

# Cashew Leche de Tigre



Photo: Kathryn Sheldon

Chef Adriana Urbina loves Venezuelan food. And for good reason. "I am very Venezuelan," she jokes of how she most loves to both cook and eat. She describes the cuisine as sweet and sour, but not spicy, and one that prides itself in both traditional stews and bright seafood dishes. "We have light food and we have these heavy stews with spices and levels of flavor," she says. "I like both." As the chef at [De Maria](#) in New York, Urbina unites the traditional flavors of her home with local and seasonal ingredients, having fun with memory and playing with style.

Urbina grew up in Caracas. But she often vacationed on Margarita Island in the Caribbean, feasting on fresh fish, where *leche de tigre*—a traditional citrus sauce—is used to quick-cure ceviche. At its simplest, traditional *leche de tigre* is lemon juice and cilantro, but that wasn't doing it for Urbina. "Every time I eat ceviche, I feel that it's one-note: lemon, lemon, lemon," she says of the flavors she finds stateside. So she looked to make a *leche de tigre* for her kitchen that would add nuance to anything that could benefit from a punch of sweet and sour—not just fish dishes.

"I want you to be able to taste different kinds of acidity in the dish," she says, which is why her version breaks free from lemon's chokehold. Orange and grapefruit—both the fresh-squeezed juice and tiny bits of the fruit—provide sweet and bitter citrus notes on top of the lemon. Venezuelans often serve ceviche with sweet plantains; Urbina shifts the profile up by blending raw cashews directly in the sauce, as they also grow abundantly there. Blended until smooth and finished with enough salt "so that all the flavors come to life at the end," Urbina's cashew *leche de tigre* rolls out layers of acidity. "It's not textbook—it's not sweet, but not super sour," she says. "It reminds me of when I was little, eating in Margarita, with all of these fresh ingredients together."

Here's how make her spin on *leche de tigre*—plus a handful of different ways to use it—so you can bring a little Venezuela into wherever your home might be.

## Ceviche

For a quick, traditional ceviche that's "not fishy at all," start by slicing a light black bass or snapper. Gently toss in the cashew *leche de tigre* with red onion and cilantro stems ("they carry more flavor than the leaves," she says) and top with toasted cashews. "That's it!"

## Salad

"This is great dressing because it has the acidity and the thickness of a vinaigrette," Urbina says. Used with a light hand, any kind of lettuce does well with the cashew *leche de tigre* as a dressing. For a little spiciness, try arugula or watercress. Add fresh pieces of orange and grapefruit, plus toasted, crumbled cashews. "Cashews are very rich in flavor and a little heavy, so it's perfectly balanced with the citrus and lettuce," she promises. But be warned—with all that acidity at work, it's easy to drown your greens, so start light and add more if needed.

## Shellfish

For cooked shellfish, Urbina likes to think of the cashew *leche de tigre* as a kind of peanut sauce. The sweetness of the cashews pairs perfectly with the right kind of seafood, like grilled shrimp or scallops, and you've got a citrus match made in heaven when you add to anything heavy on garlic. When sautéing shrimp or scallops, use a little cashew *leche de tigre* with chopped garlic. Or, grill the seafood and finish with it with the sauce.

## En Papillote

"Fish and herbs are delicious, and this sauce will pair perfectly with any herb," Urbina promises. For a foolproof preparation, [make little pouches](#) of light-fleshed fish. Add aromatics like lime zest and garlic, plus herbs like thyme, cilantro or tarragon. "Any type of vegetable goes great," she says. Drizzle with sauce and lightly toss to coat, seal everything in the pouch then bake until just steamed.

## Whipped Dessert

For a frozen whipped cream that's both light and bright, whip two cups of whipping cream until they're at stiff peaks. Fold in ¼ cup of condensed milk, ¼ cup of cashew *leche de tigre* and 2 tablespoons roasted and crumbled cashews. Cover and leave in the freezer for two hours to set. "Serve with *dulce de leche* or any kind of creamy, sweet, crunchy topping," she says. Perfect for a slightly sour but bright and sweet summer dessert.

## Cocktail

For "a very Venezuelan drink," toss a serving of dark rum over ice and add a touch of cashew *leche de tigre*. If you want, add a little water "to loosen it up a little bit."

# Cashew Leche de Tigre

*Recipe adapted from Adriana Urbina, [De Maria](#), New York NY*

**Yield:** 2 cups

**Prep Time:** 5 minutes

**Cook Time:** N/A

**Total Time:** 5 minutes

## Ingredients

1 cup raw cashews

½ cup lemon juice

¼ cup orange juice

¼ cup grapefruit juice

½ teaspoon black pepper

½ teaspoon salt

## Directions

Combine all ingredients in a blender and blend until you have a smooth sauce. Season to taste with salt.