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You Have the Chili Queens to Thank for Your Taco Addiction



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7/03/13 11:59AM

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In America, Mexican fare is as beloved as apple pie. (Actually, it might be *more* beloved than apple pie — can you even remember the last time you ate a slice?) In fact, Americans love Mexican food so much that it’s been appropriated time and again (the truest form of flattery!). How did these delicious imports become all-American staples? I give you a brief history of five popular imports:

Tacos: The Red Hot Chili Queens of Mexican Food

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According to Jeffrey M. Pilcher, a professor of history at the University of Minnesota and “taco historian,” the shelled wonder [dates roughly to the 18th century](#). He found the first U.S. reference to tacos in a 1905 newspaper — during a time when Mexican workers immigrated to California and the southwest. Throughout Los Angeles and San Antonio, [a group of badass ladies called the Chili Queens](#) began selling them to their communities from their tamale pushcarts. But the ubiquity of the taco was soon to manifest — the railroad-induced tourism boom of the 1880s let travelers from Eastern parts get their first taste of the taco. And they were hooked.

¡Hechos Jarritos!

Accomplished chemist/genius/Jarritos mastermind Don Francisco “El Güero” Hill founded the company in Mexico City in 1950, launching with a coffee-flavored soda. When Hill came to the realization that people liked their coffee hot (at least, back then), he decided to play with more widely acceptable flavors such as mandarin, lime, fruit punch, and tamarind. Within 10 years, Jarritos was being bottled and sold in 80 percent of Mexican states, before finally landing in the U.S. in 1988. Today, it’s the top-selling Mexican product in the Hispanic market — and, because it’s made with natural sugar, it moonlights in expensive organic grocery stores. Also, did you know it’s even better with alcohol? Do try this at home:

- Grapefruit Jarritos
- 2 oz. Tequila
- 1 oz. fresh lime

Mix ingredients in an 8 oz. glass and enjoy your very own Paloma!

Hot Tamales

America’s favorite food to consume after a night of drinking was originally [the portable battle food of ancient Aztec warriors](#). Tamales had a long journey through the states, and were estimated to have [migrated in the early 20th century](#) to the Mississippi Delta via migrant laborers and up north to Chicago by way of African-American field workers. The husk-wrapped masa is usually stuffed with pork, chicken, or cheese, steamed, and served with salsa verde or mole, rendering most

Just don't eat the husks. [President Ford did that once](#), biting into the husk of a still-wrapped tamale during an April 1976 visit to the Alamo, and he never lived it down. The faux pas lives in infamy as “The Great Tamale Incident.”

Mexican Beer: A Case Study

Named after its eponymous city in Mexico, Tecate began as a humble independent brewery in 1944 before being bought out by Cuauhtémoc-Moctezuma Brewery in 1954. As the top-selling beer in the Hispanic market, it's becoming increasingly popular among non-Hispanic drinkers — particularly with the onslaught of recent endorsements from [Oscar de la Hoya and ESPN sponsored slots](#). Pro-tip: Tecate is particularly delicious with a wedge of lime shoved into your aluminum can.

Guac 'n' Roll

The green stuff you love to slather on chips and eat out of a plastic tub is another [Aztec invention](#). [Spanish conquistadors date the Aztec dip — rumored to have aphrodisiacal powers — back to 1500](#). [Avocados were introduced to California in 1856](#), when a man named Dr. Thomas White planted the first avocado tree on U.S. soil in San Gabriel, CA. [Rudolph Hass](#), the man responsible for those delicious Hass avocados, patented the varietal in the 1930s and avocados were on their way to becoming a cash crop by the early 20th century. [The California Avocado Advisory Board starting spreading the good word about avocados in the 1940s](#), and it's now an American staple. As of this year, [79 million pounds of avocados](#) were consumed during the Super Bowl, basically making it the most American-y American thing ever.

While these are the top mass-marketed Mexican food and drink imports, Mexico's culinary influence in the States continues to grow, with regional specialties like mezcal, moles, tortas and chicarrones flooding the market year after year. Speaking of, I'm starving — 'scuse me while I help myself to an American-sized helping of guac.

[Carly Fisher](#) is a writer and editor based in Chicago. She spends most of her time stuffing her face and being paid to write about it.

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