

Chouchouka

Makes 4 to 5 cups:

Ingredients

2 28 ounce cans of whole peeled tomatoes
3 or 4 mixed bell peppers (one green)
8 to 10 garlic cloves
2 tablespoons sweet paprika
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste
pinch of sugar
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1 to 2 tablespoons canola oil

Preparation

Canned tomatoes work perfectly for this, but if the season's right, I'll throw in some fresh ones, too. In a colander, drain the peeled tomatoes over a bowl, reserving the juices. Add tomatoes to a large heavy pot over medium-low heat. If you're using some fresh tomatoes too, roughly chop them, drain their juice, and add to the pot, too. Using a flat spoon or spatula, break up tomatoes into small chunks. Cook them, stirring occasionally, for about an hour.

Preheat broiler.

On a baking sheet, lay out the green, red, and yellow peppers.

Place pan under broiler and char the peppers.

Using tongs, turn them frequently until they are blackened on all sides.

Alternatively, they can be blackened them over an open flame.

When peppers are completely charred, place them in a large bowl and cover with plastic wrap.

Allow them to steam for about 20 minutes--this will make it easier to remove their skins.

Carefully remove stems from the peppers and peel off skins.

Slice them lengthwise and lay the flesh open on a cutting board.

Use the back of a knife to scrape any remaining seeds from peppers and roughly chop.

After tomatoes have cooked for an hour, they should be darker--a lot of the liquid will have evaporated. Add chopped roasted peppers to tomatoes in the pot.

Finely chop 8 to 10 large garlic cloves--you should have about 1/2 cup. Stir the garlic into the pot.

Add paprika, cayenne pepper, sugar, kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to pot and stir well. Adjust cayenne to the level of heat you like, but remember it will cook down so flavors will intensify. Add smoked paprika.

Cook the mixture over low heat for another two hours, stirring occasionally. If the tomatoes begin to look dry, add some of the reserved tomato sauce.

When Chouchouka has fully cooked, it will be even darker in color. Taste for seasoning and adjust as needed. Add a couple of tablespoons of canola oil and stir into the mixture to finish.

Cool to room temperature and serve.

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