet, and compare the result against toasting a chile properly, dry, before rehydrating it.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — DRIED CHILES

- Toast whole dried chiles dry, pressed flat against a hot comal, a matter of seconds per side
- Smoking or blackening means the chile has already scorched — a genuine, unrecoverable bitterness
- A real, different kind of burn window from Hungarian Cookery's own paprika — dry direct heat, not liquid fat
- Toast first, then rehydrate in hot water for 15-20 minutes — never the other way around
- A genuinely different process from Indian Cookery's own whole-spice roasting — larger pods, toasted dry then softened wet, never ground dry

Next — Chapter 6: Building a Salsa — Blend, Then Fry

Pureeing chiles, tomatoes, and aromatics into a sauce, then frying the blended salsa briefly to

cook out raw flavour and deepen the taste.

CHAPTER 6: BUILDING A SALSA: BLEND, THEN FRY

Mexican Cookery

Chapter 6 · Building a Salsa: Blend, Then Fry

Every sauce-building chapter in this Subject so far has cooked its base components first, then combined them into a final sauce. This chapter genuinely inverts that order — blend everything into a liquid first, then fry the already-blended puree.

A Real Order-of-Operations Inversion

COURSE	REAL ORDER
Italian Cookery	Sauté the soffritto, then add tomato and simmer
French Cookery	Cook the roux first, then add liquid
Chinese Cookery	Stir-fry aromatics, then add sauce ingredients
Indian Cookery	Build the bhuna base before any liquid goes in
Hungarian Cookery	Build the onion-paprika base before meat or liquid
Mexican Cookery	Blend everything into a liquid first, then fry that liquid

Every sibling course cooks its solid, chopped components before combining them into a final sauce. Mexican salsa technique does the reverse — chiles, tomatoes, and aromatics are blended into a puree first, and only afterward does real cooking happen, applied to the already-liquid mixture.

Building the Salsa

1 Blend the base

Combine rehydrated dried chiles (Chapter 5), tomatoes, onion, and garlic — raw or lightly roasted first, depending on the style you're after — and blend into a smooth or

semi-smooth puree.

2 Heat oil in a pan

Get the oil genuinely hot before the puree goes in.

3 Fry the blended puree

Pour the puree into the hot oil and cook, stirring, for a real few minutes, until it darkens slightly, thickens a little, and the raw, sharp edge mellows into something deeper and rounder.

POURING LIQUID INTO HOT OIL SPATTERS — GENUINELY MORE THAN SOLID INGREDIENTS

A wet puree hitting hot oil causes real, vigorous spattering, well beyond what adding chopped ingredients would produce. Pour carefully, stand back initially, and consider a splatter guard.

TASTE BEFORE AND AFTER — THE DIFFERENCE IS REAL

A raw or unfried puree tastes sharp and thin. The same mixture, fried, tastes noticeably rounder and deeper — a genuine, tasted transformation from the frying step alone.

Two Legitimate Styles, Not a Right and Wrong

Fresh, unfried salsas — bright, sharp, quickly blended or chopped — are just as real and traditional as the fried, cooked style this chapter focuses on. Both are genuine techniques with different goals: fresh salsa for a bright, immediate flavour; fried salsa for a deeper, more mellow one that also tends to keep longer.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Build a full cooked salsa — blend rehydrated dried chiles with tomatoes and aromatics, then fry the blended puree in hot oil until darkened and thickened, tasting before and after frying.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Split one batch of blended salsa in two — leave one portion raw, fry the other — and taste both directly side by side.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Practice pouring blended puree into hot oil carefully, observing the real spattering behaviour and using a splatter guard or slow, careful pouring to manage it safely.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — BUILDING A SALSA

- Blend chiles, tomatoes, and aromatics into a puree first — the reverse order from every sibling course's own sauce-building technique
- Fry the already-blended puree in hot oil for a few minutes, until it darkens and thickens slightly
- Pouring liquid into hot oil spatters more than solid ingredients — pour carefully
- Fried salsa tastes rounder and deeper; unfried salsa tastes brighter and sharper — both are genuine, legitimate styles

Next — Chapter 7: Mole — Assembling a Complex Sauce From Many Toasted Components

Building toward a real mole — multiple dried chiles, toasted spices, nuts or seeds, and chocolate.

CHAPTER 7: MOLE: ASSEMBLING A COMPLEX SAUCE FROM MANY TOASTED COMPONENTS

Mexican Cookery

Chapter 7 · Mole: Assembling a Complex Sauce From Many Toasted Components

Chapter 6's own salsa blends a handful of ingredients into a sauce. Mole takes that same blend-then-fry principle and applies it to something genuinely more complex — a dozen or more separately toasted components, each prepared its own way, before they're ever combined.

