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Culichi and Shredded Chicken Chiles Rellenos Casserole

Culichi is a rich, somewhat spicy sauce made from poblano chiles, onions, and sour cream. It comes from Culiacán, in the state of Sinaloa on the Pacific Coast. Culichi is often served with fish dishes but I've adapted it here for shredded chicken, where it replaces the traditional egg custard. Serves 6 to 8.

8 Anaheim chiles, roasted, seeded, and peeled
2 tablespoons canola oil or other neutral flavored oil
2 yellow onions, finely diced
2 tablespoons chopped garlic
2 bunches green onions, medium-diced
2 tablespoons medium Santa Cruz Chili Powder
2 tablespoons chipotle in adobo, minced with its marinade
2 tomatoes, seeded and medium-diced
4 cups loosely shredded, roasted, or poached chicken meat
1-1/2 cups Monterey Jack cheese, grated
1 teaspoon salt
3 cups Culichi Sauce

Preheat oven to 375° F.

Slice the chiles lengthwise into 1-inch wide strips, and set aside. Heat the oil in a large pan and sauté the yellow onions over medium heat, about 5 minutes, until they become quite soft. Add the garlic, and continue cooking about 1 minute so that the garlic releases its flavor. Sprinkle in the chili powder, stir in the chipotle and tomatoes, and simmer for about 2 minutes more. Stir in the chicken meat, season with 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste, and simmer about 3 minutes.

Grease an 8-inch casserole. *[Note: We used a larger casserole dish with great success].* Layer half of the chile strips to cover as much of as the bottom of the casserole as possible. Spread half the chicken mixture over the chiles. Sprinkle half the cheese over the chicken. Sprinkle half the green onions over the cheese. Ladle half of the Culichi Sauce over the mixture, gently shaking the casserole to help the sauce seep to the bottom of the dish. Layer the remaining chile strips over the cheese and Culichi Sauce. Spread the rest of the chicken mixture over chiles. Sprinkle the remaining cheese over the chicken, followed by the remaining green onions and Culichi Sauce, gently shaking the casserole.

Bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the casserole begins to bubble and brown.

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Culichi Sauce

Culichi refers to things that come from the city of Culiacán, which is in the state of Sinaloa on Mexico's Pacific Coast. Culichi sauce is often used with fish, but I include it here for the Culichi and Shredded Chicken Chiles Rellenos Casserole. A very rich sauce, it is also excellent with grilled or pan-fried fish.

Makes 3 cups.

2 teaspoons canola oil or other neutral-flavored oil
1 yellow onion, roughly chopped
3 poblano chiles, peeled, seeded, and roughly chopped
1 tablespoon freshly chopped garlic
2 cups dry white wine
2 cups sour cream
1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese

In a 2-quart saucepot with a heavy bottom, heat the oil over medium heat and sauté the onion and poblanos for about 10 minutes, until the onion becomes soft and translucent and the chiles are soft. Add the garlic and continue cooking 1 minute more, so the garlic releases its flavor. Add the white wine and reduce for about 10 minutes to 1/2 cup. Add the sour cream and bring to a slow simmer, stirring constantly so that the sauce doesn't scorch. Stir in the cheese to melt. Let cool slightly, then puree in a food processor.