

This month, we have real estate as our main theme, which in Spanish is called “Bienes Raíces.” These words sound very appropriate to me because when one makes the decision of owning a home, there is an expression in Mexico that says, “echar raíces,” meaning to put down roots for a future life.

Along the same lines as this reflection in connection with Latin roots, which we all share even if we come from different countries, I looked for the food that could wrap around the words “roots” and “origin” in the best way. This led me to investigate about maize.

Maize is the most important grain in Mexico, thanks to its domestication thousands of years ago. The plant gave humans sufficient quantities of grain to eat, and this also contributed to the discovery of the different preparations that makes this grain so versatile.

Maize was so important in the diet during the pre-Hispanic times that it’s considered to be one of the factors of transformation from a nomadic society of hunters to a more sedentary society of farmers. As a matter of fact, the discovery of corn and its influence in the society formed a great part of the social, economic and religious characteristics of the Mesoamerican societies.

Maize was always important, but there were changes in the different times concerning the quantity of how much was eaten and the reason that it was eaten. During the early pre-classic period (approximately 2550 to 1200 BCE), it was moderately consumed, but it was utilized for ritual acts by preparing fermented drinks for drinking during religious ceremonies.

Also, in Nahuatl mythology, it’s described that you could find out people’s destinies by throwing grains of maize.

Around the year 1000 BCE, maize formed a principal part of the diet. For the Maya, it was a food for the elite and not for the common people. In the time previous to the Spanish conquest, it was an essential food partially because of the population growth. Also, with a growing complexity of the political system, economic relations and the fact that its grains could be stored for a long time, all of this contributed to the fact that corn became an essential part of their diet.

With the Spanish conquest and all of the cultural, economic and social changes that this brought, maize and its consumption were the things that survived from the indigenous culture.

At the present time, maize not only provides half of the calories that Mexicans consume, it also brings happiness to our tables every day with dishes that, although they have been through changes and influences of other cultures, they still have their essence.

For the agricultural societies of Mesoamerica, maize not only represents the fundamental food and the base of its gastronomy, it also is seen as a mythical symbol of its profound historical attachment as the essence of the human being. The best example is found in the book called *Popol Vuh*, in which it describes that, after several tries without success, the gods were able to finally create the human beings out of a mixture of white and yellow maize.

The human beings before us believed that they were formed from maize. It was considered a god – its essence, the reason of its existence and its root.

It is because of this that this month in which we underline the subject of real estate – Bienes y Raíces (homes and roots) – I took the liberty of taking the word root and relating it with the food that is precisely the root and origin of our Latin culture, maize.

I would like to present Pastel Azteca, which is one of my family’s favorite dishes. It is a very Mexican version of lasagna and is made with a base of corn tortillas in layers, along with other ingredients. 🇲🇽

Corn – Our Roots

Ingredients

- 1 package of corn tortillas (minimum 24 tortillas)
- oil for frying
- 2 cans of sliced mushrooms
- 1 onion
- 2 cans of corn
- 8 chiles poblanos cut into strips
- 2-3 tablespoons of sour cream
- 4 cups grated mozzarella cheese
- 4 cups of green sauce

Fry the tortillas in oil until they are shiny, without letting them harden. Drain the excess of oil from the tortillas with paper towels, and set them aside. Fry the onions until golden, add the mushrooms, corn and chile poblano strips. Season with salt.

In a pyrex, put a layer of fried tortillas, adding a cup of green sauce. Add part of the vegetable mixture and sour cream on top, as well as the grated cheese.

Repeat these steps as many times as you want (2-3 times), finishing with a layer of tortillas, cream, salsa and cheese. Bake at 350 F for one hour or until it gets brown.

