

Cowboy Talltale's Lazy Recipe for Chili Rellenos

By: Sherry E Engler

Never in my life did I think I would be amused by anyone, ANYONE, eating a green chili until I witnessed Cowboy Talltale savoring one from his Rim Country garden. (You may recall he is the cowboy "born decades ago and raised in these here parts" who roped the wild javelina and has a tendency to tell tall tales.) Continuing with my story, there he sat surrounded by homegrown green chilis stacked high on his kitchen table with only enough room for a plate holding a valuable staple to Cowboy Talltale, a roasted green chili, peeled and ready to eat. He grabbed up the green chili by the stem, with an eager bite he bit at least half-way and smiled the biggest smile I have ever seen on his wrinkled, elderly face. Suddenly, tears gathered in the creases of wrinkles by his deep, blue eyes; his nose started to run like a faucet; his eyes pinched together as if in pain as his lips puckered and his tongue lashed out of his mouth seeking relief from the spicy HOT green chili.

After quite a few profanities, which I will not repeat, he exclaimed, "Dang! That's good green chili! Hatch, New Mexico has nothing on us Rim Country gardeners! Our chilis are just as good, only BETTER, BETTER than those grown in Hatch, New Mexico! And I have perfected the soil to grow them HOT."

He took another large bite, biting the remaining chili down to the stem, devouring seeds and all. "WHEW WEE!!!" he shouted as tears rolled down his leathery complexion and he snorted back as if fire would fly from his nose, his right-hand waving in the air and hitting on his leg as if he had just ridden the most ferocious bull in the rodeo. "It's the capscum. The capscum makes the chili hot," he announced as he choked down the tears from the savory delight.

Actually, he meant to say capsicum. Green chilis are of the genus Capsicum. The concentration of the capsicum, which is considered the spicy heat component, is what makes a green chili hot or mild; which leads us to the history of green chilis in the Southwest and Rim Country. Here are a few green chili facts:

The first inhabitants known for chili growing were the Pueblo peoples dating back hundreds of years. Apparently, they cultivated at least three species of the chili pepper plant. In my imagination, I picture a Pueblo inhabitant deciding to eat or NOT to eat the green chili. Is it poisonous? What will it taste like? The Pueblo decides to pick out the weakest of the group to try it in case it is poisonous. The weakest picks up the green chili, much like Cowboy Talltale, takes a huge bite, cries, screams, spits and then proclaims how that chili is of better quality than any in the land. Thus began the green chili crops. Seemingly, the Pueblo peoples grew green chili their own way until the influence of the Spanish who introduced new species and new techniques for growing chilis.

In 1894, Horticulturist Dr. Fabian Garcia started studying types of green chilis at New Mexico State University (at that time, known as Las Cruces College) and released one of the favorites in 1913 known as New Mexico No. 9 which we know as the Hatch green chili and later, Dr. Paul Bosland founded "The Chili Pepper Institute at NMSU.

Hatch green chilis have gained notoriety for their taste because of the soil and growing conditions in the area from the Hatch Valley along the Rio Grande to the Tonuco Mountains.

Many believe it is the soil components which give Hatch green chilis superior flavoring but, according to Cowboy Talltale, Rim Country has the very same components, “only better...to grow the best tasting green chilis around”.

In 1912, Pharmacist Wilbur Scoville created a method of rating the spicy heat of the green chili by Scoville units. The Scoville Organoleptic Test dissolved dried chili peppers in alcohol to extract the capsaicinoids (which are the heat components). The capsaicinoids were then put in sugar water to be tasted by five human tasters. Because of the human decision making, this test is dependent on the human palate which has possibilities of error. My thought is, “How much alcohol?” Therefore, in the nineteen eighties, a more scientific test was developed which was called the ASTA Pungency Units. However, due to intense human studies, Cowboy Talltale claims he is an expert and has grown the hottest green chili ever grown, to exceed any measuring scale invented.

Advice for processing homegrown green chilis depends on the method you prefer to use.

According to Cowboy Talltale, always pick a firm-feeling green chili and never let them ripen too long. If the green chili is wrinkled, it will have less “chili meat” and will not peel easily.

Always, always wash the green chilis and pat dry. You may place the green chilis on the outside grill or in the oven with the broiler setting at 400 to 450 degrees. Chilis should not be touching. When the peeling of the green chilis starts to turn brown and you hear the popping and sizzling of the peeling blistering from the chili meat, turn the green chilis using long tongs so as not to get burnt. Repeat this process until the peeling looks as if it has blistered in its entirety, enabling easy peeling. Let green chilis cool to avoid getting burned in the peeling process. Because the capsicum is a burning irritant and may cause discomfort to the eyes and hands if not protected, some recommend using safety glasses, covering exposed skin and using gloves. If the green chilis are extremely hot, in the spicy sense, you may want to peel them under running cold water to alleviate the irritation of burning eyes caused by the capsicum.

Cowboy Talltale claims the best way to roast them is over an open fire, using a rectangular flat grill to lay the green chilis on. In researching, he may be right on this advice because apparently it is the heat caramelizing the sugars in the green chili which gives the chili its savory flavor.

Cowboy Talltale’s Lazy Chili Relleno Recipe

Rim Country grown green chilis, roasted and peeled

Sharp cheddar cheese, cut into thin strips

2 cups of your favorite pancake batter

Stuff green chilis with strips of cheese. Mix up your favorite pancake batter. Put all the green chilis in the batter. Heat up oil in frying pan. One at a time, carefully place the green chilis in the hot oil. Fry until brown on one side. Flip with a spatula to cook the other side. Remove and place on a plate with a paper towel to absorb any extra cooking oil. “Best dang Chili Rellenos you will ever eat!”

Cowboy Talltale’s Even Lazier Chili Relleno Recipe

Rim Country grown green chilis, roasted and peeled with the stems removed

Sharp cheddar cheese, cut into thin strips

2 cups of your favorite pancake batter

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Stuff green chilis with strips of cheese. Mix up your favorite pancake batter. In an oven proof dish, pour half the pancake batter. After layering stuffed green chilis in batter in dish, pour remaining batter over green chilis. Sprinkle with grated cheddar cheese and cook for “about 30 minutes or until it looks done.” “Best dang lazy Chili Rellenos you will ever eat!”

Happy Harvesting! Happy Peeling! And “Whew Wee” Happy Eating!!! Best wishes for a blessed harvesting season to you and yours.