

Travel the World without Leaving Your Kitchen

International Cooking Series

The Fusion Cuisine of Spain

Most of us can passionately describe a delicious recipe or meal that someone in our family has passed down for generations and the ensuing joy of sharing the dish around the table. Exploring, learning, and embracing cultural food traditions, both our own and others', can broaden our perspectives about the history and cultures from around the world. Whether you experience these cultural differences in eating while traveling, while visiting a restaurant in your community, or by preparing them at home, it can help you celebrate the cultural diversity found in all our communities. So, travel the world without leaving your kitchen and experience the influences of past inhabitants on the mouthwatering flavors of Spain.

The History of Food

The Pyrenees Mountains physically isolate Spain from the rest of Europe. It wasn't until the fascist dictator Francisco Franco died that Spaniards began building a huge tourism industry, entertaining more than 80 million tourists annually. Bullfights, spiraling cathedrals, world-class art, whitewashed villages, and sunny beaches, along with the charm of the people, make Spain an enchanting place to live and visit. The influences of Greek, Roman, Jewish, Moorish, and Middle Eastern inhabitants are a blend of cultures, flavors, and ingredients that have led to diverse regional food traditions. There are many flavors and cultures to explore across Spain, from cured ham and fresh paella to hearty beans. But for Spaniards, food isn't just about nourishment, it's about what happens around the table with family and friends. It's about tradition and using local, quality ingredients to showcase the natural, and often spicy, flavors in each dish.





Regions of Spain

With spectacular topography and geography, Spain has 17 distinct regions. While not all are mentioned here, you can get the sense of how history has influenced the food culture of each area.

- **Galicia** hosts pilgrims hiking across northern Spain on a journey that ends at the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. The area is known for seafood tapas, such as Galician goose barnacles and Galician-style octopus. These are delicacies best enjoyed on the seaside of Spain. During three months of the year, you can find pop-up
- restaurants, a medieval tradition that allowed winemakers to sell their surplus wine. Today, winemakers open their homes to sell their homemade wine and offer plates of Padron peppers and chorizo empanadas.
- The city of **Bilbao is in Basque country** and best known for the Guggenheim Museum.
- Skewers (pinchos or pintxos) are an appetizer of small portions of meat, fish, or vegetables served on top of a piece of bread, often served with a skewer or toothpick. Basque country is also known for more than 500 apple varieties, much

of which is made into cider in the 80 cider houses that remain from the past.

- If you're interested in running with the bulls, you're headed to **Pamplona in Navarre**. Navarre is home to the specialty crops of asparagus, artichokes, and peppers. This region is well known for its large frozen vegetable factory.
- The region of **Aragón** is home to the Pyrenees Mountains and Spain's largest river, the Ebro. Lamb and beef share a plate with rainbow trout and crab as local delicacies of the region. Or if you're visiting, join truffle farmers and their dogs who sniff out prized truffles. This is one of the largest truffle-producing regions in the world.
- **Cataluña** is where trendy Barcelona, complete with Gaudi's modernistic architecture, hosts the most tourists. Catalan tomato bread (pa amb tomaquet) is a popular breakfast food or snack, best served warm. Simply toast thin slices of good bread, rub a clove of garlic on top of the bread, rub a tomato, cut-side-down all over the top of the bread, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with salt. It is easy to make, and a great way to use your overripe tomatoes from the garden.
- Spain has 46 World Heritage sites, and the **Castille and León** region has eight of them. Besides historical cities, the area is regarded for the world's largest collection of Romanesque art. Wheat, barley, and oats are grown in the area. Suckling pig, blood sausages, and roast lamb are readily available in restaurants.
- The tapas bar culture is strong in **Madrid**, also Spain's capital city. High speed trains connect cities throughout Spain, making day trips easy. Hearty stews of sausage, chickpeas, and vegetables are included in local recipes. Or visit Madrid's only three-star restaurant, DiverXO, where the tasting menus are works of art themselves.
- **Castilla-La Mancha** is mostly an arid and sparsely populated area of Don Quixote fame.

The capital of Castilla-la Mancha region is Toledo, known for its celebration of its Christian, Muslim, and Jewish past. While it is one of the biggest regions in Spain, it is sparsely populated outside of the cities, making wheat, grape, and olive oil cultivation possible. Sheep, goat, rabbit, and salted cod are popular in this area. The delicious Spanish cheese Manchego is produced here, as well. It is made exclusively from the milk of Manchego sheep and aged for up to two years. If you visit during the saffron harvest in October, you can join others in picking and toasting the spice by hand.