A Real, Honest Correction: Chocolate Isn't the Point

MOLE IS NOT "CHOCOLATE SAUCE"

Mole poblano's own real reputation abroad often centres entirely on chocolate — but in a real mole, chocolate is a small addition near the end, there to round out bitterness and add depth, not to make the dish taste like dessert. The genuine complexity comes from everything else — the chiles, the toasted spices, the nuts and seeds — not from the chocolate at all.

Toast Everything Separately First

Mole's own real technique is an extension of Chapter 5's dried-chile toasting and Chapter 6's blend- then-fry principle — but applied to far more components, each toasted on its own before anything is combined:

COMPONENT	HOW IT'S TOASTED
Dried chiles (ancho, guajillo, and others)	Pressed on a dry comal, per Chapter 5
Whole spices (cinnamon, cloves, black pepper, cumin)	Toasted briefly in a dry pan until fragrant

COMPONENT	HOW IT'S TOASTED
Nuts and seeds (almonds, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds)	Toasted in a dry pan until golden and aromatic
Bread or a tortilla	Toasted or lightly fried until deep golden — this thickens the finished sauce

THIS IS WHERE MOLE'S REAL COMPLEXITY COMES FROM

Each component develops its own distinct toasted flavour before anything is blended together. Skipping the individual toasting step and blending everything raw genuinely loses that layered depth — it's not a corner that can be cut without a real, tasted consequence.

Assembling the Mole

1 Rehydrate the toasted chiles

Soak them per Chapter 5's own technique.

2 Blend everything together

Combine the rehydrated chiles, toasted spices, toasted nuts and seeds, and toasted bread, blending in stages if needed — a real, dense mixture like this often takes more than one batch to blend smoothly.

3 Fry the blended mixture

Fry the combined puree in hot oil, the same real principle Chapter 6 introduced, now applied to a far more complex mixture.

4 Simmer with stock

Add stock and simmer for a real, extended time — often well over an hour — to let all the separately toasted flavours meld into one sauce.

5 Finish with a small amount of chocolate

Stir in a small amount of chocolate near the end, letting it melt fully into the sauce.

The finished mole should be thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, with a real, layered flavour — genuinely more complex than Chapter 6's own simpler, brighter salsa.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Build a real mole from scratch — toast several dried chiles, spices, and nuts or seeds separately, blend them together, fry the blended mixture, simmer with stock, and finish with a small amount of chocolate.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Taste a small piece of the chocolate you're using on its own, then taste it properly melted into the finished mole, and compare how dominant (or not) the chocolate flavour actually is in each.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Make a small side batch of mole skipping the individual toasting step — blend everything raw and untoasted — and compare its flavour directly against a properly toasted batch.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — MOLE

- Chocolate is a small, late addition for depth and balance — not mole's dominant flavour
- Each dried chile, spice, and nut or seed is toasted separately, its own way, before anything is combined
- Blend the toasted components together, fry the blended mixture, then simmer with stock for a real, extended time
- Skipping individual toasting genuinely loses the layered depth that makes mole distinct from a simpler salsa

Next — Chapter 8: Tamales — Beating Air Into Masa & Steaming in a Husk

Beating masa with lard until light and aerated, tested with a real float test, then steamed rather than griddled.

CHAPTER 8: TAMALES: BEATING AIR INTO MASA & STEAMING IN A HUSK

Mexican Cookery

Chapter 8 · Tamales: Beating Air Into Masa & Steaming in a Husk

Tortilla masa (Chapter 4) is a firm, moist dough, pressed thin and cooked dry on a hot comal. Tamale masa starts from the same base but takes it in a genuinely different direction — whipped with fat until it's light and aerated, then cooked slowly by moist steam instead.

Beating Air Into the Masa

Combine masa with lard (or vegetable shortening as a substitute), and beat vigorously — with a mixer, or by hand with real sustained effort — until the mixture becomes noticeably lighter and fluffier, closer to a thick batter than a firm dough.

THE REAL FLOAT TEST

Drop a small ball of the beaten masa into a cup of cold water. If it floats, enough air has been incorporated. If it sinks, keep beating and test again — a genuine, concrete way to check without guessing.

Assembling in a Husk

1 Soak the husks

Soften dried corn husks in warm water until pliable.

2 Spread the masa

Using the back of a spoon or an offset spatula, spread a layer of beaten masa across the wider end of a husk.

3 Add the filling

Place a spoonful of filling — savoury (meat in mole or salsa, or cheese and chiles) or sweet — in the centre of the masa layer.

4 **Fold to enclose**

Fold the sides of the husk in over the filling, then fold up the narrow bottom end, enclosing the masa and filling completely.

