

Spicy Braised Short Ribs with Garlic & Lemon

Serves 8-10

I feel like many people are always in search of a steady, reliable short-rib recipe: not too basic or boring but not so loud it couldn't happily mingle with anything else on the table. Something satisfying, with a foolproof technique that yields perfectly tender, shreddable, fall-off-the-bone meat in a pool of well-seasoned sauce (which I'm tempted to describe as "beefy"), without being too heavy. Short ribs that can be made with ingredients you've already got on hand, cooked ahead of time, reheated with ease.

These are those short ribs, the answer to "What is your favorite basic-but-delicious short rib recipe?" There's no tomato paste or finely chopped vegetables, no bottle of Barolo—just a pot of gorgeous short ribs bathed in a sauce that's equal parts tangy and salty, sweet and savory. They are simultaneously so complex and so beautifully basic, you might wonder whether they are the platonic ideal of a braised short rib. (I think they are.)

Ingredients

5 pounds bone-in short ribs, at least 1½ inches thick, cut into single-bone portions (or 3½–4 pounds boneless, at least 1½ inches thick)

Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

4 tablespoons neutral oil, such as grapeseed or canola

4 lemons, halved

2 large yellow onions, unpeeled, quartered

2 garlic heads, unpeeled, halved crosswise, plus 4 cloves, finely chopped

2 teaspoons crushed red pepper flakes or 1–2 tablespoons

Calabrian chile paste, plus more

2 tablespoons honey

½ cup sherry vinegar, apple cider vinegar, or white wine vinegar

½ cup soy sauce or tamari

4 thyme sprigs

1 cup parsley and/or cilantro, tender leaves and stems, finely chopped

1 cup finely chopped chives (from about 1 bunch)

Flaky sea salt

Preparation

1. Season the short ribs with salt and pepper at least 1 hour (at room temperature) and as much as 48 hours (covered and refrigerated) in advance.
2. Preheat the oven to 300°F.
3. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Working in batches, sear as many short ribs as will comfortably fit in the pot until deeply golden brown on both large flat sides, 4–6 minutes per side. Transfer the browned short ribs to a large plate or cutting board and drain all but about 2 tablespoons fat from the pot; repeat with the remaining short ribs. Once you've seared all the short ribs, remove and discard all the fat from the pot and carefully wipe it out. (There's no need to wash the pot; just get rid of any scorched bits.)
4. In the same pot over medium-high heat, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons oil and add 2 of the lemons, the onions, and halved heads of garlic. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the lemons, onions, and garlic get a bit of color, 5–7 minutes. Add the red pepper flakes or chile paste and cook for a minute or two. Add the honey and cook, stirring, until it starts to bubble furiously and turn a few shades darker, 2–3 minutes. (Caramelizing the honey a bit gives you a more “mature” flavor rather than just “sweet,” which will do the braising liquid many favors.)
5. Add the vinegar, soy sauce, thyme, and 4 cups water (careful, it'll bubble considerably). Using a wooden spoon or spatula, scrape up the bits on the bottom of the pot and bring to a strong simmer. Season with salt and pepper and add the short ribs back in, bone-side up (you want the meat to be as submerged in the liquid as possible). Cover the pot and place it in the oven. Do not look at it or remove the lid for 3 hours. (Nothing bad will happen, promise.)
6. After 3 hours, check the short ribs. They should be extremely tender and nearly falling apart, almost having the jiggly texture of a baked custard or Jell-O. (If not, continue roasting another 20–30 minutes.) Remove from the oven.
7. At this stage—and this is optional!—you can remove the lid and, using a spoon, carefully skim off as much of the top layer of fat as possible (the short ribs might seem a little greasy without skimming, but worse things have happened). Increase the oven temperature to 425°F and return the pot to the oven, uncovered, to let the short ribs brown on top and thicken the braising liquid a bit, another 35–45 minutes.
8. Meanwhile, combine the parsley and chives in a small bowl and season with flaky salt; set aside.

9. Once the short ribs are nicely browned, the sauce is slightly reduced, and you're ready to serve, remove the short ribs from the oven. Add the chopped garlic to the pot and squeeze the remaining lemons over, letting the raw garlic and fresh lemon juice season the braising liquid. Serve straight from the pot or transfer the ribs to a shallow bowl or plate with high sides, spooning the braising liquid over. Sprinkle with the herb mixture before serving.

DO AHEAD: You can remove the short ribs from the oven after step 6, let them cool at room temperature, and place them in the fridge overnight. When ready to serve, remove them from the fridge and, using a spoon, scrape off the solidified fat on the top layer. Return the short ribs, covered, to a 325°F oven until totally warmed through, 30–40 minutes. Remove the lid, increase the temperature to 425°F, and continue to cook, uncovered, to let the short ribs brown a bit on top and reduce the braising liquid, another 35–45 minutes.

EAT WITH: A bowl of delightfully creamy polenta, a pile of lemony potatoes (page 98), or crusty bread for sopping. If you're lucky enough to have leftovers, shred them and fold them into tomato sauce for a gorgeous little ragu.