- The **Valencia** region is on the eastern Mediterranean coast. Traditional paella made with chicken, rabbit, and local white beans reportedly began here. While Valencia is famous for this rice dish, the region of Alicante has recorded more than 300 historical rice-based dishes, which local chefs are trying to promote. Delicious Valencia oranges and mandarins are grown here, too. It is reported that the locals eat more than five times the oranges as in other European countries.
- The Iberian pigs still roam the forests and fields of the region of **Extremadura**. These unique hogs provide cured ham products that use the locally grown La Vera paprika.
- The whitewashed villages originate in the southern **Andalucía** area, where Moorish and medieval architecture is on display. It is also famous for Spanish flamenco dancing and music. Golden sandy beaches and lots of fish and shellfish, along with cold gazpacho are popular here.



Tapas

The Spaniards revolutionized the art of savory snacking. They are famous for their tapas. Tapas are small savory dishes, snacks, or appetizers, sometimes referred to as small plates. The history behind tapas is varied. Since tapa means lid, one story comes from covering customers' drinks with a slice of bread, ham, or cheese to stop the flies and dust from entering. Another has King Alfonso X being prescribed a large quantity of alcohol to recover from illness. So, he ate small portions to diminish the effects of alcohol. Afterward, he insisted that every household should serve a small portion of food to prevent public drunkenness. Another legend has it that workers labored from dusk to dawn and not wanting to stop for lunch or dinner but needing nourishment, they sustained themselves with

small and inexpensive slices of sausage, olives, and chickpeas. After working long hours in extreme heat, soups like gazpacho and cold salads provided both nourishment and hydration. Fresh cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, and onions are marinated in oil before serving with octopus, tuna, or fish. In some cases, olives or hard-cooked eggs are also added. Whatever the reason, the small plate serving gives you the opportunity to try something new while grazing your way to dinner.

Tortilla Espanola (Spanish Omelet)

Spanish tortillas are thick omelets of egg and other ingredients, such as potatoes, spinach, and onions. They are cooked in a large skillet and usually cut into pieces for service. In Spain, you will find them served for breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, and tapas.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings of tapas or 4 entrée servings

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 45 minutes

Nutritional analysis per 2-egg omelet: 240cal, 3g fat, 170mg cholesterol, 230mg sodium, 22g carbohydrates, 9g protein

Ingredients

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 pounds potatoes, ¼-inch slices (Yukon Gold variety works well)
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 8 large eggs, beaten well
- ½ teaspoon salt

Instructions

1. Pat the potato slices dry and place them in a large bowl. Sprinkle with salt and toss gently to combine.
 2. In a large skillet, over medium-low heat, add the oil and heat until shimmering. Add the potatoes, and cook for about 10 to 15 minutes, until done. Don't worry if they break apart. Remove the potatoes to a paper-towel-lined colander to absorb excess oil.
 3. Using the leftover hot oil in the same skillet used for potatoes, turn the heat up to medium. Add the onions and sauté until they begin to caramelize, stirring often, about 4 minutes. Remove the onions into a paper-towel-lined colander to absorb excess oil.
 4. In a large bowl, combine the eggs by whisking them together. Add the drained potatoes and onions. Allow the mixture to rest for 20 minutes.
 5. Carefully wipe the skillet to remove excess oil and food particles. Over medium-low heat, gently add the egg mixture and cook for about 6 to 8 minutes.
 6. To flip the tortilla, use a larger plate than your skillet. Place the plate over the pan and flip it over quickly. It will be messy, just don't burn yourself. Then slowly slide the tortilla back into the pan and let the other side cook for another 6 to 10 minutes, or until the eggs are fully done.
 7. Flip the tortilla onto a clean plate. Let it cool for 10 minutes before serving at room temperature.
- Note:** If you prefer not to fry the potatoes, in a large pan, heat 1 quart of water to boiling over high heat. Add sliced potatoes and cook until tender, about 10 minutes. Or follow the instructions for steaming in the microwave. These tortillas will store for up to three days refrigerated in an airtight container. They do not freeze well.





