

Ethnobotany of Mexico

FOR FRANCISCA RAMIREZ
THE BRIDGE - CUSTOM DETOX
OCTOBER 2025



The following plants, herbs and foods have been revered for centuries within the vast tradition of Mexican ethnobotany.

Each carries its own story, woven from indigenous wisdom, ritual use, and everyday nourishment.

More than ingredients, they are medicines of terrain and spirit — supporting your continued journey into enlightenment while tending to digestion, detox, blood, liver, skin, and the subtle energies of the body.

Together they form a living apothecary, honouring your traditions, culture, ceremony, and the land itself.

NOPAL

The flat green pads of the prickly pear cactus, eaten fresh or juiced all over Mexico, are a powerful plant ally for you — assisting with digestion, blood sugar balance, and detox.

INDIGENOUS HISTORY

Nopal has been sacred since Aztec times, symbolizing **resilience** and **abundance**. It appears in the foundation myth of Tenochtitlán, where an eagle perched on a nopal signaled the site of the future city (now Mexico City).

MEDICINAL USAGE

Traditionally used for **blood sugar regulation, digestion, liver health**, and wound healing. Rich in fiber and antioxidants, Nopal is a terrain ally for detox and metabolic balance.

PRACTICUM

1. **JUGO VERDE** - Look for this in local juice stands. The classic “jugo verde” is a perfect blend of NOPAL, PARSLEY, PINEAPPLE. You can also make your own with Nopal sold pre-cleaned and cut, add Nopal to the blender with parsley, cilantro and pineapple - add cucumber and lime for variety.

2. **QUICK DIGESTIVE SALAD** - Slice pre-cleaned nopales limpios into strips, toss with lime, sea salt, and a splash of apple cider vinegar. A classic way to neutralize the mucilage and make it light, refreshing, and easy to digest.

3. **USE THE POWDER IN SMOOTHIES** - Fresh is always preferable, but if you want to bring some back to the US, look for the Powder and add 1 tsp nopal powder to your morning smoothie or water for daily fiber and gentle terrain support.



TEPACHE

A living probiotic tonic made from pineapple rinds, piloncillo, and cinnamon — excellent for supporting digestion and cooling the system.

INDIGENOUS HISTORY

Tepache is a drink that comes from the Nahua people, dating back to pre-Hispanic times. It was originally made with corn before evolving into the pineapple-based drink it is today. Fermented drinks have long been part of markets, homes, and celebrations across Mexico and South America, and tepache remains a humble, ancestral beverage of the people.

MEDICINAL USAGE

Tepache offers natural probiotics from its gentle fermentation, helping to restore and balance the gut. Pineapple contributes **bromelain**, an enzyme that **supports digestion, eases inflammation, and aids detoxification**. Cinnamon adds warmth and helps **regulate blood sugar**, making tepache both a cooling and balancing tonic for your system.

PRACTICUM | MAKE TEPACHE AT HOME

Ideally, you will find someone locally to show you how it's made so you get an authentic experience. I can tell you what I find online, but you are on the ground - and have access to the hands that have physically made this drink for years.



1. Rinse and peel a fresh pineapple, **ORGANIC** if possible.
2. Saving the rinds (you will use the fruit separately).
3. Place the rinds in a large glass jar with 2–3 liters of water, 1 cone of **piloncillo** (or ½ cup raw sugar), and 2–3 sticks of cinnamon.
4. Cover the jar loosely with a cloth and let it ferment at room temperature for 2–3 days.
5. Taste after the second day — when lightly bubbly and tangy, strain the liquid, chill, and enjoy over ice.
6. Drink within 3–4 days while still fresh and alive.

ODE TO PILONCILLO



Sugar comes from sugarcane, a plant with a long and complex history in human life. Once more valuable than gold, sugar was a symbol of wealth, vitality, and pleasure.

In modern times, sugar has been demonized as one of the greatest disruptors of health — yet sweetness itself is essential, both as nourishment and as a reminder of life's joy. Across cultures, raw unrefined sugar remains a traditional food: jaggery in India, chancaca in the Amazon, panela in South America.

In Mexico, this tradition lives on as **piloncillo** — pure sugarcane juice boiled down and poured into rustic cones. Unlike refined sugar, piloncillo retains **minerals and trace enzymes**, and a deep molasses flavor. It offers energy, warmth, and grounding — a food of the people, carrying both medicine and memory.



EPAZOTE

Epazote (Mexican Wormseed). A pungent green herb with a distinct aroma, epazote is used fresh in soups, stews, and especially beans — both for flavor and for its digestive powers.

INDIGENOUS HISTORY

Epazote's name comes from Nahuatl (epazotl), meaning “skunk sweat,” a nod to its strong scent. It was used by the Aztecs and Maya for **digestion and as a vermifuge** (to expel intestinal parasites). Long before modern medicine, it was a household remedy, always at hand in the kitchen garden.

MEDICINAL USAGE

Traditionally Epazote is used to **ease gas and bloating** (especially with beans) and as an old-world “vermifuge” meaning it is used to **kill parasites**. It's a clearing herb — lightening the digestive load and keeping the gut environment balanced.

PRACTICUM

1. **Cook with Beans** — Add a few fresh sprigs of epazote while simmering beans to ease gas and support digestion. Remove the leaves before serving.
2. **Digestive Tea** — Steep 1–2 fresh or dried leaves in hot water after dinner for a strong digestive tisane. Use sparingly, as the flavor is potent. Will mix well with Hierbabuena, Toronjil, Manzanilla and Canela.



