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Tamales is a dish that is eaten in various countries in Latin America. I would like to talk about a special day called El Dia de la Candelaria, which is celebrated in several Latin-American countries.

El Dia de la Candelaria is celebrated on February 2, marking the end of the Christmas celebrations. This day also marks the beginning of planting in the center of Mexico, during which people pray and perform rituals for a successful harvest.

In Latin America, the presence of the indigenous people was very strong before the Spanish came, and there are celebrations and traditions that have a pagan beginning and that have continued in some fashion rooted in the celebrations that take place now in the Catholic religion.

El Dia de la Candelaria, or sometimes called Candlemas, was the day that all of the candles in the churches were blessed, this tradition coming from a pagan custom. In previous times, in Christianity, there was a light festival, which marked the middle of winter at the half point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox.

El dia de la Candelaria commemorates the purification of Maria and the presentation of Jesus before God in the temple of Jerusalem. For 40 days after childbirth, women were not allowed to go to the temple. At the end of this time, women were brought to the temple to be purified along with their child who was very carefully covered. This ritual, of bringing the firstborn son to be presented to the Temple comes from Jewish origin and it's still practiced in the Jewish communities around the world, in Hebrew it is called Pydion Haben.

So what does this celebration of the Candelaria have to do with tamales?

In Mexico, during the celebration of King's Day on January 6, a circular, sweet bread is cut and eaten, called Rosca de Reyes, and it contains a little plastic boy that symbolizes Jesus. The person who gets the boy in his piece



# Tamales

a very carefully wrapped dish

## Uchepos

Ingredients  
(serves 8):

- 12 large and tender fresh corns
- 7 ounces of butter
- 6 tablespoons of sugar
- 2 teaspoons of salt
- Fresh corn husks or dried husks

of the sweet bread is the one that has to bring tamales for everyone in that group on El Dia de la Candelaria.

The word tamal comes from the Nahuatl word Tamalli, which means carefully covered. It is said in Mexico that during the Day Of the Candelaria, the tamal and its covering are done so carefully and perfectly that it symbolizes the baby Jesus covered up for his presentation at the temple.

Tamales themselves deserve a long description and have been the main theme in many books and cook books because there are many types of tamales, which vary according to their origin and preparation.

They are made of boiled or steamed dough filled with different ingredients. They can have meat, be vegetarian, salty, sweet or wrapped in corn or banana leaves, which are thrown away before eating.

Tamales have existed since the year 8000 B.C.E. and were a very practical food that was given to the people in the army and hunters in the different pre-Columbian cultures, such as the Aztecs,

Mayan, Olmecas and Toltecas.

In the beginning, the Spanish rejected tamales because they were considered to be from the lower class, as well as other indigenous traditions and customs, which in time were revalidated.

### Preparation

Cut the corn off the cob, and grind it in the food processor. Cream the butter very well, and add the sugar and salt. Mix in the ground corn.

Take the corn husks, and add a few teaspoons of the mix and carefully fold them without squashing the filling. Cook in a steamer for 40 minutes or until they feel firm to the touch and easily separate from the leaves. Sometimes, they might need a few more minutes to fully cook. It is much quicker in a pressure cooker and can be cooked in 15 minutes. ♦