

Gorgeous Chili (the long way)

Serves 6—8

Chili means many different things depending on where you are. At its most basic, you can expect meat cooked until tender, nearly falling apart, in some sort of spiced, likely tomato-y sauce. This version is heavy on the tomato, is well spiced but will not necessarily light your mouth on fire, uses hunks of meat (chuck, sirloin, brisket, etc.) to slow braise, and beans cooked from dried (yes—there are beans in this recipe) to soak up all that beefy, spiced, tomato-y liquid. As advertised, it takes a long time to cook (should simmer at least three hours). Is it worth it? I really think it is. The way the liquid thickens from the long braise of the beef and starches released from the beans, not to mention how much better the beans taste when cooked from dried, it really is gorgeous. Great if you have the time, patience or a real fondness for things you can “make ahead.” That said, there is always “the short way,” a recipe you can find on my site.

Ingredients

3–4 pounds chuck roast, sirloin or brisket, cut into 1 ½ - 2” pieces

Kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons neutral or olive oil

2 medium yellow onions (about 1 pound), finely chopped

8–10 cloves garlic, finely chopped or thinly sliced

¾ cup tomato paste (from one 6 oz. can)

1 ½ tablespoons cumin seed or 2 teaspoons ground cumin

2 teaspoons smoked or sweet paprika

1 ½ teaspoons hot paprika (or smoked or sweet, plus more crushed red pepper flakes)

1 ½ teaspoons crushed red pepper flakes, plus more

2 12-ounce cans beer (something light, like a lager)*

1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes (or whole tomatoes, well crushed)

1 pound dried beans (a white bean, black bean or pinto bean are all good choices—can also use a mix)

Toppings, you must (thinly sliced scallion, fresh or pickled red onion, shredded cheddar cheese, full-fat sour cream, chopped cilantro, thinly sliced fresh or pickled jalapeños, crumbled Fritos, lime wedges, etc).

***If not using beer, use water**

Instructions

1. Season the beef with salt and pepper (you can do this as far as 24 hours in advance, if you want). Heat oil in a large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat. Add the beef in one layer (don't worry too much about crowding the pan), and cook until deeply browned on all sides, turning the pieces as they brown, 15-18 minutes total. Transfer the beef to a large plate or bowl, leaving the fat behind; set aside (I do not drain the fat here, but you can).
2. Add onions and garlic to the pot, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally until they're softened and translucent, 3–5 minutes. Add tomato paste and cook until it turns brick red, caramelizing a bit on the bottom of the pot, 2–3 minutes. Add cumin, paprika and chili flake and cook, stirring constantly for a minute or so to toast and bloom the spices.
3. Add beer, using a wooden spoon to scrape up the caramelized bits at the bottom of the pot, followed by crushed tomatoes, beans, 6 cups of water, and the beef plus any juices. Season with salt and pepper and bring to a strong simmer.
4. Reduce the heat to medium-low (everything should be at a gentle simmer) and partially cover the pot about 90% of the way (use a sheet pan if you don't have a lid). Cook, checking and stirring only occasionally, until the pot has thickened into a beautiful chili and the beef and beans are completely tender, nearly falling apart, 3–3 ½ hours.
5. Remove from heat, and, using a wooden spoon, encourage the hunks of beef to break down into smaller shreddy bits by gently pressing them against the side of the pot—they should fall apart easily with no resistance. Give it a good stir so the meat is evenly distributed and season again once more with salt, pepper and maybe crushed red pepper flakes if you like.

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6. To serve, set out all the toppings you want. Use every small bowl and precious tiny plate to display your shredded cheese and bowls of sour cream. Your scallions and pickled things. Do not top anyone's bowl for them, but encourage them to go wild. There are always more toppings where those came from, you say.

DO AHEAD: Like all great soups and stews, this chili gets better with age. It can be made 5 days ahead, stored in the fridge, or frozen 3 months ahead, stored in the freezer..