

# French Braised Beef •

## Ingredients

Beef chuck shoulder .....	4–5 lbs	Black peppercorns .....	1 tsp.
Burgundy wine .....	2 cups	French dip seasoning mix .....	2 Tbsp.
Beef stock .....	2 cups	Kosher salt .....	1½ tsp.
Onions, large .....	2	Black pepper .....	½ tsp.
Celery stalks .....	3	Vegetable oil .....	2 Tbsp.
Garlic cloves .....	4	Pearl onions, peeled .....	2 cups
Tomato paste .....	3 Tbsp.	Cremini mushrooms .....	2 cups
Fresh thyme .....	4–5 sprigs	Fresh parsley, chopped .....	2 Tbsp.
Dried bay leaves .....	2		

## Searing and Aromatics

Pat dry **beef chuck** with paper towels — Rough chop **onions** and **celery** into large chunks — Mince **garlic** — Prepare **bouquet garni**: bundle **fresh thyme**, **bay leaves**, and **peppercorns** in a disposable teabag — Preheat oven to 275°F

1. Season **beef chuck** generously on all sides with **kosher salt** and **black pepper**.
2. In a Dutch oven, heat **vegetable oil** over medium-high heat until shimmering. Working carefully to avoid splatter, sear the **beef** on all sides until deeply browned, approximately 3–4 minutes per side. The goal is a rich mahogany crust. Remove **beef** and set aside.
3. In the same pot, reduce heat to medium. Add rough-chopped **onions** and **celery**, stirring occasionally until they begin to soften and caramelize slightly, about 5–7 minutes. Add minced **garlic** and cook for 1 minute until fragrant.
4. Add **tomato paste** and stir constantly for 1–2 minutes, allowing it to caramelize slightly and deepen in color. This develops savory complexity.
5. Deglaze the pot with **Burgundy wine**, scraping up all browned fond from the bottom with a wooden spoon. Simmer for 2–3 minutes to allow alcohol to burn off slightly.
6. Return seared **beef** to the pot. Add **beef stock** and **French dip seasoning mix**. The liquid should come approximately one-third up the sides of the meat. Add **bouquet garni**.

## The Braise

1. Bring braising liquid to a bare simmer on the stovetop, approximately *2–3 minutes*.
2. Cover with the lid and transfer to the preheated  $275^{\circ}\text{F}$  oven. Braise for *3 hours*, then check the meat for tenderness with a fork. It should yield easily but still hold its shape.
3. After *3 hours*, add peeled **pearl onions** and **cremini mushrooms** directly to the braising liquid, nestling them among the aromatics and meat. Return to oven, covered, for an additional *1.5–2 hours* until **beef** is completely fork-tender and vegetables are yielding but not dissolved.
4. Remove from oven. Using tongs or a slotted spoon, carefully transfer the **beef** to a warm platter, cradling it gently to prevent breaking apart. Distribute **pearl onions** and **mushrooms** around the meat.

## Sauce and Service

1. Place the Dutch oven on the stovetop over medium heat. Allow the braising liquid to come to a gentle simmer. Using a skimming ladle, carefully skim the surface fat and impurities, working methodically until the surface is relatively clear. This typically requires *3–5 minutes* of gentle skimming.
2. The sauce should have reduced naturally to approximately one-third of its original volume, yielding a silky, glossy consistency that coats the back of a spoon. If it appears too thin, continue simmering gently until it reaches desired body, approximately *2–3 minutes* more. Taste and adjust seasoning with additional **salt** and **pepper** as needed.
3. Remove and discard **bouquet garni**.
4. Pour sauce over **beef**, **pearl onions**, and **mushrooms**. Garnish generously with fresh **parsley**. Serve immediately with mashed potatoes and supplemental beef stock gravy on the side.

## Equipment Required

- 5–6 quart enameled Dutch oven with self-basting lid
- Large skillet or sauté pan for searing (optional; can use Dutch oven)
- Wooden spoon for stirring and scraping fond
- Tongs or slotted spoon for handling meat
- Skimming ladle with perforations
- Sharp knife and cutting board
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Paper towels for patting dry
- Disposable cotton teabags (or cheese-cloth bundle)
- Warm platter for resting meat
- Instant-read thermometer (optional but helpful)

## Mise en Place

- Ensure **beef chuck** is at room temperature before searing—remove from refrigerator 30–45 minutes prior
- Peel **pearl onions** and clean **mushrooms** well in advance; store in separate containers
- Rough chop **onions** and **celery** into large, uniform chunks
- Mince **garlic** fresh just before use
- Measure all liquids and seasonings
- Assemble **bouquet garni** in teabag
- Measure **French dip seasoning mix**

## Ingredient Tips

- Select a quality Burgundy wine—Pinot Noir or a rustic Côtes du Bourgogne works well. Avoid heavily oaked wines; the braise will concentrate and intensify the flavors
- Chuck shoulder with good marbling ensures richness and tenderness; ask your butcher for a single large roast rather than portioned pieces

- Beef stock should be homemade or high-quality store-bought; weak stock will result in thin, unsatisfying sauce
- French dip seasoning mix varies by brand; look for onion-forward blends without excessive salt
- Pearl onions vary in size; uniformity helps with even cooking
- Cremini mushrooms maintain better texture than button mushrooms; avoid portobello, which can become mushy
- Fresh thyme is essential for the bouquet garni; dried thyme becomes powdery and unpleasant

## Preparation Tips

- Pat the **beef** thoroughly dry before searing; moisture prevents proper browning
- Develop a deep mahogany crust during searing—this Maillard reaction creates the foundation of flavor
- Do not skip the fond-scraping step; those browned bits contain concentrated savory compounds
- Allow **tomato paste** to caramelize briefly before deglazing; this concentrates and deepens its umami impact
- The braising liquid should come only one-third up the meat, not submerge it; this creates a humid oven environment without excessive stewing
- Do not stir the braise during cooking; resist the urge to check frequently. The self-basting lid does the work
- Add **pearl onions** and **mushrooms** late to preserve their distinct texture and flavor
- Skim fat methodically and gently; aggressive skimming can cloud the sauce
- Taste the sauce before service; the braising aromatics may have rendered differently than expected, requiring seasoning adjustment

## Make Ahead & Storage

- The **beef** can be seared and the braise begun up to *4 hours* ahead; add **pearl onions** and **mushrooms** only when you plan to finish
- Prepare all vegetables and seasonings the morning of service
- Leftover braise keeps refrigerated for up to *4 days*; the flavors actually deepen overnight
- To reheat: gently warm in a *325°*F oven, covered, for *20–30 minutes* until heated through. Add a splash of beef stock if sauce has reduced too much during storage
- The braise does not freeze well due to the delicate texture of the meat and the nature of the sauce emulsion

## Serving Suggestions

- Serve over creamy mashed potatoes, allowing them to absorb the silky sauce
- Accompany with supplemental beef stock gravy on the side for guests who prefer additional sauce
- A simple green salad with vinaigrette provides brightness and cuts through the richness
- Crusty bread for soaking up every drop of sauce is essential
- The same Burgundy wine used in the braise pairs beautifully for drinking; continue with it at table
- Garnish generously with fresh **parsley** just before service for color and herbaceous freshness
- Allow guests to rest the platter for *5 minutes* before serving, preserving the meat's internal juices