Steaming

Stand the wrapped tamales upright in a steamer, open end up, and steam for a real, substantial time — often an hour or more — until the masa sets.

A REAL DONENESS TEST: DOES IT RELEASE CLEANLY?

Unwrap a test tamale carefully. If the masa sticks to the husk, it needs more steaming time. A properly done tamale's masa pulls cleanly away from the husk.

The husk itself is purely a cooking vessel here — unlike Chinese Cookery's own dumpling wrappers, it's never eaten, only removed before serving.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Beat a batch of masa with lard until light, testing it with the float test, and continuing to beat and retest until a small ball floats.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Assemble and steam a full batch of tamales — soaked husks, spread beaten masa, a filling, folded and steamed for the proper time — checking doneness by whether the masa releases cleanly from the husk.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Make one tamale with properly beaten, aerated masa, and one with plain, unbeaten masa (like tortilla masa). Steam both the same way and compare texture.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — TAMALES

- Tamale masa is beaten with lard until light and aerated — genuinely different from tortilla masa's firmer, unbeaten texture
- The float test — a small ball dropped in water — is the real, concrete check for enough air
- Spread masa on a soaked husk, add filling, fold to enclose, and steam upright for a real, substantial time
- A properly done tamale's masa releases cleanly from the husk; an underdone one sticks
- Unlike a dumpling wrapper, the husk is purely a cooking vessel — never eaten

Next — Chapter 9: Lime, Citrus & Ceviche: "Cooking" Without Heat

Citrus-marinated raw fish as real protein denaturation via acid alone, honestly compared against Indian Cookery's own yogurt-tenderizing chemistry.

CHAPTER 9: LIME, CITRUS & CEVICHE: "COOKING" WITHOUT HEAT

Mexican Cookery

Chapter 9 · Lime, Citrus & Ceviche: "Cooking" Without Heat

Indian Cookery's own yogurt marination gently softens a protein's surface over hours. Ceviche takes the same real chemistry — acid denaturing protein — and pushes it much further: raw fish, fully transformed by citrus alone, with no heat involved at all.

The Real Chemistry

Fresh lime (and often lemon) juice contains real citric acid, concentrated enough that submerging raw fish in it denatures the proteins in the flesh — the same fundamental protein transformation heat would cause, just triggered by a change in acidity instead of temperature. The fish firms up and turns opaque, visually and texturally similar to what cooking with heat would produce.

	INDIAN COOKERY'S YOGURT MARINADE	CEVICHE'S CITRUS MARINADE
Real mechanism	Mild lactic acid, gently loosening protein structure	Concentrated citric acid, genuinely denaturing protein
Real depth of effect	Surface-level tenderizing	A full, complete-through transformation, given proper time
Real time involved	Hours, even overnight — genuinely forgiving	Minutes — a real, much narrower window

SAME UNDERLYING CHEMISTRY, A GENUINELY DIFFERENT DEGREE OF EFFECT

Both techniques rely on the same real principle — acid acting on protein. Yogurt's mild acidity is forgiving specifically because it only works gently at the surface. Citrus acid is concentrated enough to fully transform the protein all the way through, which is exactly why ceviche's own timing window is so much narrower.

Making Ceviche

1 Start with genuinely fresh fish

Use the freshest fish you can source, ideally previously frozen — a real, standard food-safety practice for any raw-fish preparation, since freezing kills parasites that could otherwise survive raw handling.

2 Cut it into small, even pieces

Even sizing matters — an unevenly cut piece will "cook" at a genuinely different rate than its neighbours.

3 Submerge fully in fresh lime juice

Make sure every piece is genuinely covered by the juice, not just partially dipped.

4 Watch for the real visual signal

Raw fish looks translucent and soft. Properly "cooked" ceviche fish turns opaque and firms up — a genuine, visible doneness cue.

A REAL, NARROW TIMING WINDOW — OVER-MARINATING GENUINELY RUINS THE TEXTURE

Ceviche typically needs somewhere around 15-30 minutes, depending on how finely the fish is cut — but leaving it in the acid too long past that point keeps breaking the protein down well past a pleasant texture, turning the fish genuinely mushy and mealy rather than firm.

Drain and finish with diced onion, chile, cilantro, and salt — sometimes tomato or avocado — and serve cold.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Make a full ceviche from scratch — evenly cut, fresh fish, fully submerged in lime juice, watched closely for the opacity change over the real timing window, then drained and seasoned.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Marinate two equal portions of fish — one for the proper timing window, one left far longer — and compare their final texture directly.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Set aside a small piece of raw fish before marinating the rest, then compare it directly against a properly finished piece of ceviche — appearance, texture, and how each feels when cut.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — CEVICHE

- Citric acid genuinely denatures fish protein — the same underlying chemistry as Indian Cookery's own yogurt marinade, at a much stronger, faster-acting concentration
- Use genuinely fresh, ideally previously frozen fish, cut into small, even pieces
- Submerge fully in lime juice; opacity replacing translucency is the real, visible doneness signal
- A real, narrow window — typically 15-30 minutes — with over-marinating genuinely turning the texture mushy

Next — Chapter 10: Capstone — A Build-Your-Own Taco Spread

A genuine fourth structural model for this Subject — shared components assembled into an individual portion by each diner at the table.

