

TORTILLA ESPAÑOLA

From Tony Rector-Cavagnaro

I lived, studied, and worked in Barcelona for three wonderful years! One of this Mediterranean metropolis' many cultural facets is provided by its fabulous and diverse culinary tradition: the best seafood dishes in the world, including paella marinera; splendid Catalan roasts and stews; allioli and other time-honored sauces; and also down-home dishes from other parts of Spain. The most ubiquitous yet simplest dish of them all is the humble potato omelet, known as truita de patates in Catalan and tortilla espanola in Spanish. So simple, yet an inexpensive meal in itself, it was perfect for the palate and the pocket of the starving student that I was.

Ingredients: (medium-sized tortilla, 8 slices):

4 medium-sized brown POTATOES, peeled, cut in 1/2 to 3/4 inch cubes

1 large yellow ONION, diced moderately

4 whole eggs

1/2 c of OLIVE OIL

1 tsp of SALT (Note: For a smaller tortilla simply use half the ingredients.)

Optional Ingredients:

Black pepper (for added flavor)

A clove (or two) of finely chopped garlic added to the chopped onion during the last minute of frying (for more intense flavor)

Preparation:

Fry the potato cubes until they are golden (but not brown), take them out of the frying pan with a draining utensil, and put them on a china plate lined with an absorbent paper towel. [A Teflon-coated frying pan makes the job easier.]

Use the same oil to fry the diced onion (and the optional garlic clove during the last minute) until it is cooked (but not crispy), drain, and add to the plate with the fried potato cubes. Save the remaining olive oil in a china cup.

Beat the eggs well enough so the yolks and whites are combined. Add salt (or garlic salt), and, if desired, also add pepper to suit taste. Then fold in potato cubes and onion bits, and stir the mix carefully.

Heat about a tablespoon of previously used olive oil, and then slowly pour the mix. Cook on medium heat for a minute, and then on low heat for a few more minutes. At the same time, even out potato cubes with a wooden spatula, and move frying pan in circular motion once every minute (or so) in order to prevent the bottom from sticking and to give an even round shape to the tortilla in progress.

Turn off the heat. Now place a large china plate face down over the frying pan. Hold the handle firmly with a cloth or mitt and place the other hand firmly on the plate. Then with a quick (but not jerking) motion turn the frying pan and plate over so the half-cooked tortilla is now on the plate.

Place the frying pan back on the burner and heat a teaspoon of olive oil. Then, when the oil is hot, carefully (but not too slowly) slide the tortilla into the frying pan; turn down heat to low, and cook the other side until done. Make sure to move in circular motion again, and be careful not to burn it.

Time to prepare and cook: 20 to 45 minutes, depending on the size of the tortilla.

Recommendations:

Slice it like a pie (or in cubes for hors d'œuvres). You may eat the tortilla hot, warm, or at room temperature, or cold the next day. In Spain it is eaten hot for dinner, or cold or at room temperature in between two slices of crusty French bread as a sandwich, or a slice by itself, warmed up or not, with a piece of crusty French bread, some manzanilla green olives and a small glass of Spanish vino tinto (red wine) such as rioja or tempranillo (usually available at Trader Joe's, and less expensive than most California wines). ¡Buen provecho! (Bon appetite!)

The first time you make a tortilla española it might be better to try a smaller one [two potatoes, half an onion, two eggs], and, with more experience, for a larger one, use six potatoes, an onion and a half, and six eggs. If you can resist the temptation, tortillas taste better a day after they are made. Always refrigerate the tortillas after they cool off. They will keep for at least a week. (Eat cold, warm or re-heated.)

There are other variants of tortilla, which actually means omelet in standard Spanish: add cooked peas and cubed carrots, cubed Serrano ham or prosciutto, and cubed Spanish chorizo (or if not available, cooked linguiça sausage) to the ingredients above, and you have tortilla paisana (peasant style). Another interesting combination (instead of potatoes) is garbanzos, onion, spinach, and garlic. Other tortillas: white Northern

beans, onion, chopped parsley and garlic; fried red and green peppers, onion; mushrooms, garlic and parsley; artichoke hearts, etc. Do NOT include tomatoes as an ingredient, however. ☺