Gambas al Ajillo (Spanish Garlic Shrimp)

Garlic shrimp is a traditional tapas dish of garlic-drowned shrimp in a rich olive oil sauce. You can also add your favorite spice, maybe Spanish paprika, to change the flavor a bit. Pair with lemon slices and crusty bread to mop up the delicious sauce.

Yield: 6 servings for tapas

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Nutritional analysis per serving: 180cal, 10g fat, 145mg cholesterol, 840mg sodium, 5g carbohydrates, 16g protein

Ingredients

- *1½ pounds peeled and deveined large shrimp*
- *½ to 1 teaspoon salt*
- *¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil*
- *¼ cup garlic, peeled and thinly sliced (approximately 12 medium cloves)*
- *1 to 2 teaspoons red pepper flakes*
- *1 tablespoon chopped parsley*
- *2 to 3 tablespoons of dry sherry or dry white wine, optional*
- *1 teaspoon lemon zest*
- *4 inches of crusty bread, sliced into pieces*

Instructions

1. Pat shrimp dry and sprinkle with salt, tossing lightly. Set aside for 10 minutes.
2. In a large skillet, over medium heat, heat oil until shimmering. Add the garlic and cook about 2 to 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. The garlic should start to caramelize on the edges.
3. Add the shrimp. Sauté until pink about 2 to 4 minutes before turning, depending on the size of the shrimp. It is easy to overcook the shrimp so watch carefully. Remove from the heat and add the red pepper flakes, parsley, wine, and zest.
4. Serve immediately.

Note: This recipe uses less oil than traditional options to reduce the calories and fat per serving. Consider using the leftover sauce on other meat, seafood, or vegetable dishes.

Croquetas de Jamon Serrano (Ham Croquettes)

While croquettes date back to the French and contain potato centers, croquetas are filled with a béchamel sauce and, in this case, Serrano ham. Cured for at least a year, serrano ham has a much deeper flavor and firmer texture than its closest relative, Italian prosciutto. Served with cheese and olives is a simple way to taste Serrano ham. The breed of the pig, along with the curing process are the main differences between Jamon Iberico and Jamon Serrano. Jamon Iberico is certified by the European Union. Along with this breed of pig foraging for acorns, herbs, and grasses, the curing process allows the fats to change to healthier monosaturated fatty acids, high in oleic acid. When served paper thin and at room temperature, the meat literally melts in your mouth, allowing Jamon Iberico to be considered a delicacy.

Yield: 18 3-inch croquetas

Prep time: 30 minutes + refrigerated resting

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Nutritional analysis per 2 croquetas: 450cal, 21g fat, 35mg cholesterol, 410mg sodium, 52g carbohydrates, 12g protein

Ingredients for the Croqueta Doughs

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, finely diced
- 1 medium onion, finely diced
- Less than ½ cup of all-purpose flour
- 4 ounces ham, small diced (Serrano or Iberico ham is a traditional choice)
- Pinch of ground nutmeg
- 2 cups 2% milk

Instructions for the Croqueta Dough

1. In a large pan, over medium heat, add olive oil and heat until shimmering.
2. Add the diced onion and garlic, and sauté for about 2 minutes or until the mixture starts to brown.
3. Add the diced ham and nutmeg, and sauté for 30 seconds more.



4. Add the flour, stirring continuously until it begins to turn brown, about 2 to 3 minutes.
5. Reduce the heat to medium-low. Add the milk little by little, stirring continuously to incorporate each addition until it is all added. This may take about 15 minutes. Adding it all at once will result in lumpy sauce. It should become creamy and thick.
6. Turn off the heat and allow the dough to cool slightly before transferring into a large bowl. Cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight.

Ingredients for the Breading

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 beaten egg
- 2½ cups breadcrumbs
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil



Instructions for Making Croquetas

1. To make the ham croquetas, take the dough out of the refrigerator. With lightly floured hands, shape 2 tablespoons of dough at a time and set aside for later breading. There should be about 18 3-inch croquetas.
2. Prepare separate bowls of flour, beaten egg, and breadcrumbs. Roll each croqueta in flour, dip in egg, and roll in breadcrumbs. Set aside on a parchment-lined baking sheet and place in the freezer for 10 to 15 minutes.
3. To fry, heat oil over medium-high heat in a large skillet. The oil is ready when you drop a little flour in the hot oil, and it sizzles.
4. Fry the chilled croquetas in batches for 1 to 2 minutes on each side, or until golden brown.
5. Remove the croquetas from the oil and place them on a paper towel-lined platter and allow to cool.
6. Serve warm.

