

## Foodways Traditions of Northwest Ohio: Mexican-American Foods

**1835**-Texas Rebellion

**1836**-Mar.6- Battle of the Alamo  
Mexican General Santa Anna wins

**1845**-Texas annexed by U.S. from  
Mexico.

**1848**-Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo  
ends Mexican-American war.

**1853**-Gadsen Purchase adds  
additional land from Mexico to U.S.

**1917**-Immigration Act of 1917  
opens the door to Mexican migrant  
labor.

**1920**-Sugar companies recruit  
5,000+ Mexican workers in Great  
Lakes beet fields.

**1930**-Mexican workers hired to pick  
tomatoes during gaps in beet  
harvesting work in NW Ohio.

**1935**-Migrant laborers in SE  
Michigan and NW Ohio strike and  
win better wages, acreage, and  
protection from discrimination.  
(basis for AWU Local 2007 in  
Findlay, Ohio, as well as other  
unions).

**1942**-Emergency Farm Labor Act,  
“Bracero,” brings in contract  
migrant labor from Mexico.

**1948**-Mexican government removes  
Texas from its blacklist for the  
Bracero program.

**1962**-The Migrant Health Act  
provides funds available for migrant  
health clinics.

**1964**-The Bracero program ends.

**1965**-Title I of the Elementary and  
Secondary Education Act funds  
summer schools, daycare, and  
Headstart centers for migrant  
workers.

**1967**- Farm Labor Organizing  
Committee (FLOC) is formed in  
Toledo, Ohio.

The Mexican-American population in northwest Ohio came here originally in the 1930s and 40s to work in the sugar beet fields and factories. In the 1940s, tomato farms needed workers in the field, stimulating migrant labor that has continued into the present. The foodways of Mexican-Americans living here reflect that heritage and have also been stigmatized by discrimination. With changing tastes in mainstream America, their food is now gaining attention and respect. Several individuals have started small businesses producing Mexican food in this new environment.

Tortillas are a good example of some of the changes as well as the hidden richness of Mexican-American foodways. In northwest Ohio, tortillas were usually made of wheat flour instead of corn meal (corn treated with an alkaline solution) as they were in Mexico since that was what was available here. Also, flour tortillas were common in Texas where many of the families came from and still have strong ties. They were a basic staple at every meal, similar to a slice of bread or cornbread at many American tables. Although tortillas are now widely available commercially, none tastes quite like Grandma's. The recipe and preparation of tortillas seem simple—mix flour, water, salt, and lard but every cook has a slightly different way of making them. The differences are frequently subtle and not recognized except by those who grew up with them. Homemade tortillas are now a special treat and help to make family gatherings and celebrations special. They might not seem that significant, but without them, a meal does not feel complete and satisfying.

What's in a name? Many Mexican-Americans living in northwest Ohio call themselves Mexican, Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino. These names represent the common language and heritage they share with other people from Central and South America. At the same time, many local Mexican-Americans have family ties to Texas where there is a distinctive Tex-Mex or Tejano culture. This culture is different from Mexican culture in that it has historically blended Anglo and Mexican traditions.



471 E. Broad St., Suite 1620  
Columbus, Ohio 43215-3857614-  
461-7802  
614-461-4651 fax  
800-293-9774 in-state toll free  
E-mail [ohc@ohiohumanities.org](mailto:ohc@ohiohumanities.org)

**H**istorical center  
& museum

13660 County Homes Road • Bowling Green, OH 43402-9583  
Phone 419.352.0867 • Fax 419.352.6220  
[www.woodcountytourism.org](http://www.woodcountytourism.org)

 **Schooner Farms**  
14890 Chicago Pike  
Wapakoneta, Ohio 45369  
419-241-0908  
[www.schoonerterraces.com](http://www.schoonerterraces.com)



PO Box 484 • Bowling Green,  
OH 43402  
419-395-0204  
[Luzyl@foodandculture.org](mailto:Luzyl@foodandculture.org)

## Something to chew on...

Many people believe “Mom’s food always taste best.” Do you have favorite foods from your family? Who usually does the cooking?

Gloria talks about how tortillas accompany each meal. Are there foods that you feel a meal has to include to be satisfying?

Is there any food that you ate at home but were shy about eating in public? What was it? Why were you shy about eating this food? Consider if your feelings are influenced by stereotypes of your cultural, regional, or ethnic background. What other factors may influence your feelings?

What was the most important thing for a tortilla to be considered a good one for Gloria? How does your opinion of a good tortilla compare to Gloria’s opinion?

Gloria talks about trying American food and mentions fried chicken and mashed potatoes in a box. Do you think those foods represent what most Americans eat? And who are Americans, anyway?! Isn’t she an American? She was born in Texas.

## How to Make Tortillas

- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 tablespoons of cold lard
- 1 1/3 cups of warm water

1. Mix all the dry ingredients: flour, salt, and baking powder together in a large mixing bowl.
2. Next, add the lard until the flour resembles cornmeal. Add water slowly and mix until the dough comes together; place on a lightly floured surface and knead a few minutes until smooth and elastic.
3. Divide the dough into 24 equal pieces and roll each piece into a ball.
4. Preheat your comal or use a large iron skillet over medium-high heat. Use a well-floured rolling pin to roll a dough ball into a thin, round tortilla. Place tortilla onto the hot dry comal or skillet and cook until bubbly and golden; flip and continue cooking until golden on the other side. Place the cooked tortilla in a tortilla warmer; continue rolling and cooking the remaining dough.



## Activities

Tortillas can be used to wrap many different foods. Experiment with various fillings. What fillings would you use to substitute for the traditional Mexican fillings?

Explore your local grocery store. What variations can you find for the traditional filling and tortilla (wrap)? How would you adapt the tortilla to create a new meal? Also, search for variations of the tortilla, such as flat breads. How do these breads vary in taste and texture?

Locate Mexican restaurants in your town. Compare their menus and how the tastes and textures of their foods vary.

Prepare a food demonstration of how to prepare a Mexican-American food. Demonstrate how the food is made and share any historical relevance behind the food, its preparation, and ingredients.

Mexican food uses distinctive ingredients. Look for these ingredients in your local grocery store.

- Hot Chilies: Habanero, jalapeno, malagueta, poblano
- Root Vegetables: Sweet potatoes, yams, yucca, jicama, Jerusalem artichokes, taro