



# CAPIROTADA

*Capirotada* is a special holiday dish that is often described as a bread pudding. It is popular before and during Lent, as well as the winter holidays, and you can find many variations of it throughout Mexico. Capirotada is usually made in a round baking dish and formed by layering slices of toasted bread and a variety of toppings, such as nuts, crumbled cheese, and raisins. It is then soaked in a syrup made with piloncillo, cloves, and cinnamon before being baked. Capirotada is one of the many recipes brought to the New World by the Spaniards. A dish with a heavy Moorish influence, it was originally prepared as a way to use leftover bread.

PREP TIME: 20 minutes	COOK TIME: 50 minutes	YIELD: 10 servings
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12 ounces (340 g) piloncillo (about 1¼ cups if shredded) or 1½ cups (340 g) dark brown sugar

1 stick Mexican cinnamon

2 whole cloves

3 tablespoons salted butter, melted

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

16 slices (⅓ inch/8.5 mm thick) Bolillo (page 215), French, Italian, or challah bread, at least 2 days old

¾ cup (90 g) crumbled queso Cotija (see Notas)

¼ cup (40 g) salted roasted peanuts (see Notas)

¼ cup (35 g) raisins (see Notas)

2 bananas, sliced (optional)

¼ cup (48 g) rainbow sprinkles (optional)

2 tablespoons butter, cut into small cubes

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C). Make the syrup by placing the piloncillo, cinnamon stick, cloves, and 1½ cups (360 ml) of water in a medium saucepan over medium-low heat. Stir occasionally and let the piloncillo melt into a light syrup, about 20 minutes. Once melted, remove the saucepan from the heat and let cool, then strain the syrup through a fine-mesh strainer.
2. While the syrup is cooking, in a small bowl, combine the melted butter with the oil, mix well, and brush the mixture over both sides of the bread slices. Place the bread slices on a baking tray and bake for 8 minutes, then flip them over to bake for 5 more minutes, or until a deep-golden color (see Notas). Remove from the oven and keep the oven on.
3. In an 8-inch (20 cm) round oven-safe dish, make a single, flat layer of bread. Using a ladle, slowly pour syrup over the bread, making sure that all the bread pieces absorb the syrup and reserving enough syrup for the second layer of bread. Alternatively, dip each slice of bread into the syrup to ensure that the crumb is evenly soaked in the syrup. Top this layer of bread with half of the cheese, peanuts, raisins, and sliced bananas (if using). Make a second layer of bread and pour the remaining syrup over it. Top with the remaining cheese, peanuts, raisins, and banana slices (if using). Add the sprinkles (if using).
4. Dot the capirotada with the cubes of butter, then cover the dish with aluminum foil and bake for 40 minutes, or until the top crust is golden and the lower layers are still moist. Serve warm or cold (see Notas).

## NOTAS

- \* In northern Mexico, some people use toasted corn tortillas instead of bread. Traditionally, the bread is fried instead of toasted in the oven, but I find that toasting the bread is faster and less messy.
- \* You can substitute the Cotija cheese with Mexican Manchego, Chihuahua, Monterey Jack, mild white Cheddar, and even Parmesan mixed with queso fresco.
- \* Instead of peanuts, you can use almonds, pecans, walnuts, or pine nuts. Prunes, cranberries, or other dried fruit can be used instead of raisins. You can also add shredded coconut.
- \* Some cooks also add anise seed to the syrup. To try this, use ¼ teaspoon.
- \* Some other common fruits for topping are Plátanos Fritos (page 174) and apples. If you want, you can top the capirotada with even more toppings at serving time.

