

Green Chile Cheeseburgers

This New Mexican classic may just be the best burger you've never had. BY LYNN CLARK

GREEN CHILES SHOW up on menus everywhere in New Mexico—even at McDonald's. Farmers harvest the chiles in late summer, when they are bought by the bushel to be roasted and frozen for year-round use. The chiles make their way into all kinds of dishes, even apple pie and chocolate ice cream! One especially beloved tradition is the green chile burger. At roadside restaurants all over New Mexico, ground beef patties are grilled to a crusty brown and topped with fire-roasted, chopped chiles and a slice of cheese.

I mail-ordered a big bag of fire-roasted, hot green chiles from Hatch, New Mexico, the self-proclaimed green chile capital of the country. Almost as soon as they arrived, I headed out to grill some burgers. As advertised, the chiles had intense heat and a captivating sweet and smoky flavor. Nonetheless, waiting for chiles to arrive in the mail so I could make a burger was out of the question. To bring this regional favorite out of the Southwest, I'd need to use ordinary supermarket ingredients.

Most recipes suggest canned chiles as a substitute. We found them tinny, and they were so mild you could eat them with a spoon. Casting about for an alternative, I spied Anaheim chiles at the supermarket. In fact, these do grow in New Mexico, but experts say that the state's hot, arid climate produces hotter Anaheims than those grown in California or Florida, the states that supply most supermarkets around the country. I roasted the supermarket Anaheims and found them far milder than the Hatch I'd mail-ordered. To fix that, I tried combining them with poblano peppers, which have a spicy, smoky edge. The mix tasted unpleasantly vegetal and the heat barely registered. Moving up the heat scale, I combined the Anaheims with jalapeños. Much better! These came close to the mail-order chiles. To round out the flavor, I borrowed from recipes I'd seen that added sautéed onions and garlic to the chiles. Rather than dirtying a pan, I simply grilled the onions with the chiles, then chopped them with fresh garlic in the food processor.

In step 2, you may need to add a teaspoon or two of water to the food processor to help the chile mixture puree. Pressing a shallow divot in the center of each burger patty keeps the burgers flat during grilling.

Now that the topping was in order, I turned to the burger. Tasters preferred the flavor and fat of 85 percent lean ground beef. After a few trial runs, I settled on 6-ounce patties, which could accommodate a generous chile topping. To shape the burgers, I used a proven test kitchen technique—making a small indentation in each patty to keep them from buckling and dislodging the topping. I grilled the burgers to medium doneness over high heat. They were juicy and meaty, but tasters complained the chile was being upstaged. The obvious solution was extra topping, but if I heaped on any more, it'd just fall into the grill. Wait a sec—what if I put chile *into* the burgers? This time, I set aside some of my chile mixture for the topping and pureed the rest into a smooth paste, which I then mixed into the ground raw meat. These burgers packed a pleasurable, hot punch through and through. For my last test, I tried topping the burgers alternately with cheddar, Monterey Jack, and American. Tasters preferred mild American cheese, which melts well and is traditional on these burgers.

I flipped a final batch of burgers over and topped them with spoonfuls of chile mixture and a slice of cheese; the cheese melted as the burger finished cooking, which helped the topping stay put. The burger, by contrast, was ready to travel—straight into your kitchen.

GREEN CHILE CHEESEBURGERS

Serves 4

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- 3 Anaheim chiles, stemmed, halved lengthwise, and seeded
- 3 jalapeño chiles, stemmed, halved lengthwise, and seeded
- 1 onion, peeled and sliced into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick rounds
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Salt and pepper
- 1½ pounds 85 percent lean ground beef
- 4 slices deli American cheese



Authentic fire-roasted Hatch chiles may be several states away, but a good substitute is as near your local grocery store.

1. CHAR VEGETABLES Grill chiles and onion, covered, over hot fire until vegetables are lightly charred and tender, 2 to 4 minutes per side. Transfer vegetables to bowl, cover, and let cool 5 minutes. Remove skins from chiles and discard; separate onion rounds into rings.

2. PROCESS CHILE MIXTURE Transfer chiles, onion, and garlic to food processor and pulse until coarsely chopped. Transfer all but $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped chile mixture to empty bowl and season with salt and pepper; set aside. Process remaining mixture until smooth.

3. FORM BURGERS Combine 1 pureed chile mixture, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper in large bowl and knead gently until well incorporated. Shape into four $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick patties. Press shallow divot in center of each.

4. GRILL AND TOP Grill burgers, covered, over hot fire until well browned on first side, 3 to 5 minutes. Flip burgers top with chopped chile mixture and cheese, and continue to grill, cover until cheese is melted and burgers are cooked to desired doneness, 3 to 5 minutes. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN DISCOVERY Chile Pinch Hitter

For complex green chile flavor outside of New Mexico, we found that a combination of mild Anaheims and spicy jalapeños has a nice peppery balance.



MILD HEAT
Anaheim chiles add a mildly sweet, grassy flavor.



SPICE IS NICE
Jalapeño chiles have just enough heat to stand up to the beefiness of the burger.