

## Red Chile Sauce

Red chile salsa (sauce) can be made from dried chile pods.

Select dry chile pods in optimum condition. Do not use pods with signs of mold, insect infestation, disease, or decay. (Chile pods from ristras sprayed with plastic, shellac, or insecticide are not edible and are to be used for decorative purposes *only*.)

Remove stems, seeds, and yellow veins from chile pods. Twelve to 14 large chile pods yield about 1 pint of chile puree. Leave the veins if a more pungent product is desired.

Wash pods in warm water, lifting pods out of the water and changing the water several times.

Place washed chile pods in a pan and cover with warm water for 1/2–1 hour to allow pods to rehydrate. Add warm water as needed. Simmer pods and water for 10 minutes. Pulp should be soft, thick, and separating from the skin. Place chile pods and some of the water in a blender and blend until a smooth puree is obtained. Run puree through a sieve or colander to remove any unwanted peeling bits.

### Measure:

- 1 c. chile puree
- 1 c. water
- 1 minced garlic clove (optional)
- 1/2 t. salt
- 2 T. vegetable oil
- 1/2 t. crushed oregano leaves (optional)

In a sauce pan mix chile puree, water, garlic, salt, and fat. Simmer gently for 10 minutes, stirring frequently. Add oregano and simmer another 5–7 minutes. This yields 1 pint or enough for four servings of enchiladas of three tortillas each. Store left-over salsa or puree in the freezer for later use.

*Priscilla Grijalva*

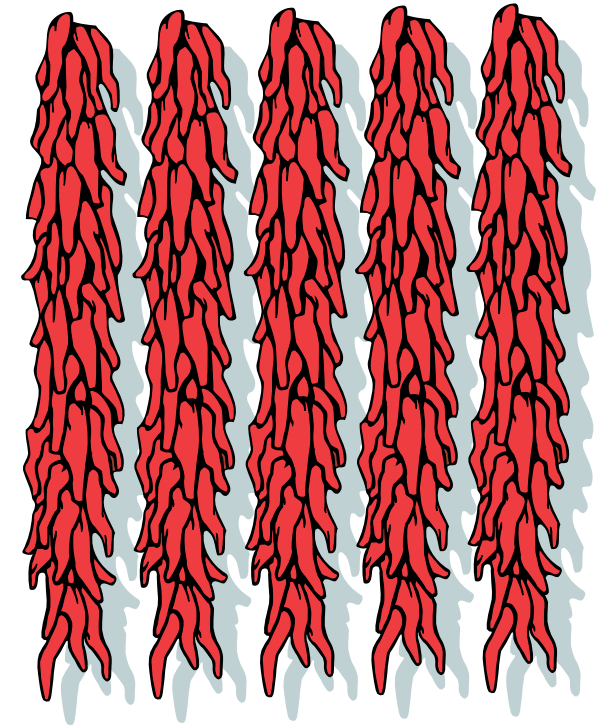
*Former Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist*

There is a Cooperative Extension Service office in each New Mexico county. Local Extension staff are available to help you.

# USING CHILE...

Making Ristras  
Making Chile Sauce

---



New Mexico State University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and educator. NMSU and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

Reprinted March 1995

Las Cruces, NM  
1.5M



Home Economics Program  
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE  
Box 3AE/Las Cruces, NM 88003

## How to Make Chile Ristras\*

From mid-September until frost, green chile matures and turns deep red. New Mexicans have traditionally harvested and strung red chile into colorful strings called ristras. The chile is allowed to dry in New Mexico's warm sun, then is stored—still on the ristra string—for use in various tantalizing food dishes during the winter.

When making chile ristras, select freshly picked, mature, red chile pods. If the chile still has a slight green coloration, put it in a cool, dark, but well ventilated place for two or three days. This will help it finish ripening and turn it a bright red.

Green chile is not acceptable for making ristras. Because it has not reached maturity, green chile will only shrivel and turn a dull orange color as it dries.

Allow red chile pods to set for two or three days after picking. This allows the stems to lose some of their moisture. In the ristra tying process, stems often break if they are too fresh. Good ventilation is important in the final drying steps. If fresh chile is bought in closed containers or plastic bags, take the chile out of the container or bag to avoid spoilage.

### Materials needed

3/4 to 1 bushel red chile  
Lightweight cotton string (package string)  
Baling wire or twine

Begin by tying clusters of three chile pods on the lightweight string. To tie clusters, hold three chiles by their stems, wrap the string around the stems twice (fig. 1), bring the string up between two of the chiles, and pull tight (fig. 2).

