

ULTIMATE BEEF CHILI

SERVES 6 TO 8

A 4-pound chuck-eye roast, well trimmed of fat, can be substituted for the steak. Because much of the chili flavor is held in the fat of this dish, refrain from skimming fat from the surface. Dried New Mexican, mulato, or guajillo chiles make a good substitute for the anchos; each dried arbol may be replaced with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cayenne. If you prefer not to work with any whole dried chiles, the anchos and arbols can be replaced with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of commercial chili powder and $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of cayenne pepper, though the texture of the chili will be slightly compromised. Good choices for condiments include diced avocado, finely chopped red onion, chopped cilantro, lime wedges, sour cream, and shredded Monterey Jack or cheddar cheese.

- 8 ounces (1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups) dried pinto beans, picked over and rinsed
- Salt
- 6 dried ancho chiles, stemmed, seeded, and torn into 1-inch pieces
- 2-4 dried arbol chiles, stemmed, seeded, and split into 2 pieces
- 3 tablespoons cornmeal
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons cocoa
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 onions, cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch pieces
- 3 small jalapeño chiles, stemmed, seeded, and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 2 teaspoons molasses
- 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds blade steak, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick, trimmed and cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch pieces
- 1 (12-ounce) bottle mild lager, such as Budweiser

1. Combine 4 quarts water, beans, and 3 tablespoons salt in Dutch oven and bring to boil over high heat. Remove pot from heat, cover, and let stand for 1 hour. Drain and rinse well.

2. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Place anchos in 12-inch skillet set over medium-high heat; toast, stirring frequently, until flesh is fragrant, 4 to 6 minutes, reducing heat if chiles begin to smoke. Transfer to food processor and let cool. Do not wash out skillet.

3. Add arbols, cornmeal, oregano, cumin, cocoa, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt to food processor with toasted anchos; process until finely ground, about 2 minutes. With processor running, slowly add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup broth until smooth paste forms, about 45 seconds, scraping down bowl as necessary. Transfer paste to small bowl. Place onions in now-empty processor and pulse until roughly chopped, about 4 pulses. Add jalapeños and pulse until consistency of chunky salsa, about 4 pulses, scraping down bowl as necessary.

4. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onion mixture and cook, stirring occasionally, until moisture has evaporated and vegetables are softened, 7 to 9 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add chile paste, tomatoes, and molasses; stir until chile paste is thoroughly combined. Add remaining 2 cups broth and drained beans; bring to boil, then reduce heat to simmer.

5. Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Pat beef dry with paper towels and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon salt. Add half of beef and cook until browned on all sides, about 10 minutes. Transfer meat to Dutch oven. Add half of beef to skillet, scraping up browned bits from bottom of pan, and bring to simmer. Transfer beef to Dutch oven. Repeat with remaining 1 tablespoon oil, remaining steak, and remaining beef. Stir to combine and return mixture to simmer.

6. Cover pot and transfer to oven. Cook until meat and beans are fully tender, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 hours. Let chili stand, uncovered, for 10 minutes. Stir well, season with salt to taste, and serve. (Chili can be refrigerated for up to 3 days.)

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS

Our goal in creating an "ultimate" beef chili was to determine which of the "secret ingredients" recommended by chili experts around the world were spot-on—and which were expendable. We discarded ground beef for blade steaks, used a combination of dried and fresh chiles, and brined our beans for legumes that stayed creamy for the duration of cooking.

CHOOSE YOUR MEAT After deciding to use diced—not ground—beef, we began by testing six different cuts of beef for our chili: flap meat, brisket, chuck-eye roast, skirt steak, blade steak, and short ribs. Though the short ribs were extremely tender, some tasters felt that they tasted too much like pot roast. The brisket was wonderfully beefy but lean and a bit tough. The clear winner was blade steak, favored for its tenderness and rich flavor. Chuck-eye roast is a good second option.

BRINE THE BEANS It's important to brine your beans in order to get them to cook quickly, with a lasting tender and creamy texture (see concept 28). We use a quick brine here because beans are not the central focus and, after all, the rest of the recipe takes a fair amount of work. The timing works out perfectly, though: By the time the beans are done brining (one hour), the rest of the work is done.

SEED, TOAST, AND PUREE For complex chile flavor, we trade in the commercial chili powder in favor of ground dried ancho and arbol chiles; for a grassy heat, we add fresh jalapeños. We toast the anchos to develop their flavor and seed all our chiles to control the heat. We include oregano, cumin, cocoa, salt, and cornmeal (which thickens the chili).

ADD FLAVOR AND TEXTURE Beer and chicken broth outperformed red wine, coffee, and beef broth as the liquid component. To balance the sweetness of our pot, light molasses beat out other offbeat ingredients (including prunes and Coca-Cola). For the right level of thickness, flour and peanut butter didn't perform as promised; instead, a small amount of ordinary cornmeal sealed the deal, providing just the right consistency in our ultimate beef chili.

STIR-FRIED THAI BEEF WITH CHILES AND SHALLOTS

SERVES 4

If you cannot find blade steaks, use flank steak. Because flank steak requires less trimming, you will need only about 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds. To prepare the flank steak, first cut the steak with the grain into 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-wide strips, then cut the strips against the grain into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick slices. To make slicing the steak easier, freeze it for 15 minutes. White pepper lends this stir-fry a unique flavor; black pepper is not a good substitute. Serve with steamed jasmine rice.

BEEF STIR-FRY

- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- 1 teaspoon packed light brown sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon ground coriander
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground white pepper
- 2 pounds blade steak, trimmed and cut crosswise into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick strips

SAUCE AND GARNISH

- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons water