



Press release

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Mexico, D.F.

THE ROOTS OF MEXICAN CUISINE

Diana Kennedy: champion of our traditional cuisine



Mexico, D.F.- *How to conserve the original flavors of Mexican cuisine?* [Traditional Mexican cuisine](#) was recently recognized by [UNESCO](#) as Intangible Cultural Heritage; however, many of its original ingredients and forms of preparation have been lost over time. As a tribute to those who have dedicated part of their lives to maintaining the cultural and gastronomic tradition of Mexico, and as a special recognition to the important work of Diana Kennedy, promoter of traditional Mexican cuisine, the National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO) announced the launch on Tuesday the 9th of September of the website [Diana Kennedy "The roots of Mexican cuisine"](#). The event took place in the restaurant "El Cardenal" (Centro Histórico of Mexico City) and information is available in www.biodiversidad.gob.mx/usos/dk/.

Traditional Mexican cuisine is a manifestation of ancient culture that remains alive to this day. It is characterized by its wide diversity of ingredients, techniques and procedures, and is based on agricultural products that are derived from processes of domestication over thousands of years and that present an extremely wide genetic diversity. Mexico is one of the [Centers of Domestication of Cultivated Plants](#) that exist in the world (out of a total of only eight). Mexico is notable for the domestication of maize, chili, squash, beans, tomato, vanilla, maguey, cotton and avocado. For Mexico, the large quantity of varieties of plant species adapted to the different soil and climatic conditions is invaluable, and allows us the privilege of enjoying a wide variety of [foods](#) in a melting pot of colors, aromas and flavors.



At present, many ingredients of our cuisine are being lost. The main causes are importation of agricultural products, development of different hybrid and transgenic varieties, change in the dietary culture and lack of knowledge regarding the original ingredients. The website [Diana Kennedy "The roots of Mexican cuisine"](#) comprises an important legacy regarding the wide variety of native ingredients of our traditional cuisine rescued by this remarkable researcher and promoter of the conservation of traditional Mexican cuisine. Diana is a tireless traveller who has crossed the country in every class of transport, visited hidden and colorful markets and compiled the knowledge of kitchens and cooks through culinary language. She is the author of almost 20 publications about Mexican cuisine and has received a great deal of national and international recognition, making her an authority in this subject.

In recent years, CONABIO, through the Institute of Biology of UNAM, assisted the project entitled **"Documentation of the biodiversity of Mexican gastronomy: rescue of the culinary archives of Diana Kennedy"** with the advice of three of the world's most recognized experts in this subject: Robert Bye Boettler, Edelmira Linares and Clarissa Jiménez. The objective was to compile knowledge about the native ingredients of Diana's valuable heritage, including different visits to markets. The results of this project form the base of the construction of the website [Diana Kennedy "The roots of Mexican cuisine"](#). In the analysis of the ingredients of four of Diana's books, 1179 recipes belonging to 31 states were used and a wide diversity of culinary elements identified. Visits to different markets located in five Mexican states provided samples of 261 ingredients. Similarly, 688 field notes belonging to 15 states were transcribed. Compilation of digital images created an archive of 2,279 photographs, all of which are currently available in the [Image Bank](#) of CONABIO.

Native ingredients in the dishes of Mexican cuisine include: black, white and bayo beans, plumeria, runner bean; squash and its flowers and seeds; the chilies known as pasilla, ancho, poblano, chilaca, serrano, guajillo, jalapeño, ancho, cora, de árbol, cascabel, chipotle, amarillo, güero, colorado, miahuateco, mora, morita, chilpaya, habanero, amashito and pasilla mixe. Also xoco, chaya, achiote, hoja blanca, hoja santa, cuajilote, ahuahtli, white leadtree, wild chayote, flor de colorín, nopal, joconoxtle, trompillos; the mushrooms known as hongos azul, clavito, cuitlacoche and pata de pájaro. Some animal ingredients are ants, venison, jumiles, shark, eel, shrimp and catfish.

Standing out among the native ingredients, all of which are of great value, is the nopal plant - an icon of our concept of identity. Salvador Novo stated: *...No one waters it, no one cultivates it. It absorbs vital juices from the driest land, from the rock it sits on. And one day, from these broad flat hands sprout small red fingers: the tunas –tenochtl– red like the hearts of men...* history also reminds us that it was on a nopal that the eagle rested, a symbol leading to the founding of the city of Tenochtitlán, the *place of the nopal on the rock*.

To pass on to our descendants the non-material heritage represented by traditional Mexican cuisine and to continue delighting ourselves with its thousands of flavors and colors, we invite the public to find out more about our rich and delicious Mexican biodiversity in the website: [Diana Kennedy "The roots of Mexican cuisine" \[www.biodiversidad.gob.mx/ usos/dk/\]\(http://www.biodiversidad.gob.mx/ usos/dk/\)](#).



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- **Mexican Biodiversity Portal** www.biodiversidad.gob.mx
- **UNESCO** <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00001>
- **Traditional Mexican cuisine, community, ancestral and living culture - The paradigm of Michoacán** <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011>
- **Conservatory of the Mexican Gastronomic Culture** <http://www.ccgmx.com/ccgm.4/index.html>
- **Centre of Cultivated Plants** <http://www.biodiversidad.gob.mx/genes/centrosOrigen/centrosOrig.html>
- **Foods** <http://www.biodiversidad.gob.mx/ usos/alimentos.html>

Note for the editors:

The National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO) is a permanent interministerial commission; its purpose is to generate the knowledge required by Mexico on which to base public policies and societal decisions regarding biodiversity. For this reason, it is primarily dedicated to forming and updating the National Biodiversity Information System (SNIB, by its Spanish acronym), supporting projects and studies concerning the knowledge and use of biodiversity, providing advice to governmental agencies and those of other sectors, conducting special projects, disseminating knowledge regarding the biological richness, monitoring international conventions and providing services to the public. CONABIO was created by Presidential Decree on the 16th of March, 1992. www.conabio.gob.mx www.biodiversidad.gob.mx.

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