



Shredded Beef Tacos (Carne Deshebrada)

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 15: Beefing Up Mexican Favorites

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

In order to achieve a moist, tender, and richly flavored beef taco filling, we cooked boneless short ribs slowly and gently in a covered Dutch oven over a sauce base of dark beer, vinegar, and dried ancho chiles. In order to maximize browning during the braise (and skip searing beforehand), we set the meat over thick onion slices to expose more of its exterior to the oven's heat.

Serves 6 to 8

Use a full-bodied lager or ale such as Dos Equis or Sierra Nevada. If you can't find *queso fresco*, substitute feta. If your Dutch oven does not have a tight-fitting lid, cover the pot tightly with a sheet of heavy-duty aluminum foil and then replace the lid. To warm the tortillas, place them on a plate, cover them with a damp dish towel, and microwave them for 60 to 90 seconds. The shredded beef also makes a great filling for empanadas, tamales, and chiles rellenos.

INGREDIENTS

BEEF

- 1 1/2** cups beer
- 1/2** cup cider vinegar
- 2** ounces (4 to 6) dried ancho chiles, stemmed, seeded, and torn into 1-inch pieces
- 2** tablespoons tomato paste
- 6** garlic cloves, lightly crushed and peeled
- 3** bay leaves
- 2** teaspoons ground cumin
- 2** teaspoons dried oregano
- Salt and pepper
- 1/2** teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2** teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1** large onion, sliced into 1/2-inch-thick rounds
- 3** pounds boneless beef short ribs, trimmed and cut into 2-inch cubes

CABBAGE-CARROT SLAW

- 1** cup cider vinegar
- 1/2** cup water
- 1** tablespoon sugar

- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 head green cabbage, cored and sliced thin (6 cups)
- 1 onion, sliced thin
- 1 large carrot, peeled and shredded
- 1 jalapeño chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 18 (6-inch) corn tortillas, warmed
- 4 ounces queso fresco, crumbled (1 cup)
- Lime wedges

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. FOR THE BEEF:** Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Combine beer, vinegar, anchos, tomato paste, garlic, bay leaves, cumin, oregano, 2 teaspoons salt, 1/2 teaspoon pepper, cloves, and cinnamon in Dutch oven. Arrange onion rounds in single layer on bottom of pot. Place beef on top of onion rounds in single layer. Cover and cook until meat is well browned and tender, 2 1/2 to 3 hours.
- 2. FOR THE CABBAGE-CARROT SLAW:** While beef cooks, whisk vinegar, water, sugar, and salt in large bowl until sugar is dissolved. Add cabbage, onion, carrot, jalapeño, and oregano and toss to combine. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 24 hours. Drain slaw and stir in cilantro right before serving.
- 3.** Using slotted spoon, transfer beef to large bowl, cover loosely with aluminum foil, and set aside. Strain liquid through fine-mesh strainer into 2-cup liquid measuring cup (do not wash pot). Discard onion rounds and bay leaves. Transfer remaining solids to blender. Let strained liquid settle for 5 minutes, then skim any fat off surface. Add water as needed to equal 1 cup. Pour liquid in blender with reserved solids and blend until smooth, about 2 minutes. Transfer sauce to now-empty pot.
- 4.** Using two forks, shred beef into bite-size pieces. Bring sauce to simmer over medium heat. Add shredded beef and stir to coat. Season with salt to taste. (Beef can be refrigerated for up to 2 days; gently reheat before serving.)
- 5.** Spoon small amount of beef into each warm tortilla and serve, passing slaw, queso fresco, and lime wedges separately.

TECHNIQUE

GIVING BEEF(INESS) A BOOST

We found that many recipes for the shredded beef taco filling known as *carne deshebrada* produced results that weren't actually all that beefy. To improve meatiness, we used short ribs, one of the most flavorful braising cuts we know, and cut them into 2-inch cubes for faster cooking. We also propped up the cubes on onion rounds so that the exposed portions would brown during the 2-plus hours of cooking—thus avoiding the fuss of searing the meat before cooking.

TO IMPROVE MEATINESS: Sliced onion lifts the short ribs above the braising liquid, which delivers more browning—and more meaty flavor.



TECHNIQUE

FOR MAXIMUM FLAVOR, KEEP THE COOKING LIQUID

Many recipes for *carne deshebrada* call for braising the meat, shredding it, and tossing it in a sauce made separately. Meanwhile, the braising liquid is thrown out. We use a lesser amount of cooking liquid; add dried chiles, tomato paste, garlic, herbs, and warm spices to it; and puree it—and all its meaty flavor—into a sauce. For depth and brightness, we forgo water (or even broth) as the braising liquid in favor of a combination of beer and vinegar.