HIERBA SANTA

A heart-shaped aromatic leaf with a subtle anise flavor, used fresh in cooking and teas. Revered both as food and medicine, hierba santa supports digestion and brings a gentle, sacred fragrance to meals.

INDIGENOUS HISTORY

Known since pre-Hispanic times, hierba santa has been used by the Aztecs, Mixe, and other indigenous groups as both a culinary herb and a sacred plant. Its Nahuatl name, *tlanepa*, means “aromatic herb.” Traditionally it was **burned as incense**, wrapped around food, or **brewed as a medicinal infusion**.

MEDICINAL USAGE

Hierba santa is valued for **easing indigestion**, colic, and respiratory congestion. Its aromatic oils act as a carminative, soothing the stomach and stimulating appetite. In terrain medicine, it’s considered a balancing herb — opening the senses, lightening the digestive load, and connecting the meal to ceremony.

PRACTICUM

- 1. As Incense — Burn a dried leaf to clear the space, calm the senses, and invite a sacred presence — a gentle ritual for life’s transitions. Perfect for your home in Mexico.**
2. In the Kitchen — Wrap fresh cheese, mushrooms, or tamales in a leaf and steam; the flavor is light and aromatic, supporting digestion.
3. Digestive Tea — Steep one fresh leaf in hot water after meals to ease gas and relax the stomach.



HOJAS DE GUAYABA

Brewed as tea, guava leaves are a traditional Mexican remedy for digestion and blood sugar balance — a light, aromatic ally for weight management.

INDIGENOUS HISTORY

Guava has been cultivated in Mexico since pre-Hispanic times, valued not only for its sweet fruit but also for its **leaves**. Indigenous communities brewed guava leaf infusions to treat diarrhea, stomach pain, and **metabolic imbalances**. In some traditions, the leaves were also used in **dreamwork** — sipped as tea or placed beneath the pillow to invite visions and restful sleep, connecting the plant to both healing and the subtle realms of the night.

MEDICINAL USAGE

Guava leaves are most respected for **supporting blood sugar balance, lipid metabolism, and weight control**. They are also taken for common digestive troubles like diarrhea, bloating, and stomach pain.



PRACTICUM

1. **Weight Balance Tea** — Brew a handful of fresh or dried guava leaves in ½ liter of water. Drink a small cup before meals to help regulate blood sugar, reduce cravings, and support weight control.
2. **Digestive Support** — Sip the same tea after a heavy meal to ease bloating or stomach discomfort.
3. **Dreamtime Ritual** — Place a few dried leaves under your pillow at night to invite vivid dreams and deeper rest.

CHÍA FRESCA

chia seeds have been a staple of Mexican endurance and hydration since Aztec times. Light, filling, and versatile, it's both traditional and modern — a simple seed with powerful benefits.

INDIGENOUS HISTORY

Chía was considered **sacred** by the Aztecs, used as both food and medicine. Warriors carried it on long journeys, as the soaked seeds provided **lasting hydration** and **energy**. Alongside maize, beans, and amaranth, it was one of the foundational crops of pre-Hispanic Mexico.

MEDICINAL USAGE

Rich in soluble **fiber**, **omega-3s**, and **minerals**, chia supports hydration, digestion, and **blood sugar balance**. It swells in water to create **satiety**, making it an ally for **weight management**. In terrain medicine, it is seen as a balancing seed — lightening cravings and sustaining energy.

PRACTICUM

1. **Chía Fresca** — Soak and mix (agitate) 1–2 tbsp chia seeds in a glass of water with fresh lime juice and a touch of piloncillo or honey. A traditional, hydrating street drink.
2. **Savory Chia Pudding with Avocado + Lime**
 - Soak and mix (agitate) 3 tbsp chia seeds in 1 cup unsweetened almond or coconut milk
 - Stir in a pinch of sea salt, squeeze of lime, and a drizzle of olive oil.
 - Top with diced avocado, chopped cilantro, and a sprinkle of pumpkin seeds (pepitas)





TIENDAS & MARKETS | CDMX

COYOACÁN

1. **La Casa del Pan Papalotl** – Organic bakery and café with macrobiotic and vegetarian options.
2. **The Green Corner** (Coyoacán) – Local branch of the organic supermarket chain.
3. **Tianguis Orgánico de Coyoacán** (Saturdays) – Farmers' market with organic produce and artisan products.
4. **La Veganeria** – Plant-based shop with supplements and natural foods.
5. **Mercado de Coyoacán** – Classic market with fresh produce, juice stands (great for nopal jugos verdes).

ROMA / CONDESA

1. **Orígenes Orgánicos** (Roma) – Pioneer organic store + café with superfoods, supplements, and fresh produce.
2. **The Green Corner** (multiple locations, incl. Condesa) – Large organic supermarket chain with Mexican and imported natural products.
3. **Fresco by Diego** (Roma Norte) – Gourmet health store with artisanal, organic, and specialty foods.
4. **Pan Gabriel** (Roma) – Gluten-free and organic bakery.
5. **Mercado el 100** (Roma, Sundays) – Open-air farmers market with local, organic producers.
6. **Mercado Medellín** (Roma Sur) – Abundant produce market with juice stalls and natural goods.