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Chile Ash Paste

A great way to make use of this paste is to expand it into a deep, savory sauce using your choice of stock, and serve it over roasted fish, turkey, or mushrooms.

Makes 1½ cups

8 ounces ancho chiles
8 ounces guajillo chiles
1 medium yellow onion, peeled and roughly chopped
2 garlic heads, peeled and whole
1 tablespoon cornmeal
3 tonka beans (or 1 vanilla bean, split)
10 juniper berries
4 whole cloves
2 black cardamom pods
2 teaspoons black peppercorns
2 tablespoons dried oregano
1 tablespoon kosher salt
½ cup distilled white vinegar
1 tablespoon pomegranate juice

1. Soak the chiles in a bowl of warm water until softened for approximately 20 minutes. Drain and cut off the stems. Set on paper towels to dry for about 30 minutes.
2. Heat a dry, well-seasoned cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Slowly char the chiles, constantly mixing them in the pan, until they have a charcoal-like appearance, 20 to 25 minutes. As the chiles begin to release their last bit of oil, they will start to light on fire. While they are on fire, stir with a metal spoon for no longer than 15 seconds. Pour 2 tablespoons water into the pan, remove the chiles from the pan, and set them aside to cool.
3. Add the onion and garlic to the skillet and repeat the same process, cooking over medium heat until blackened but still intact. Remove the onion and garlic from the pan and set aside to cool.
4. Reduce the heat under the skillet to low, add the cornmeal, and lightly toast. Pour it into a small bowl.
5. In a spice grinder, combine the tonka beans, juniper berries, spices, and herbs, and grind them to a fine powder.



6. Remove the seeds from the chiles.

7. In a food processor, combine the chiles, onion, garlic, cornmeal, ground spice mixture, salt, vinegar, and pomegranate juice and blend until you have a paste. Push the mixture through a tamis for a more refined clay-like texture (or use a fine-mesh sieve or a food mill). If there's too much moisture, hang the paste in a cheesecloth and let it dry overnight. This paste is ready immediately and will last indefinitely if kept in a covered jar at room temperature.