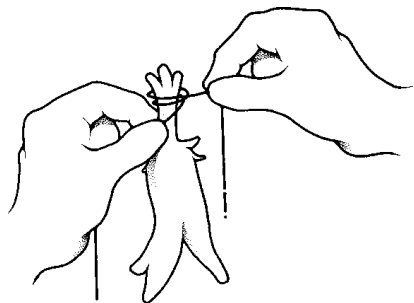


Fig. 1. Wrap the string around the stems of three chiles.

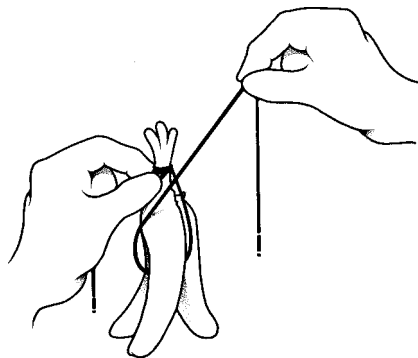


Fig. 2. Pull the string up tightly between two of the chiles.

Make a half hitch with the string and drop it over all three stems; pull the string tight (fig. 3). Pick up three more chile pods, and, in the same manner, tie another cluster about three inches above the first cluster. Continue until there are several clusters of three chiles, or until the weight makes it hard to handle. Break the string and start again; continue tying until all the chile has been used.

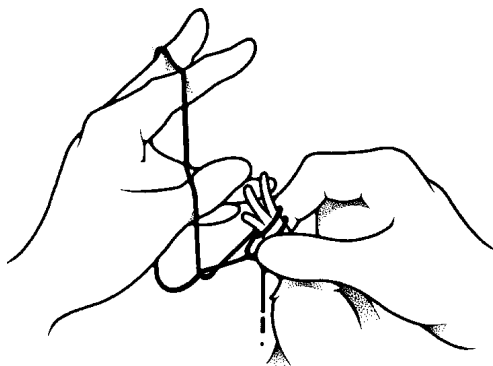


Fig. 3. Make a half hitch over the three stems.

Suspend the baling wire or baling twine from a nail in a rafter or from a door knob. Make a loop in the loose end of the wire (twine) to keep chile clusters from slipping off (fig. 4a). Some people like to use a wooden peg or dowel at the end of the wire or twine to keep chiles in place (fig. 4b). Beginning with the first three chile pods (one cluster) tied to the package string, braid the chiles around the wire (twine).

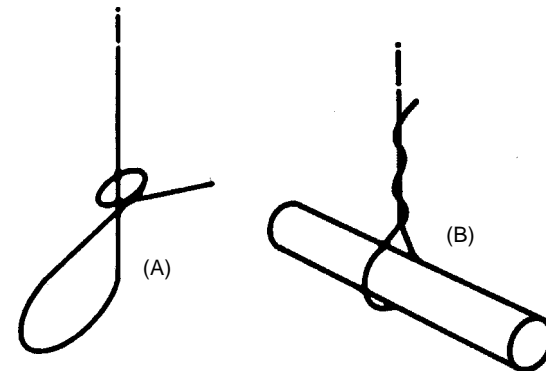


Fig. 4. Make a loop at the end of the wire (A) or fasten it to a peg or dowel (B).

The process is like braiding hair—the wire serves as one strand and stems of two chiles in the cluster are the other two strands (fig. 5). As the chile is braided, push down in the center to make sure of a tight wrap. Position the chiles to protrude in different directions. If this is not done, empty spaces can develop along one side of the ristra. Continue braiding until all the chile clusters are used.

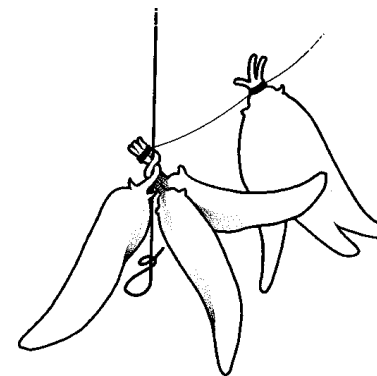


Fig. 5. Braid the clusters of chile around the wire.

Hang the completed ristra in full sun, either on a clothesline or from outdoor rafters where there is good ventilation. The chile can turn moldy and rot without proper air circulation for final drying. This would cause discoloration, which detracts from the ristra's natural beauty and, naturally, would preclude using the chile as food.

\*Source: James R. Sais, *Making Chile Ristras*, 1989.