

Braised Short Ribs: Learn to love a long, slow braise to make tough meat awesome

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

How do you transform a tough, less expensive cut of meat into something tender and delicious? You braise it!

Braising is a wonderful and basic cooking technique that uses a slow, wet heat in a covered pot. It's great for cuts such as chuck, flank, brisket, rump and round. In fact, cooked properly, these cuts can be more delicious than more tender cuts. I'm using short ribs in this recipe, but the method can be used to wonderful effect on any other tough cut of meat.

Short ribs can be butchered three ways: English, flanken or boneless. In English style, the ribs are cut parallel to the bone, with one bone per cut. In flanken style — which originated with the Jews of Eastern Europe — the ribs are cut across the bone. With English style, you get relatively uniform chunks of beef. With flanken style, you get a sauce with more body and flavor because the cut bones enrich it.

You also can get boneless, which we used in this recipe. They cook a little faster than ribs with bones, and you get more meat for your money (you're not paying for the bone weight).

We start by browning the ribs in a pan. During browning, the meat will give off juices that form tasty little brown bits on the bottom of the pan. Reconstituted with wine once the meat has finished browning, these bits end up enriching the sauce. I also brown the vegetables, which amps up their natural sweetness.

This recipe requires two

bottles of beer, though you also could use a full bottle of red wine. But whether beer or wine, please choose bottles for which you feel some real affection. It doesn't have to be expensive, but it also shouldn't be the dollar special. You won't end up tasting the beer or wine, but you will be astonished by and grateful for the soulful taste of the ribs, which will boast an acidity and depth they'd otherwise lack.

Combine the browned meat, vegetables, beer and chicken broth in a Dutch oven, covered tightly. I place a piece of kitchen parchment right on top of the meat to make sure no liquid escapes. Then it is cooked low and slow. You'll know you're done when the tip of a knife slides into the meat with no resistance. If you became antsy and try to speed up the process by boiling the meat, you'll end up with hockey pucks for dinner.

Assuming you have the time, try to prepare this dish a day ahead, then allow it to cool off and chill overnight. It also freezes beautifully. Not only will the ribs taste better the next day, but by then the fat will have solidified at the top of the pan, allowing you to scoop it off with ease. Then you can warm up the contents and proceed with the recipe.

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BEER BRAISED BEEF SHORT RIBS

If you use bone-in short ribs, check the meat after 3 hours of braising. They likely will need an extra hour of braising.

Start to finish: 4 hours (1 hour active)

Servings: 8

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
5 pounds boneless beef short ribs
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
2 cups thinly sliced yellow onions
2 medium carrots, coarsely chopped
1 1/2 tablespoons minced garlic
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 sprig fresh thyme (or 1 teaspoon dried thyme)
1 bay leaf
Two 12-ounce bottles beer
4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
1 1/2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1/2 cup water
2 teaspoons lemon juice

Directions:

Heat the oven to 325 F.

In a large Dutch oven over medium-high, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil. Use paper towels to pat the ribs dry, then season them on all sides with salt and pepper. Reduce the heat to medium, add a quarter of the ribs to the pot and brown on all sides, about 10 minutes. Transfer them to a large platter or bowl. Repeat with the remaining oil and short ribs, transferring them to the platter or bowl when finished.

Return the pot to the heat and add the onions and the carrots. Cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, 10 to 15 minutes.

Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add the tomato paste, thyme and bay leaf, then saute for 2 minutes. Transfer the vegetable mixture to the bowl with the ribs. Return the pot to the heat and add the beer. Bring to a boil and simmer until the beer is reduced by about three-quarters.

When the beer is reduced, add the chicken broth and bring to a boil. Return the meat and vegetables to the pot and cover with a piece of kitchen parchment. Put the lid on the pot and set in the oven on the lower shelf and cook until the meat is very tender, 4 to 5 hours.

Use tongs to transfer the ribs to a platter. Let them stand until cool enough to be handled.

Meanwhile, strain liquid in the pan into a bowl. Discard the solids and return the liquid to the pot. Let



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stand for several minutes, then skim off any fat that floats to the surface (or use a fat separator).

In a small bowl, whisk together the flour and water. Set the pot over medium-high heat and bring the cooking liquid to a boil. Add half of the flour mixture in a steady stream, whisking. Bring the sauce to a boil, check the consistency and if you would like it thicker, whisk in more of the flour-water mixture. Simmer for 8 minutes. Whisk in the mustard and lemon juice, then season with salt and pepper.

Add the meat to the pot along with any juices from the platter. Cook gently, just until heated through. To serve, arrange some rib meat on each plate and spoon some of the sauce over each portion.

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Nutrition information per serving: 620 calories; 290 calories from fat (47 percent of total calories); 32 g fat (13 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 170 mg cholesterol; 15 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 57 g protein; 820 mg sodium.