

Gazpachos manchegos

We tend to associate the term "gazpacho" with the much appreciated Spanish classic cold tomato soup, "gazpacho andaluz". There are literally thousands of variations of the dish, served all over the planet. "Gazpachos manchegos" (La Mancha style gazpachos) are something quite different.

It turns out gazpachos date back long before the tomato made its way from the Americas to Spain. The root meaning predates the Romans and apparently refers to refuse or leftovers. The pre-tomato gazpachos were a poor man's dish, using old bread or breadcrumbs, water, olive oil, garlic, salt, vinegar and chopped up bits of leftovers (typically vegetables). There were many variants in different regions around southern Spain. I was introduced to the "manchego" version by a friend who grew up in La Mancha.

What follows is my own take on this traditional La Mancha shepherd's meal. They would use whatever they could forage or catch and cook over a small fire. There are many "authentic" recipes, this may not be that authentic, but it works for me. Like other recipes here, this is a kind of framework, around which you can do your own thing.

Ingredients

- Protein - game bird, rabbit, chicken (we'll use half a chicken, cut in pieces).
- Olive oil, garlic, salt, water or stock.
- "tortas" - 180 grams (6.5 oz) a dry unleavened bread like matzos, broken up. Matzos would be a good alternative.
- Vegetables - tomato, chunks of green or red pepper.
- Options - diced serrano ham (or lean bacon), mushrooms, leek, onion.
- Spice/herbs - thyme, rosemary, peppercorns, bay leaf, saffron, pimenton (you chose).

Preparation part 1: meat & stock

I like to prepare the chicken & stock before hand. Cooking the chicken to a) make the stock and b) take the meat off the bone for easier eating.

- First salt, then gently brown the chicken pieces in a bit of olive oil in medium sized saucepan.
- Add 1 liter of water + half an onion, 1 small carrot, a clove of garlic, a few green leaves of leek, a sprig of thyme or rosemary.
- Cook for 20 - 30 minutes until the chicken is tender, but not overcooked
- Strain the stock, set the chicken aside to cool.
- When cool enough, pull the meat off the bones and cut into bite sized pieces.

Preparation part 2: putting it all together

- In large diameter pan, gently sautee 1 tomato (diced) in a splash of olive oil with a couple of cloves of garlic. You can skip this step and use 2-3 tablespoons of our sofrito recipe instead.
- When the tomato has cooked down for a few minutes, add half a small red pepper cut in 1" chunks along with the extras you plan to include: diced ham, mushrooms cut in bite sized chunks, and whatever herbs/spices you prefer.

- When the pepper starts to soften, stir in the chicken and 1 liter of stock, bring to a gentle boil and cook for a few minutes to combine the flavors.
 - Check for salt - go easy here as the "tortas" are salty.
 - Add the "tortas" (or matzos), cook at a gentle boil uncovered for 10 minutes. Stir gently once in a while. It's like cooking pasta, the "tortas" should be tender, not overcooked.
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- That's it - cover and let it rest for 5 minutes and you're ready to go.

Notes:

Some like it a little soupy (like the photo), others prefer the classic version: fairly dry with all of the liquid absorbed. Your choice.

Feel free to experiment, especially with the spices & extras. The purists might not agree, but I expect a "curry-driven" version might work.