Note: The croqueta dough or croquetas may be frozen for up to 2 months in an airtight container. Allow them to thaw on the counter for 10 to 15 minutes before frying. Following manufacturer's instructions, these can be prepared in an air fryer or in the oven on an air fryer setting.



Pipirrana (Spanish Summer Salad)

Pipirrana is an easy cold salad which originated in the Andalucía region of southern Spain but varies in ingredients depending on the region. The salad is perfect for using seasonal, local ingredients during the summer months.

Yield: 10 as a tapa or 6 servings as a side dish

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving: 65cal, 5g fat, 40mg sodium, 5g carbohydrates, 1g protein

Ingredients for Salad

- 2 large ripe tomatoes, chopped
- 1 medium cucumber, seeded and chopped
- 1 small, white or Spanish onion, diced
- ½ medium green bell pepper, chopped
- ½ medium red bell pepper, chopped

Ingredients for Garlic Vinaigrette

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- Pinch of pepper

Instructions

1. In a medium bowl, combine all the salad ingredients.
2. In a small bowl, combine vinaigrette ingredients. Add the vinaigrette into the salad and toss to combine. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes or more before serving with crusty bread.
3. Traditional garnishes might include hard-cooked eggs and/or tuna.

Note: The salad may be refrigerated for up to 3 days in an airtight container. It does not freeze well.



Traditional Spanish Gazpacho

Traditional gazpacho served in Spain is very smooth, whereas our American version is generally chunky, with a tomato juice base. Traditional Spanish gazpacho is served in a glass to drink like juice or with crusty bread for dunking as a tapa.

Yield: 6 servings

Prep time: 20 minutes + refrigeration time

Cook time: 40 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving: 120cal, 9g fat, 75mg sodium, 8g carbohydrates, 2g protein

Ingredients

- 2 pounds of fresh summer tomatoes, skinned, seeded, and chopped
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- 1 small green bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 small cucumber, peeled, seeded, and chopped
- 1 teaspoon sherry vinegar or red wine vinegar
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Pinch of salt
- 4 inches of crusty bread, cut into pieces

Instructions

1. In a blender, combine all ingredients, including the bread. Using the low speed, turn on the blender and process for 5 minutes, until it is smooth. If it is too thick, add a little more olive oil or water. Transfer the gazpacho to a glass pitcher, cover, and refrigerate for a minimum of 2 hours or up to 24 hours.
2. Remove the pitcher from the refrigerator and give it a stir before filling glasses or bowls.
3. A traditional garnish is finely diced onions and peppers with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil.

Note: The soup can be refrigerated for up to 5 days, tightly covered. If you can find cubanelle or Italian peppers, use them in place of the bell pepper.



Espinacas con Garbanzos (Spinach with Chickpeas)

Espinacas con Garbanzos originated as a tapa in Seville. Arab traders brought spinach from ancient Persia, dating back to the 12th century. Spinach was an important ingredient in Moorish and Sephardic Jewish cuisine in Spain during that time. The garbanzos were brought to Spain by way of the Phoenicians. If you love chickpeas, search the web for a Cocido Madrileño recipe, a stew that includes meat, potatoes, and chickpeas.

Yield: 12 servings as a tapa, 6 servings as a side dish

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 20 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small onion, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 16-ounce can of garbanzo beans (chickpeas), drained and rinsed*
- 1 10-ounce package of frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained well*
- ¼ cup raisins

- ½ cup tomato sauce
- 1 teaspoon ground smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper

**If the size indicated is not available in the local grocery, purchase what is available.*

Instructions

1. In a large skillet, over medium-low heat, heat oil until shimmering.
2. Add the onion, stirring occasionally for about 4 minutes. Then add garlic and cook another 1 minute or until onions are translucent.
3. Stir in the remaining ingredients, lightly mashing the chickpeas as the mixture cooks. Cook the mixture until thoroughly heated to 135 degrees F.

Note: To prepare as a stew, add 1 cup of low-sodium chicken broth, and for a tapa, serve on crusty bread slices. This is also delicious with ham added.



