

## Pipián Rojo with Peppers, Zucchini, and Shrimp



This recipe is super flexible. Use any vegetables you like that will roast at about the same time, such as small potatoes and butternut squash, cabbage wedges and thickly sliced red onion, halved plum tomatoes and chayote. Or, just make the sauce. Dollop it on tacos, a grain bowl, or baked sweet potatoes. Use it to smother enchiladas. Include the rice and beans for a hearty meal that hits many brain-healthy food groups, or keep it simple as a sheet pan dinner with sauce. Finally, be sure to adjust the spiciness to your liking. For a mild pipián, start with 1 dried chile, 1 chipotle in adobo, and 1 teaspoon ground chile.

Serves 4

- ½ cup raw, unsalted cashews
- ½ cup pepitas (unhulled pumpkin seeds)
- 2 cups mini bell peppers (or 2 red or yellow bell peppers, cut into 2-inch pieces)
- 2 medium zucchini, cut into 1-inch half-moons
- 2 teaspoons avocado oil, divided
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 2 to 4 dried guajillo, pasilla, New Mexican, or arbol chiles
- 1 cup boiling water + more water for the sauce
- ½ medium white onion, sliced 1-inch thick
- 2 large garlic cloves, halved
- 1 teaspoon ground chile
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 chipotle chile in adobo (from a can) + 1 teaspoon adobo sauce
- ⅓ cup well-stirred tahini
- ½ pound peeled and deveined medium shrimp (about 12)

Other toppings and sides:

- Corn tortillas, warmed
- Sliced lime
- Cooked rice
- Cooked black beans
- Cilantro leaves
- Sliced avocado
- Toasted sesame seeds

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Preheat the oven to 300°F. Place the cashews and pumpkin seeds on a rimmed baking sheet lined with parchment paper and toast until just a shade darker, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to a plate, reserving a few teaspoons of the pumpkin seeds to sprinkle on the finished dish.

Increase the oven temperature to 375°F. Using the same baking sheet, combine the bell peppers, zucchini, 1 teaspoon oil, and ½ teaspoon salt and spread out in a single layer. Roast until soft and starting to brown, 20 to 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, prep the dried chiles. Use scissors to snip off the stem, slice lengthwise, and open like a book. Remove seeds and membranes, taking care not to touch your eyes while working. (Using gloves is safest.) For large chiles (like ancho), cut into 2 to 3 pieces. Place in a shallow bowl and cover with 1 cup boiling water. Set aside.

In a large deep skillet, warm 1 teaspoon oil over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook until slightly charred and the onions are soft, about 10 minutes. Add the toasted cashews, pepitas, dried chiles and their soaking water, an additional 1 cup water, the chipotle chile and its adobo sauce, the ground chile, cumin, cinnamon, and 1 teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil and reduce the heat to a gentle simmer. Cook, stirring often, until the onions and cashews are very soft and the liquid reduces to a bright red broth, 15 to 20 minutes.

Carefully transfer the chile and onion mixture to a blender with the tahini and blend until smooth, about 1 minute, adding up to ½ cup water, if needed, for a creamy but pourable consistency. You should have about 3 cups of sauce. Serve right from the blender or return the sauce to the pan and keep warm over very low heat.

When the vegetables are done, nestle the shrimp amongst them and bake until just opaque, 3 to 4 minutes.

To serve, place dollops of sauce in the center of each plate and top with shrimp. Place the peppers on one side of the plate and the zucchini on the other. Add rice and beans, if using, and any other toppings you like. Finish with a sprinkle of pepitas and warm corn tortillas on the side.