CHAPTER 10: CAPSTONE — A BUILD-YOUR-OWN TACO SPREAD

Mexican Cookery

Chapter 10 · Capstone: A Build-Your-Own Taco Spread

Every capstone before this one — however differently structured — ends with a finished, composed dish the cook has already assembled. This one doesn't. The cook provides the components; the actual composing happens at the table, individually, by each diner.

A Real Fourth Structural Model

COURSE	CAPSTONE STRUCTURE
Japanese Cookery	One balanced meal, already composed — ichiju-sansai
Italian Cookery	Sequential courses, each already composed
French Cookery	Sequential courses, each already composed
Chinese Cookery	Several already-composed dishes, shared for the table
Indian Cookery	A thali — several small already-composed dishes on one plate
Hungarian Cookery	Sequential courses, each already composed
Mexican Cookery	Shared, uncomposed components — each diner builds their own portion at the table

NO SINGLE "CORRECT" FINISHED DISH EXISTS

Every other capstone in this Subject has one real, intended final plate. This one deliberately doesn't — the cook's job ends at preparing good components, and the actual assembly, in whatever combination each diner prefers, happens after the food reaches the table.

Preparing the Components

Prepare a filling (a simply seasoned protein, or the ceviche from Chapter 9 as a lighter option), at least one salsa — the fried style from Chapter 6, and optionally a fresh, unfried one for contrast — lime wedges, and diced onion and cilantro for garnish. All of these can be made ahead and kept warm or chilled as appropriate.

1 Prepare the filling and salsas first

These hold well and can genuinely be made in advance.

2 Prepare garnishes and lime wedges

Quick, and also fine to have ready ahead of time.

3 Make the tortillas last, right before serving

Press and cook them fresh, going straight from the comal to the table while still warm.

THE SAME REAL TIMING PRINCIPLE AS INDIAN COOKERY'S ROTI

Indian Cookery's own capstone insisted on cooking roti fresh, last, since it's the one component that genuinely can't wait. Tortillas share exactly that same real constraint — everything else on this spread can hold, but a tortilla made ahead and left to sit loses real warmth and pliability within minutes.

Serving

Bring the filling, salsas, garnishes, and lime to the table together, then bring warm tortillas out last, fresh off the comal. Let each diner build their own taco — filling, salsa, a squeeze of lime, garnish — to their own taste.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Prepare and serve a full build-your-own taco spread — filling, at least one salsa, garnishes, and lime prepared ahead, with tortillas made fresh and last — and let everyone assemble their own.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Serve the same components a second way — pre-assembled by you into one fixed, composed taco per person, rather than let diners build their own. Reflect on what's genuinely different about the two approaches.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Make a batch of tortillas well ahead of time and let them sit, rather than cooking them fresh at serving time, and compare their warmth and pliability directly against a freshly made batch.

→ Solution

Where Every Piece Came From

SPREAD COMPONENT	CHAPTERS IT DRAWS FROM
Tortillas	2 (nixtamalization), 3 (masa dough), 4 (pressing & the comal)
Salsa(s)	5 (dried chiles), 6 (salsa building) — mole (7) as a richer alternative
Filling	A simply seasoned protein, or ceviche (9) as a lighter option
Garnish & lime	1 (pantry)

A real, honest note on scope: this course doesn't cover several other real Mexican dishes — enchiladas, chiles rellenos, pozole, the specific marinating-and-spit-roasting technique behind

tacos al pastor, or regional specialties beyond the single mole covered in Chapter 7. Any of these would make a genuine future companion to this course.

QUICK REFERENCE — A BUILD-YOUR-OWN TACO SPREAD

- A genuine fourth structural model for this Subject — no single composed dish, components assembled by each diner at the table
- Filling, salsas, and garnishes can be made ahead; tortillas cannot — made fresh, last, off the comal
- The same real timing principle as Indian Cookery's own roti-last capstone lesson
- No "correct" combination — each diner's own assembled taco is the real finished dish

Course Complete

This closes Mexican Cookery's own 10 chapters — nixtamalization's real chemistry, a gluten-free dough tradition, tortillas, dried chiles, salsa and mole building, tamales, ceviche, and a capstone that builds every technique into a shared, self-assembled meal.