Paella

Paella is a rice dish with ancient roots in the Valencia region. The original recipe included round-grain rice, green beans, rabbit, chicken, sometimes duck, and lima or butter beans. Traditionally, a paella pan was used to toast the rice in a single layer, but an iron skillet or heavy saucepan will work. Other popular variations have evolved including seafood paella (Paella de Marisco), which replaces the meat with seafood and removes the beans and green vegetables, and mixed paella (Paella Mixta), which combines meat, seafood, vegetables, and sometimes beans, with the traditional rice. Paella is meant to be customized, so if you have a favorite meat, seafood, or vegetable, use it. Some say the best part of the paella is the socarrat. This is the toasted rice at the bottom of the pan when the paella is cooked correctly.

In Spain, bomba or calasparra rice is used. This type of rice absorbs a lot of moisture while staying firm after cooking. While expensive, saffron gives paella its golden hue and earthy, floral flavor. To use saffron threads in this recipe, add threads to a small bowl. Cover with 1 cup of boiling low-sodium chicken broth and allow the combination to sit for 20 minutes.

Serves: 8 servings

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 45 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving: 530cal, 20g fat, 70mg cholesterol, 940mg sodium, 62g carbohydrates, 24g protein

Ingredients

- *¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil*
- *1 cup onion, diced*
- *½ medium red bell pepper, diced*
- *½ medium green bell pepper, diced*
- *3 cloves garlic, crushed*
- *1 teaspoon smoked or sweet paprika*
- *2 large tomatoes, diced, or 8 ounces tomato sauce*
- *½ teaspoon deep-orange saffron threads or ¼ teaspoon ground saffron*
- *1 teaspoon salt*
- *½ teaspoon pepper*
- *6 cups low-sodium chicken broth, 1 cup may be used to soften the saffron threads*
- *1 pound chicken thighs, skin and bone removed, cut into ½-inch pieces, or chicken breasts*
- *8 ounces Spanish chorizo, sliced, or pork loin, cut into ½-inch pieces*
- *2½ cups bomba rice*
- *½ pound large shrimp, peeled and deveined*
- *½ pound fresh mussels or clams*

Instructions

1. In a large skillet or cast iron skillet, over medium-high, heat the oil until it shimmers.
2. Add the onion, peppers, and garlic, and cook until onions soften, about 6 minutes, stirring often.
3. Add tomatoes, paprika, saffron (see above how to soften saffron threads before adding), salt, and pepper. Cook another 5 minutes, stirring often.
4. Add ½ cup broth and cook for 10 more minutes.
5. Add chicken, chorizo, and rice. Sear all sides for about 2 minutes, until lightly browned, stirring often.
6. Add the remaining broth slowly into the pan and jiggle the pan so the rice falls to the bottom into an even layer. Bring the broth to a boil. The socarrat is becoming a crunchy crust on the bottom of the pan.
7. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook uncovered, without stirring, until the rice has absorbed most of the liquid, about 12 to 15 minutes.
8. Add the shrimp and mussels and cook without stirring, for 5 more minutes, or until rice is al dente. Add ¼ cup more water or broth if the rice is not done and continue cooking, if needed.
9. Remove the pan from the heat. Cover pan and allow to rest for 10 minutes.
10. Serve warm.



Note: Ground turmeric, annatto, or calendula are good substitutes for the expensive saffron. Calrose rice is a good substitute for bomba rice.

Spanish Chicken and Chorizo Stew

Chorizo is a highly seasoned pork sausage stuffed into natural pig intestines and allowed to cure. Spanish chorizo includes either sweet or hot smoked paprika. The paprika gives it a deep red color and smoky flavor. In America, Spanish chorizo is available fully cooked and dry or semi-cured and soft.

