

FOOD//COOKING AND RECIPES

These are the Top 5 frozen enchiladas available at San Antonio-area grocery stores.

Paul Stephen, Staff writer

Oct. 18, 2023 Updated: Oct. 18, 2023 11:55 a.m.



In San Antonio, nothing warms hearts and bellies quite like an enchilada platter. Be it scratch-made with love by mom, quickly scooped from a steam pan by a harried lunch lady in the school cafeteria or delivered to the table (hot plate!) at your favorite restaurant, those bundles of cheese, sauce and tortillas provide the sustenance that keeps this city running.

And sometimes, running is all we can do. With all of us working busy schedules, juggling a heavy class load or simply frazzled by the chaos of our collective pandemic experiences, there isn't always time to cook or head out for a nosh.

Enter the frozen enchilada.

No, they'll never be as good as the real thing. But in a pinch, these convenience meals can provide at least some of the comfort of your favorite combo plate.

This week, we sampled as many varieties of frozen enchiladas as we could find in San Antonio-area grocery stores. When possible, we opted for full meals including sides. Often that was a scoop of rice and beans. Some brands mixed it all together in an enchilada bowl. Others presented it as an amalgam of ingredients with a tortilla and sauce plopped on top.

THE WHOLE ENCHILADA: Who makes the best cheese enchiladas in San Antonio? It depends on which cheese, sauce you like.



And honestly, most of them were pretty wretched.

One variety made by the brand Realgood Foods Co. presented as a high-protein, low-carb monstrosity featuring goopy cheese wrapped in what the nutrition label called a Chicken Tortilla, which had the texture and flavor of budget bologna. The so-called "cauliflower tortillas" in the Chicken Enchilada Bake from Cali' flour Foods disintegrated into a watery puddle of bland, baby-food mush after heating. And let's not even get started on the sins against the tortilla gods committed by celebrity chef Guy Fieri in his Flavortown Cheesy Chicken Enchilada Bowl.

But not all was woe. Among the 13 brands sampled, enough had at least a few redeeming qualities to earn a spot in our freezer. Well, in one case, the refrigerator, but still. If you find yourself in a hurry and nothing but an enchilada will keep you properly fueled, consider trying any of our Top 5.



5. Life Cuisine Chicken Enchilada Bowl

This brand focuses on relatively wholesome convenience meals, and its Chicken Enchilada Bowl was no exception. It had a sloppy presentation, with meat and veggies tossed in a bowl and a tortilla casually draped on top. But the flavors and aromas were there.

Above all else, the enchilada sauce is what made this option stand out. It had a well-seasoned nose of complex spices that married nicely with plump and tender bits of chicken, black beans and diced poblano chiles. The tortilla managed to retain more texture than most of the competitors, and Life Cuisine successfully restrained themselves from piling on too much cheese. If your body is craving 21 grams of protein in a hurry, this is a solid option.



4. Night Hawk Fiesta Cheese Enchiladas Frozen Meal

This label takes all the nostalgia points. If you've ever had an enchilada plate in a school, hospital or other institutional setting in San Antonio, this is exactly what you'd expect to see: a pair of cheesy enchiladas, classic red gravy, Mexican rice and refried beans. And frankly, Night Hawk pulled it off pretty well.

The sauce was a little on the sweet side, but had all the expected flavors. The tortillas held up well when heated, and the ample quantity of cheese stayed smooth and creamy without breaking into an oil slick. The Mexican rice lost some of its toothsome texture in the reheating process, but the refried beans made up for that with a silky texture and simple, familiar flavor.



3. Trader Joe's Chicken Enchiladas Verde

OK, these technically came from the refrigerated section, but the package we threw in the oven was almost ice-cold and had some telltale signs of possible recent thawing in the withered green onions on top. Qualifiers aside, Trader Joe's has whipped up a respectable batch of green enchiladas here with good textures and flavors throughout.

The two types of cheese — Monterey Jack and Cotija — blended well to provide equal parts gooey stretch and sharp bite. The tortillas, when heated following instructions for the oven, developed satisfying crispy edges. The salsa verde slathered on top contained too much sugar, but the twang of tomatillo and roasted chiles gave it a pleasing acidity and mild zip of heat.



2. Saffron Road Enchiladas Al Chipotle

It's all about the cheese with this vegetarian option. Saffron Road used Oaxaca cheese instead of the usual cheddar, which had a superior chew, stretchiness and flavor when compared to most of the other enchilada options. The smoky chipotle sauce was the spiciest sampled, and clearly indicated on the box with a cute little three-chile heat index rating. The tortillas retained some chew even after a long dance in the microwave.

The plain white rice side in this meal would have benefited from some seasoning, but the black beans and roasted corn compensated for that with good texture and flavor. For a vegetarian option, these enchiladas packed in plenty of protein at a respectable 16 grams per serving.



1. Amy's Cheese Enchilada Meal

At the end of the day, an enchilada isn't much without a decent tortilla. And Amy's scored big with slightly chubby discs of masa that withstood an industrial deep-freeze, long haul in a delivery truck and 45 minutes of sauna time under aluminum foil in the oven. They came out of that ordeal with a clean taste of nixtamalized corn and the most satisfying texture of all the enchiladas in this shootout.

While an extra scoop of the peppery red enchilada sauce would have been welcome on top, what was there had a balanced flavor and aroma. The sweet corn side dish didn't fare as well as the tortillas, developing a limp and rubbery chew. The black beans were mixed with tangy tomatoes and spices, and when stirred together with the corn, had the qualities of a Southwestern succotash. If you want an organic, gluten-free frozen dinner that also happens to taste good, Amy's is the brand to beat.

Written By

[Paul Stephen](#)

Paul Stephen moved to San Antonio from North Carolina in 2017 to join the Express-News Taste team. In that time, he's cooked through about 1,000 recipes, noshed at more than 200 restaurants and seriously considered getting a map of the city's grocery stores tattooed on his arm for easy reference. He cannot be trusted around your cookbook collection. Email Paul at pstephen@express-news.net.