

FOOD FEATURE



# CHILI BOWL

## DIVA-STYLE CHILI

- 3 pounds beef stew meat, cut into cubes, or 1-1/2 pounds ground beef
- 1 tablespoon canola or vegetable oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tablespoons ground cumin
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground black pepper
- 1/2 to 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1/2 to 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 3 cans (16-ounces each) kidney or pinto beans, rinsed and drained; or 1 cup of finely crushed tortilla
- 3 cans (15-ounces each) tomato sauce
- 1 can (14-1/2-ounces) diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 cup water
- 1 can (6-ounces) tomato paste
- 3/4 cup chunky salsa: hot, medium or mild
- 1 1/2 tablespoons brown sugar
- Shredded Cheddar cheese, minced fresh cilantro, and sour cream, optional

1. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Brown the beef stew meat in the oil in batches, being careful not to overcrowd the pan, so that the meat will brown instead of steaming. (If you're using ground meat, add it to the oil and break it apart using a spoon or potato masher).
2. Add onion, garlic, cumin, chili powder, salt, pepper, red pepper flakes and cayenne pepper. Cook 2 to 3 minutes longer. Transfer the meat to a 6-quart slow cooker to finish cooking.
3. Place 1 can's worth of rinsed and drained beans in a medium bowl. Mash them with a spoon or potato masher. (The mashed beans will thicken the chili.) If you aren't using beans, thicken with 1 cup of finely crushed tortilla chips.
4. Stir in mashed and whole beans or crushed chips, tomato sauce, tomatoes, water, tomato paste, salsa and brown sugar. Cover and cook on low for 6 to 8 hours or until the stew meat is tender. Garnish each serving with cheese, cilantro and a tablespoon of sour cream, if desired. Makes 12 (1-1/3 cup) servings.

KITCHEN DIVA PHOTO

Chili, and its history, is complex. The recipe is simply a stew of water, chili peppers, herbs and, most often, meat, with origins dating back hundreds of years. In modern times, the debate has centered on whether chili is Mexican or American.

BY ANGELA SHELF MEDEARIS AND GINA HARLOW  
THE KITCHEN DIVA

*"The difference today between chili con carne and its Mexican sister is that we, being Americans, have spun our chili in countless directions."*

It's cold outside, which means it's the perfect time for chili. You would have to look hard to find someone who doesn't love a hot, steaming bowl of chili, especially this time of year. But the fellowship ends when it comes to the details.

Many people pride themselves on their chili recipes. Their special mixture of spices, meat and/or beans (we'll get to that!) is proprietary. There are strong preferences, allegiances that rival those of collegiate and pro sports teams, and depending on where you live, even national heritage. It's not simply geography that dictates what kind of chili we prefer, sometimes whole households are divided over the issue. How we like our chili — hot or mild, red meat or white, beans or no beans — is personal.

Even more debatable than our preferences is what exactly is chili, and where did it come from. Chili, and its history, is complex. The recipe is simply a stew of water, chili peppers, herbs and, most often, meat, with origins dating back hundreds of

years. In modern times, the debate has centered on whether chili is Mexican or American.

Rick Bayless, a chef who is an expert in Mexican cuisine and who has traveled extensively throughout Mexico, says it's simply a matter of reversing the name. In Mexico, they make a stew of chilies and meat. They refer to it as carne con chili, either chili Colorado or chili verde. They also have a dish called carne guisada, which has many of the same flavorings as our chili con carne. In Mexico, it's carne con chili, and in America, its chili con carne, or just chili. Both preparations are closely related, but the chili con carne that most of us have come to love, and for which there are many recipes, seems to date back to hungry Texas cowboys inventing a trail-hearty stew of dried beef and chili peppers.

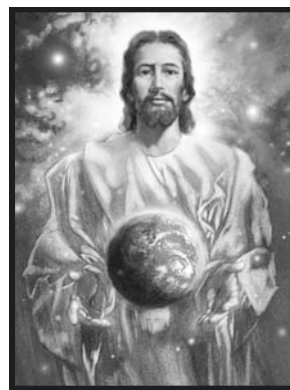
The difference today

between chili con carne and its Mexican sister is that we, being Americans, have spun our chili in countless directions. A big moment in chili history came when beans and tomatoes were added. Since then, the discussion has become fiery. With or without? What will it be?

The answer is obvious. With the idea of culinary liberty for all, we should be accepting of those who want to put beans, tomatoes, seitan, tofu or a long list of other continually evolving

ingredients in their chili. In the interest of culinary harmony, my recipe for Slow Cooker Diva-Style Chili can be customized to suit your tastes. Hot or mild, red, green or white, the wonderful thing about chilies is that, as they say, it's all good!

— Angela Shelf Medearis is an award-winning children's author, culinary historian and author of seven cookbooks. Her new cookbook is "The Kitchen Diva's Diabetic Cookbook." Her website is [www.divapro.com](http://www.divapro.com). To see how-to videos, recipes and much, much more, like Angela Shelf Medearis, The Kitchen Diva! on Facebook. Read Gina Harlow's blog about food and gardening at [www.peachesandprosciutto.com](http://www.peachesandprosciutto.com). Recipes may not be reprinted without permission from Angela Shelf Medearis



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