

208 – IN THE FIRE

THE REAL BABA GANOOJ (FIRE-ROASTED EGGPLANT)
LOMO AL TRAPO (SALT-CRUSTED BEEF TENDERLOIN GRILLED
IN CLOTH)
SWEET POTATOES ROASTED IN THE EMBERS
SHORTBREAD S'MORES

THE REAL BABA GANOOJ (ROASTED EGGPLANT DIP)

Source: Adapted from How to Grill, pg. 366

Method: Roasting in embers

Serves: 6 to 8 as an appetizer

2 cylindrical eggplants (about 1 pound each)
6 garlic cloves, each cut into 3 or 4 lengthwise wedges
3 tablespoons tahini
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons lemon juice, or more to taste, plus
lemon wedges for serving
1/2 teaspoon coarse salt, or more to taste
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
Lettuce leaves
Hot paprika
Grilled Pita Bread, for serving (pg. 189)

With a paring knife, make small slits in the eggplants and insert the garlic.

Build a fire using large charcoal or wood; let it burn down to embers.

When ready to cook, place the eggplants directly on the embers, raking any loose coals around them with a grill hoe or tongs.

Grill until the skins are charred all over and the flesh is very soft, 15 to 20 minutes in all, turning frequently with tongs. Transfer the eggplants to a plate to cool.

Peel the burnt skin off the eggplants. (Don't worry about removing every last bit.) Coarsely puree the eggplants with their garlic in a food processor. Add the tahini, 2 tablespoons of oil, the lemon juice, salt, and pepper. Taste for seasoning, adding salt or lemon juice as necessary; the mixture should be very flavorful. Add the parsley and process in short bursts, just to mix. Spoon the dip into a small bowl lined with lettuce leaves, drizzle with the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil, and sprinkle with paprika. Serve with lemon wedges and Grilled Pita Bread.

**Sub-Recipe:
Grilled Pita Bread**

Serves 4

4 pita breads

2 to 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

Set up the grill for direct grilling and preheat to high. Lightly brush the pita breads on both sides with oil and cut into wedges.

When ready to cook, place the pita wedges on the hot grate and grill until lightly browned on both sides, 1 to 3 minutes per side.

Transfer to a bread basket and serve at once.

LOMO AL TRAPO

SALT CRUSTED-BEEF TENDERLOIN GRILLED IN CLOTH

What: Simply one of the coolest dishes on Planet Barbecue—a trimmed beef tenderloin crusted with perhaps a half pound of salt, wrapped in a cotton cloth, and charred on a bed of fiery embers. The result looks like a burnt log, but when you crack off the crust, some of the most tender, succulent beef tenderloin in the world awaits you.

Where: Served at several famous grill restaurants in Bogota and a popular dish to cook in the fireplace at a Colombian home.

How: Prepared using the oldest of the five methods of live fire cooking: roasting in the embers. You lay the wrapped roast on a bed of hot coals long enough to burn the cloth wrapping and salt into a hard black shell, but briefly enough to keep the meat inside medium-rare and tender. Note: if you have a gas grill, preheat it to screaming hot and char the lomo on the grate. This won't look quite as dramatic as yanking the burnt roll out the embers, but you'll still get a great flavor.

Special effects: You need a beef tenderloin completely trimmed of all fat and sliver skin. This is easy if a little time consuming; you may want to ask your butcher to do it.

You'll also need a clean white cotton cloth about 16 inches square (a cotton diaper or napkin works well), and about ½ pound of table salt.

Advance preparation: None

Serves: 1 hungry Colombian; 2 Americans

Beef tenderloin holds a paradoxical place in the world of barbecue: it's one of the costliest and most prestigious cuts of meat, but one of the least flavorful. (I never order fillet mignon at a steak house.) After all, in North America, it's the cheap, traditionally lowbrow cuts, like spare ribs and brisket, that have achieved barbecue cult status. So if Colombian grill masters have figured out a way to give beef tenderloin both flavor and drama, I can't board an Avianca flight fast enough to try it. *Lomo al trapo* (literally "beef tenderloin in cloth" is just that—beef tenderloin wrapped in a salt-packed cotton cloth and roasted in the embers. It's cool as all get out

to make and looks positively prehistoric in its presentation (which makes it spectacular for entertaining), and, damn, if it isn't the best way I've found to grill a beef tenderloin.

1 center cut piece of beef tenderloin, meticulously trimmed of all fat and silver skin (about 8 inches long and weighing 12 to 16 ounces)

About 2 cups table salt

1 tablespoon dried oregano

You'll also need: 1 square piece of clean cotton cloth, 16 by 16 inches (an old-fashioned cloth diaper or piece of cotton sheet works well)

Arrange the cotton cloth on your work surface on the diagonal (like a diamond), so that one corner points towards you. Spread the salt out on top of the cloth to form a layer $\frac{1}{4}$ (one quarter) inch thick that extends to within 1 inch of the edge of the cloth. Sprinkle the salt all over with oregano.

Place the beef tenderloin on top of the salt at the far end of the cloth—it should run parallel to the center axis (and to your shoulders). Roll the cloth and salt around the tenderloin, starting in the far corner. The idea is to make a compact roll. Now take the points of cloth at each end of the resulting cylinder and tie them together on top of the tenderloin. The idea is to form a tight cylindrical packet. You should do this right before your charcoal or gas grill are ready.

Charcoal grill method: Light the coals in a chimney starter and rake them out into an even layer at the bottom of the grill. You will not need a grill grate. Lay the wrapped tenderloin right on the coals, knot side up. Grill for exactly 9 minutes. Using long handled tongs, gently turn the tenderloin package over and grill for exactly 8 minutes. Do not be alarmed if the cloth burns—it's meant to. In fact, the whole shebang should look about as appetizing as a fire-charred log.

