

Cojondongo

Extremaduran cold tomato bread salad

SERVES 4 Preheat the oven to 400°F.

2 THICK SLICES RUSTIC BREAD (ABOUT 4 OUNCES)

6 TABLESPOONS SPANISH EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

6 RIPE PLUM TOMATOES

½ GARLIC CLOVE, PEELED

¼ TEASPOON SWEET PIMENTÓN (SPANISH SMOKED PAPRIKA)

1 TABLESPOON CHOPPED FRESH FLAT-LEAF PARSLEY

SEA SALT TO TASTE

1 TABLESPOON SHERRY VINEGAR

1 GREEN BELL PEPPER, SEEDED AND DICED

1 SCALLION, THINLY SLICED

1 CUP QUARTERED GREEN OLIVES

Cut the bread into 1-inch cubes and toss in a mixing bowl with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Spread the bread on a sheet pan and bake on the middle rack until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Set the croutons aside to cool.

Cut 4 of the tomatoes in half. Place a grater over a mixing bowl. Rub the cut surface of the tomatoes over the grater until all of the flesh is grated; discard the skin. Spoon the tomato pulp into a fine-mesh strainer set over a large bowl. Allow the pulp to drain for 30 minutes. Reserve the drained pulp. Dice the remaining tomatoes.

Using a mortar and pestle, smash the garlic together with the pimentón, parsley, and a pinch of salt to make a smooth paste. (The salt stops the garlic from slipping at the bottom of the mortar as you pound it down.) Whisk 3 tablespoons of the olive oil and the vinegar together in a small bowl, and then stir in the garlic-parsley paste.

In a mixing bowl, combine the croutons, peppers, diced tomatoes, scallion, and olives and toss together. Pour in the dressing and mix well. To serve, spread the reserved tomato pulp on a serving platter and drizzle with the remaining tablespoon of olive oil. Top with the bread salad and season to taste with salt.

As far as I'm concerned, Spain is the king of cold dishes—and this example is a prime reason. To some people, cojondongo would be considered a thick soup, but it is really a refreshing summer salad. Apart from its freshness, what I like most about the dish is its name, which has no literal translation.

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