

Photo: Raul Thomas

STARTERS & SIDES Chef Raul Thomas

# Puerto Rican-style beef empanadas

By Sarra Sedghi · Rough Draft Atlanta, 9/1/2026

Makes 12 empanadas | **Prep** about 45 minutes | **Cook** about 30 minutes | **Total** about 1 hour 15 minutes

*Times are Rough Draft estimates.*

## Ingredients

BEEF FILLING

- [ ] 1 Tbsp olive oil
- [ ] 1 pound lean ground beef, preferably an 81/90 or 80/20 blend
- [ ] 1/2 cup finely diced yellow onions
- [ ] 1/2 cup finely diced green bell peppers
- [ ] 2 garlic cloves, minced
- [ ] 2 Tbsp sofrito
- [ ] 1 tsp adobo seasoning
- [ ] 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- [ ] 1/2 tsp dried oregano
- [ ] 1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- [ ] 1/4 cup tomato sauce

## Directions

1. **Start the flavor base:** Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and bell pepper and sauté until softened, 3 to 4 minutes.
2. Stir in garlic and sofrito and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute.
3. **Add the beef:** Add the ground beef, breaking it apart with a large wooden spoon. Cook until browned, about 5 to 7 minutes.
4. Add adobo, cumin, oregano, and black pepper. Stir in tomato sauce and chopped olives.
5. Reduce the heat to medium-low. Simmer beef mixture for about 5 minutes. (The finished mixture should be moist, but not watery.)
6. Remove from heat and add fresh cilantro. Taste and adjust, if necessary. Let cool completely.
7. **Prep the empanadas:** Place approximately 2 Tbsp of beef filling in the center of each empanada disc.
8. Fold each disc in half, creating a half-moon. Press the edges together and crimp finely with the tines of a fork.

- [ ] 1/4 cup green olives with pimentos, roughly chopped
- [ ] 2 Tbsp chopped fresh cilantro
- [ ] Salt, to taste

EMPANADAS

- [ ] 12 empanada dough discs (thawed, if frozen)
- [ ] Vegetable or canola oil for frying

9. **Fry the empanadas:** Heat about 2 inches of oil in a heavy-bottomed pot or deep skillet to 350°F.
10. Working in small batches, fry filled empanadas until crisp and golden brown, about 2 to 3 minutes on each side.
11. Transfer fried empanadas to a wire rack or paper towel-lined tray. Let rest briefly and serve warm.

## The story

This week, we're sharing a recipe for Puerto Rican-style beef empanadas from Chef Raul Thomas.

You may have encountered his empanadas at Theater in the Square. Thomas owns the theater and sells the empanadas as a concession.

"Empanadas take me back to my Puerto Rican roots. Growing up, food was always about bringing people together. You could have empanadas at a family gathering, a celebration, or simply sitting around the kitchen table," Thomas said.

Thomas recommends buying as many local ingredients as possible, especially the beef and produce. And you can find the aromatics for this recipe and empanada dough discs at most international supermarkets around metro Atlanta.

Thomas said sofrito is at the heart of his recipe. "You can buy prepared sofrito, but if you have the time, make it fresh. Fresh sofrito gives the filling another level of flavor," he said.

There are two keys to making good empanadas: don't overfill them and keep the oil at 350°F. Too much filling will cause the empanadas to open while frying, and an improper oil temperature will result in greasy or undercooked dough.

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