Yield: 10 servings

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 1 hour

Nutritional analysis per serving: 590cal, 31g fat, 215mg cholesterol, 1180mg sodium, 15g carbohydrates, 58g protein

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs or breasts*
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ ground black pepper
- 1 pound semi-cured chorizo, ½-inch sliced*
- 1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 1 medium red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cup dry sherry or dry white wine
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 28-ounce can of crushed tomatoes
- ½ cup green olives, pitted and sliced in half, as garnish*

**Using white meat, halving the chorizo, and substituting black olives for green, greatly reduces the amount of fat and sodium in this recipe.*

Instructions

1. In a large pot or Dutch oven with a lid, heat oil on medium-high until shimmering.



2. Salt and pepper the chicken and add to the pan. Sear each side 3 to 4 minutes, or until brown. Remove from pan and set aside.
3. Add the chorizo and sear 2 to 3 minutes, or until brown, on all sides.
4. Add the onion and peppers, and sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes, stirring often to prevent sticking.
5. Add the garlic and the rest of the spices and stir for 1 minute.
6. Add the sherry or wine and deglaze the pan by stirring the bottom to remove any particles that are sticking. Continue to cook until the wine has reduced by half.
7. Add the chicken stock and tomatoes. Stir to combine.
8. Return the chicken to the pan. Bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer. Add a lid and simmer for about 50 minutes or until chicken reaches 165 degrees F.
9. Traditional recipes garnish with green olives.
10. Serve with cooked rice or side salad.

Tarta de Santiago (Spanish Almond Cake)

Spanish almond cake was first mentioned in 1577. It was named after Santiago de Compostela and Saint James (Santiago), the patron saint of Galicia. It is naturally gluten free, as almonds, sugar, and eggs form the base for this cake. It is very easy to make, perfect garnished with fruit, when friends stop by unexpectedly for dinner or dessert.

Yield: 8 servings

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 30 minutes

Nutritional analysis for 1/8th of cake: 340cal, 17g fat, 115mg cholesterol, 55mg sodium, 40g carbohydrate, 10g protein

Ingredients

- 2 cups ground, raw almonds, or finely ground natural almond flour*
- 1¼ cups sugar
- 5 eggs
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon Amaretto or almond extract
- 2 tablespoons powdered sugar for dusting the cake top

**Grinding the almonds yourself works best in this recipe, but the use of ground almond flour is easier if you do not own a food processor. Raw almonds usually contain the skin, as does the natural almond flour. Finely ground almond flour usually uses blanched almonds, which can also be used as a substitute, but will result in a denser cake.*

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Grease an 8- or 9-inch springform pan lightly with butter. If you do not have a springform pan, cut a circle to fit the bottom of the same size cake pan and lightly grease the sides with butter.
2. If using raw almonds, place in a food processor and pulse until finely ground. Overmixing will produce almond butter.

3. In a medium bowl, beat the egg and sugar until the mixture is pale and creamy. This is your only leavening, so immediately finish the cake. Add the lemon zest, almond extract, and cinnamon.
4. Using a spatula, gently fold the ground almonds into the egg mixture.
5. Pour the batter into the prepared pan.
6. Bake for about 30 minutes. Test the center of the cake with a toothpick. If it comes out clean, and the cake is a golden brown, remove from the oven. If it is not done, bake until the cake is done.
7. Allow the cake to cool in the pan. Slice and transfer to a plate for service. Traditionally, the cake would be sprinkled with powdered sugar, using a stencil of the cross of Saint James. Stencils are easily found on the internet.

Note: Store the cake at room temperature in an airtight container for up to three days or freeze slices for up to two months.



Food and Health

Spain has the largest production of olive oil, accounting for half of production across the world. Spanish olive oil is typically golden yellow with a fruity, nutty flavor. Olive oil is one of the healthy ingredients included in the Mediterranean diet plan, which also includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and nuts; whole grains; and limited amounts of red meat. The health benefits of olive oil can be attributed to its high monounsaturated fatty acids content, which when substituted for saturated fat, helps lower your LDL cholesterol. Olive oil also has oleic acid and antioxidants which may reduce inflammation. While there are no definitive studies that show extra-virgin olive oil will prevent heart disease, cancer, or other diseases, there is enough evidence for the FDA to approve a qualified health claim on olive oil labels.

Spain is considered a Mediterranean country. Increasing evidence suggests that the Mediterranean diet may reduce the risks of metabolic syndrome, atherosclerosis, cancer, diabetes, obesity, and pulmonary and cognitive diseases. The lifestyle, culture, and Mediterranean-style meals allow citizens to enjoy an increased life span.

Spanish cuisine has influenced food culture around the world. While some Spanish recipes contain a lot of ingredients and may seem complicated, the extra effort is worth experiencing the flavors. There are many Spanish recipes available at your local library or from websites and food blogs. Not all will be authentic or traditional but exploring the culture and foods of modern-day Spain will be an adventure for your taste buds!

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