Gas grill method: Preheat your grill as hot as it will go. You need a "2 Mississippi" fire. There is no need to oil the grill grate. Arrange the cloth wrapped tenderloin on the grate, knot side up. Grill until the bottom is charred black, about 9 minutes. (The grill should be covered.) Turn the package over and grill until the other side is jet black, about 8 minutes.

Transfer the charred tenderloin to a metal platter and let rest for 2 minutes. Lift it with tongs and tap it hard with the back of a large heavy chef's knife (you may need to tap it several times). The burnt shell should crack and come off.

Transfer the tenderloin to a clean platter or plates. Cut into 2 or 3 pieces and serve at once.

VARIATION—A SLIGHTLY MORE ELABORATE VERSION OF *LOMO AL TRAPO*

Bogota's popular Lomo restaurant makes a slightly more elaborate version of this singular beef dish. They marinate the tenderloin in a mixture of red wine and beef stock and tie the cloth bundle with string. The marinade makes the tenderloin even juicier.

Serves 2 to 3.

1 center cut piece of beef tenderloin, meticulously trimmed of all fat and silver skin (about 10 inches long and 1-1/4 to 1-1/2 pounds) (one and one quarter to one and one half pounds)

For the marinade:

2 cups beef broth
1 cup dry red wine
3/4 cup water
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 bay leaf, crumbled
1 teaspoon dried or fresh thyme

About 3 cups table salt

You'll also need: 1 square piece of clean cotton cloth, 16 by 16 inches (an old-fashioned cloth diaper or piece of cotton sheet works well); 4 8-inch pieces of butchers string

Place the beef tenderloin in a nonreactive baking dish just large enough to hold it. Place the beef broth, red wine, water, garlic, bay leaf, and thyme in a large mixing bowl and whisk to mix. Pour this mixture over the beef and marinate in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 hours, turning the beef several times.

Arrange the cotton cloth on your work surface so one side faces you (parallel to the side of the work table). Spread out about $\frac{3}{4}$ (three quarters) of the salt on top of the cloth to form a layer $\frac{1}{4}$ (one quarter) inch thick that extends to within 1 inch of the edge of the cloth.

Arrange the beef tenderloin on top the salt at the edge of the cloth rectangle closest to you. Pour the remaining salt on top of the beef. Starting at the beef end, roll the cloth and salt around the tenderloin. Tie off the ends with butcher's string and tie the roll in two places in the center. The idea is to form a tight cylindrical packet. You should do this right before your charcoal or grill is ready.

Charcoal grill method: Light the coals in a chimney starter and rake them out into an even layer at the bottom of the grill. You will not need a grill grate. Lay the wrapped tenderloin right on the coals, knot side up. Grill for exactly 8-1/2 (eight and one half) minutes. Using long handled tongs, gently turn the tenderloin package over and grill for exactly 8-1/2 (eight and one half) minutes. Do not be alarmed if the cloth burns—it's meant to. In fact, the whole shebang should look like a fire charred log.

Gas grill method: Grill as described above.

Transfer the charred tenderloin to a metal platter and let rest for 2 minutes. Lift it with tongs and tap it hard with the back of a large heavy chef's knife (you may need to tap it several times). The burnt shell should crack and come off.

Transfer the tenderloin to a clean platter or plates. Pour any juices that have accumulated in the platter on top and serve at once.

ROASTED SWEET POTATOES WITH MAPLE CINNAMON BUTTER

Source: How to Grill, 392

Method: Ember roasting

Serves: 4

6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) butter, room temperature

1 tablespoon maple syrup

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

4 large sweet potatoes or yams

You'll also need:

A large charcoal or wood fire

Make the maple-cinnamon butter. Place the butter in a mixing bowl and whisk until light and fluffy. Whisk in the maple syrup and cinnamon. Transfer to a bowl or ramekins and refrigerate until serving.

Build a fire and let it burn down to glowing coals. Rest the sweet potatoes on the embers. Using tongs or a ho. Rake any loose coals around the potatoes.

Roast until the skins are charred and the centers are soft, 40 minutes to 1 hour. Turn the potatoes with tongs from time to time to ensure even roasting. Use a slender metal skewer to test for doneness; it should insert easily.

Remove the potatoes from the coals and brush away the ashes. Let cool for a few minutes, then cut each in half and place on plates or a platter for serving. Serve in their skins (not edible) with the maple-cinnamon butter.

SHORTBREAD S'MORES

From: How to Grill by Steven Raichlen (Workman Publishing, NY, 2001)

Method: direct grilling

Serves: 6

12 shortbread cookies

6 squares (each 2 inches) superior dark chocolate

6 large marshmallows

You'll also need:

6 long metal or bamboo skewers or sticks, bamboo skewers soaked for 1 hour in cold water to cover, then drained

1. Arrange the cookies on a platter, topping half with squares of chocolate. Set up the grill for direct grilling and preheat to high.
2. When ready to cook, if using a charcoal grill, rake the lit coals into a mound (don't place the top grate on the grill). Skewer the marshmallows on skewers or sticks and hold them over the fire. Roast until browned or even black, rotating the marshmallows to ensure even cooking. This will take 3 to 5 minutes. You can even set the marshmallows on fire (again, rotate the skewers to ensure even burning). If you've lit your marshmallow, blow out the fire.
3. Immediately position each marshmallow on top of a piece of chocolate. Place another cookie on top and press down to squish the marshmallow into the chocolate. Pull out the skewer. Wait for a few seconds for the hot marshmallow to melt the chocolate, then eat the S'more like a sandwich.
Note: Never succumb to the temptation to eat a hot marshmallow directly off a metal skewer: You'll burn your lips.