



The crystal-blue waters of the Caribbean provide a clear lens through which snorkelers may view the rainbow of sea life that lives below the waves. It also provides fishermen and divers a clean landscape for catching and collecting fish, shellfish, and spiny lobsters. When we want to see what is being brought in fresh from the Caribbean Sea, we head to Guanica on the south side of the island. Because there are many fishermen working out of this harbor, there is a great opportunity to buy directly from them such local favorites as snapper, ladyfish, and conch. The pink spiral shells of the conch are perhaps the most coveted prize of shell collectors, but do they know about the sweet, briny meat of the mollusk that makes its home inside? Fresh conch meat can be sliced thin and eaten completely raw with just salt and maybe some citrus or vinegar, but frozen conch is easier to find and quite good. The conch in this recipe is cooked for an hour to ensure that it is tender before being tossed into this fresh, peppery salad.

ENSALADA DE CARRUCHO

Conch Salad

SERVES 4 TO 6

- 3 pounds fresh or frozen conch meat
- 3 tablespoons kosher salt, plus more as needed
- 10 bay leaves
- 2 cups olive oil
- 2 cups diced white onions
- 1 red bell pepper, finely diced
- 1 green cubanero pepper, finely diced
- 6 small ají dulce peppers (see page 41), finely diced
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 cloves garlic, mashed to a paste in a mortar
- 10 green olives, pitted and chopped
- Freshly ground black pepper

In a large pot, combine the conch, salt, and bay leaves and add enough water to cover. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium, and cook until the conch is tender, about 1 hour. Drain and submerge the conch in a bowl filled with ice water to stop the cooking. Drain again and, with a knife, scrape all of the yellowish skin that remains from the conch. Cut the white flesh into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick slices. Let cool, then cover and put in the refrigerator.

In a medium saucepan, heat 3 tablespoons of the oil over low heat. Add the onions and sauté until translucent, about 7 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool.

In a medium bowl, combine the remaining oil, sautéed onions, conch, all of the peppers, the vinegar, lime juice, cilantro, garlic, and olives and mix well. Taste and adjust the seasoning with salt and black pepper. Refrigerate until ready to serve.