

Hard Shell Taco Night

Serves 4 (easily doubled or tripled)

Hard Shell Tacos- you know them, you love them. Ground beef (Impossible/Beyond work beautifully here, so does pork, turkey or chicken if you must) cooked with onions and garlic, seasoned with spices, spicy or not, gingerly stuffed into a store-bought corn tortilla shell and topped with bright yellow cheese, lots of shredded lettuce and plenty of hot sauce. The sour cream is optional (none for me), the FUN is mandatory. My biggest piece of advice here is don't overthink it. Decorate your taco however you want. Add more spices or make it less spicy. It's Hard Shell Taco Night!

Ingredients

For the Filling:

1 pound ground beef (85/15 preferred), pork, turkey, chicken* or version of Impossible beef/Beyond beef

Kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper

4-6 large cloves garlic, finely chopped

2 medium yellow onions, finely chopped, divided

1 ½ teaspoons smoked paprika

1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes, plus more if you like

2 ½ teaspoons cumin seed or 1 teaspoon ground cumin

***If using turkey or chicken, please start with 2 tablespoons neutral oil to cook**

For the Tacos and Assembly:

12 hard shell corn tortillas

8 ounces sharp yellow cheddar cheese, coarsely grated

1/2 head iceberg lettuce, shredded/thinly sliced

1 tomato, finely chopped, if you must

½ bunch cilantro, coarsely chopped

Sour cream, for serving

Hot sauce, for serving

Pickled or fresh jalapeños, sliced

Instructions

For the filling:

- 1 Heat a large skillet or dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add meat (if using turkey or chicken, add 2 tablespoons of oil first) and season with salt and pepper. Using a wooden spoon or spatula to break up the meat, cook, stirring occasionally, until the meat starts to cook through but isn't yet browned, 8-10 minutes (it'll be a little gray, that's alright, the browning happens in the next step).
- 2 Add garlic, half the onions and season again with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the meat has really started to brown and the garlic and onions are totally softened, 6-8 minutes.
- 3 Add paprika, crushed red pepper flakes and cumin. Stir so that everything is evenly coated and the spices get to toast and bloom in the fat, 1-2 minutes. Add 1/2 cup water and stir, scraping up any browned bits on the bottom of the skillet, creating a sort of gravy-ish, delicious sauce. Reduce heat to low and continue to simmer until sauce is nicely thickened (should not be soupy or watery, just thick and luscious), 1-2 minutes (this happens fast- if it cooks a little longer or meat appears dry, don't panic, just add a bit more water and keep cooking). Season again with salt and pepper, maybe more crushed red pepper flakes if you want it spicier. Remove from heat and set aside.

For the tacos and assembly:

- 4 Preheat oven to 425° (unless you're going Full Roman Family and frying your own shells or doing this in a toaster oven). Remove your taco shells from their little box or plastic or however they came, and release them from one another, laying them individually on a rimmed baking sheet (or your little toaster oven tray). Toast until lightly golden brown on the outside, 5-6 minutes.
- 5 Serve your warm shells next to a skillet of warm hard shell taco filling, small bowls of cold, crisp vegetables (lettuce, onion, tomatoes, cilantro) and lots of dairy products (cheese, sour cream). Hot sauce and jalapeños always encouraged. There is no easy way to fill one of these pre-made taco shells with your beef mixture, but using a spoon helps and remember: go slow, do your best, and don't overfill.