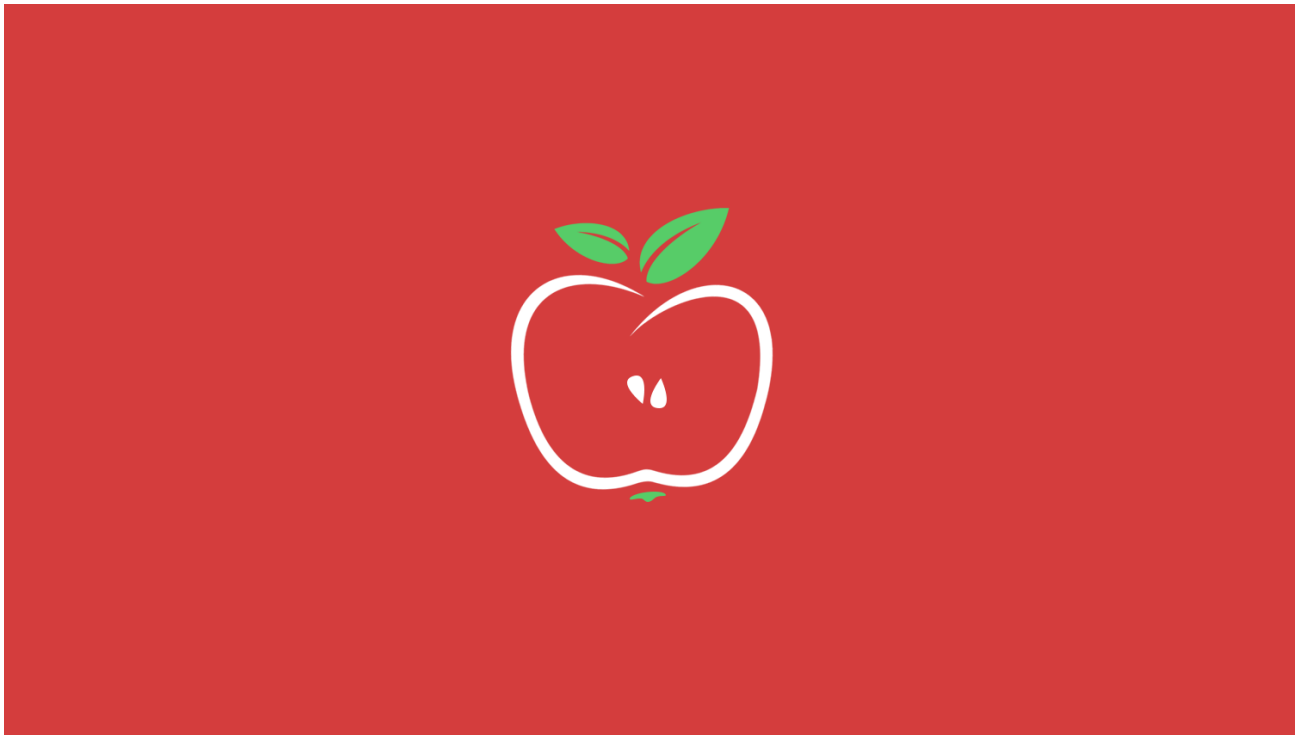
Essential Ingredients for Mexican Cooking Checklist

Stock your pantry with a few basic ingredients to create an authentic Mexican meal.



- [ ] **Avocadoes** - This rich, buttery fruit is a true Mexican staple. Avocado adds a Mexican flair to almost any dish, including such basics as sandwiches and salads.
- [ ] **Beans, canned** - Both black beans and pinto beans are go-to staples, depending on the dish and the preference of the chef. Each can be made into refried beans by buying them whole, soaking in a spice mixture, then mashing and refrying.
- [ ] **Cheeses** - Made in Mexico, queso Oaxaca is a white cheese ideal for quesadillas. If your local Mexican market doesn't carry it, substitute mozzarella. Queso fresco is a soft, crumbly cheese that adds a touch of saltiness to dishes like enchiladas. Mild Feta can be substituted for it.
- [ ] **Chipotles** - Buy these smoke-dried jalapeños canned and they'll last up to six months. (Transfer them to a jar after opening.) Used frequently for salsas and marinades, chipotles have a slight heat accompanied by a smoky flavor.
- [ ] **Chocolate, Mexican** - Mexican chocolate has a bitter, earthy flavor that pairs nicely with other ingredients in dishes as various as mousses and flans and spiced turkey breast and mole sauce. Nowadays it can be found in many large grocery stores and in Latin markets, but you can substitute semisweet chocolate plus a dash of cinnamon.
- [ ] **Crema** - Basically a Mexican version of sour cream, crema can be used in hot or cold sauces, adding that last punch of bright, tangy flavor. It can bring flautas or tacos to the next level. In bigger cities, you'll probably find crema in large supermarkets and Mexican grocery stores. If you can't find it, sour cream can be substituted in any dish except a hot sauce (since heating sour cream can make it separate or curdle).
- [ ] **Limes** - The humble lime is considered by some to be a Mexican cook's most flavorful tool. It's a must-have ingredient for finishing a dish—squeeze it on tacos, into salsa, and on just about anything that benefits from a bright, tart pop of flavor.
- [ ] **Oregano, Mexican** - This variety is a little more aggressive and savory than the herb that Americans are used to. It can be tracked down at specialty stores, most Mexican markets, and some well-stocked supermarkets. If you can't find it, use regular oregano.
- [ ] **Poblanos** - These mild chili peppers are prevalent in Mexican dishes, especially when roasted and peeled. (Once cut into strips, they're called rajas.) They're used in everything from salsas to quesadillas to chiles rellenos.

- [ ] **Tomatoes** - Mexican cuisine incorporates a wide variety of sauces, many of them tomato-based. Buy the best tomatoes you can find in season.

- [ ] **Tortillas, corn and flour** - If you're not making your own, look for the freshest ones you can find in the supermarket or a specialty store. When shopping, always read labels and opt for tortillas with the fewest ingredients because they're more likely to be fresh.

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