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## Summer squash Gratin with Mole Rojo

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I've really become a fan of preparing all sorts of vegetable dishes in this 'gratin' style. Essentially, partially cooked vegetables are layered with sauce and cheese and baked together until they become one. Cooking the veggies ahead of time reduces the water in the final product and intensifies the flavor. Unlike the classic potato gratin, this version is relatively healthy and cream-free! You can adjust the heat of the mole with addition of more hot dried chilies (arbol work nicely). You can serve this with rice and beans for a complete (vegetarian) meal. Deliciouso!

### For the squash

- 3 lbs of mixed summer squash (crookneck, zucchini, yellow)
- 3 tbsp light oil (veggie, canola)
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh oregano or 1 tbsp dried
- 1 tbsp ground cumin
- 6-7 garlic cloves, chopped fine
- 1 tbsp kosher salt

Preheat oven to 400 or prepare hot grill. Cut the squash lengthwise about ½ inch thick and place in a large mixing bowl. Toss with oil, oregano, cumin, garlic, and salt. Grill on a hot grill for 4-5 minutes per side, until slightly charred and slightly tender but still holding its shape. Alternatively, place in a single layer on a rimmed sheet pan and roast for 8-10 minutes until slightly tender. Remove from oven and allow to cool for 15 minutes (or however long, this can be done in advance).

### For the Mole

- 6-7 guajillo chilies (or ancho, or mix, something mild and slightly bitter)
- 1 chipotle (dried) or two if canned in adobe
- Stems from 1 small bunch of cilantro (should be at least a handful)
- ½ small yellow onion
- 3-4 sprigs epazote or oregano
- ¼ cup peanut oil (or veggie oil with a handful of dry roasted peanuts)
- 1 tsp coriander seeds (or ground)
- 2 tbsp honey or agave nectar
- 1 bay leaf

Remove the stems and seeds from the dried chilies and place on a sheet pan in a 350° oven for 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and place in a blender. Pour about 2 cups of boiling water over the chilies (try to cover) and place the lid on top and allow soaking for at least 15-20

minutes. Add in the rest of the ingredients into the blender and blend until homogenous. You may need to add a little more water (it should be the consistency of a runny smoothie). Be cautious of the temperature when blending; apply pressure to the top while running. Pour the mixture through a fine mesh strainer into a bowl, using a spatula or the back of a spoon to press out as much liquid as possible. At this point taste and adjust seasoning with salt or honey. It should be slightly bitter and strong tasting but add honey if it is too potent (if it is unbearable). If weak tasting, put into a saucepan and reduce over medium heat until the flavor is correct. This should yield 3-4 cup of sauce.

To prepare the gratin

3 cups shredded jack, pepper jack, or white cheddar cheese (or a blend of the three)

Cooked Squash

Prepared Mole

Cilantro and lime to finish/ garnish

Preheat an oven to 350°. In a 9x13 pyrex or metal baking dish (high rim), layer about ½ cup or mole onto the bottom of the pan (evenly coat the entire bottom). Layer some squash in a single layer and then add cheese on top. Repeat this process until the pan is filled, making sure to finish with a layer of cheese on the top. If the mole and squash are freshly prepared, place in the oven for 10 minutes and then broil the top to melt cheese to a slightly golden color. If the ingredients are prepared ahead of time (and not hot) leave in the oven for a bit longer (20-30 minutes) until the ingredients are heated through and they start to come together. The goal is to cook until the ingredients begin to mesh together (think lasagna). This means you should cook until there is little visible liquid in the pan. Remove from the oven, top with chopped cilantro and serve with a lime wedge.