

Puerto Rican Rellenos de Papa

Recipe by Travis Metcalfe

There is something about cooking that brings a whole family together. Food often invokes rich memories of the past and adding unique twists or family secrets can make a dish unlike anything you can get anywhere else. Pair this with traditions, holidays, and family gatherings and you have a recipe worth reminiscing over.

This Puerto Rican dish is a family favorite. I first learned how to make it from my wife's grandmother who was born and raised in Puerto Rico. Our family makes it every year for our extended family celebration of the Christmas holiday. This last year, my daughter joined in and made them with me and we smiled and lamented over how proud abuelita would have been if she were here to see her great-granddaughter learning to make her recipe.



Rellenos de Papa are translated as stuffed potato balls and you will find them all over Puerto Rico if you visit. They are a traditional street food and different versions of these popular treats appear in many Latin American countries. You basically make a ball of mashed potatoes, stuff a spoon full of meat or cheese of your choice inside the center and deep fry it for a few minutes. What comes out is a crunchy and crispy exterior that once you bite into it you are met with creamy and smooth mashed potatoes and the rich flavorful meat you placed in the center. They are delightful!

Equipment

Stove

Large pot to boil your potatoes in

Pan for frying meat

Food processor or blender for making Sofrito

Measuring cups

Knives and Spoons

Deep Fryer or Pot with oil for Frying

Optional (Potato Ricer)

Ingredients

- 2 Pounds of Potatoes (peeled and quartered)
- 1 ½ tablespoons of salt
- ½ teaspoon of salt
- 1 egg slightly beaten
- 1 tablespoon of cornstarch
- 4 tablespoons of butter
- 1 bag of Sofrito (see recipe below)
- 1 pound of ground turkey
- Adobo Seasoning
- 2 cloves of garlic
- Salt and pepper
- Vegetable Oil (enough to fry them in)

Making Sofrito

Sofrito is a traditional blend of ingredients that you will find in many Puerto Rican dishes. You can make it well in advance, in large batches, and keep it in the freezer until needed.

- 2 medium onions
- 1 to 2 bell peppers (seeded)
- 16 to 20 cloves of garlic
- 1 to 2 large bunches of cilantro
- 3 or 4 plum tomatoes (cored)

Rough chop everything and place in a food processor. Blend until finely combined.

You can now freeze this as is or some people like to also cook this in a pan with a little oil and simmer for 30 minutes before freezing. You can portion half cup increments of the mixture into a freezer bag and keep until you are ready to use.

Making the Meat Filling

This is a non-traditional meat filling but we love it. You can substitute just about any ground or shredded meat or cheese filling of your choice. We have experimented with many different things for fun.

1. In frying pan combine portion of sofrito, ground turkey, garlic, and plenty of adobo seasoning (pictured to the right can be found in many stores that carry Latin American sections.)
2. Cook fully and season to desired taste.
3. Let cool before combining with potatoes.



Making the Potatoes

1. In a large pot, add potatoes and 1 ½ tablespoons of salt
2. Cover with water and bring to a boil
3. Simmer until fork tender
4. Immediately drain and mash or put through a potato ricer
5. Add remaining salt, egg, cornstarch, and butter.

Pro-tip: temper the egg by adding some of the hot potatoes to the egg before pouring the egg into hot potatoes.

6. Allow this potato mixture to cool to room temperature

Putting it all together

This is the tricky part for most people. I have found it helps tremendously to coat your hands in cornstarch first.

1. Take a generous spoonful of the potato mixture and make it into a round patty in the palm of your hand.

Pro-tip: I use an ice cream scoop in the potatoes to give me the same amount everytime and make it easy to scoop them out and get them in my hand.

2. Take a smaller spoonful of the meat mixture and place it in the center of the patty in your hand.
3. Fold the edges of the potato patty upward and around into the shape of a ball. Roll it in your hands and place on a sheet pan.
4. Make the remainder of your relleno until you have used up the potato and/or meat filling
5. Once you have made all your relleno, heat enough oil to cover them to 375° and fry until golden brown (see picture above). Remove from oil and cool on a paper towel.

Pro-tip: I like to dip my relleno in a simple egg mixture and a bowl of panko crumbs before frying for an additional crispy exterior. I have also found it helps the relleno stay together better when frying them. Sometimes I have experienced where when they start frying then fall apart and this makes for a mess in the fryer. The egg mixture seems to help keep it all together.

This is a picture of my daughter and I making them together this last year. You can see several Relleno on the pan that are ready for the fryer.

Enjoy!

