



Best Ground Beef Chili

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

Our ground beef chili uses 85 percent lean ground beef for richness and flavor. We use only small amounts of pureed whole canned tomatoes and pinto beans to create a thick, rich dish that is best served over white rice and/or with tortilla chips. To keep the meat moist and tender, we treat it with salt and baking soda. Both ingredients help the meat hold on to moisture, so it doesn't shed liquid during cooking. This means that 2 pounds of beef can be browned in just one batch. We also simmer the meat for 90 minutes to fully tenderize it. Finally, our homemade chili powder uses a combination of toasted dried ancho chiles, chipotle chiles in adobo, and paprika, along with a blend of herbs and spices to round it out. We make sure to stir in any fat that collects on the top of the chili before serving since it contains much of the flavor from the fat-soluble spices in the chile powder.

Serves 8 to 10

Diced avocado, sour cream, and shredded Monterey Jack or cheddar cheese are also good options for garnishing. This chili is intensely flavored and should be served with tortilla chips and/or plenty of steamed white rice.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds 85 percent lean ground beef
- 2 tablespoons plus 2 cups water
- Salt and pepper
- 3/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 6 dried ancho chiles, stemmed, seeded, and torn into 1-inch pieces
- 1 ounce tortilla chips, crushed (1/4 cup)
- 2 tablespoons ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon ground coriander
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1–2 teaspoons minced canned chipotle chiles in adobo sauce
- 1 (15-ounce) can pinto beans
- 2 teaspoons sugar

2 ~~tablespoons~~ cider vinegar

Coarsely chopped cilantro

Chopped red onion

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 275 degrees. Toss beef with 2 tablespoons water, 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, and baking soda in bowl until thoroughly combined. Set aside for 20 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, place anchos in Dutch oven set over medium-high heat; toast, stirring frequently, until fragrant, 4 to 6 minutes, reducing heat if anchos begin to smoke. Transfer to food processor and let cool.
3. Add tortilla chips, cumin, paprika, garlic powder, coriander, oregano, thyme, and 2 teaspoons pepper to food processor with anchos and process until finely ground, about 2 minutes. Transfer mixture to bowl. Process tomatoes and their juice in now-empty workbowl until smooth, about 30 seconds.
4. Heat oil in now-empty pot over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, 4 to 6 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add beef and cook, stirring with wooden spoon to break meat up into 1/4-inch pieces, until beef is browned and fond begins to form on pot bottom, 12 to 14 minutes. Add ancho mixture and chipotle; cook, stirring frequently, until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes.
5. Add remaining 2 cups water, beans and their liquid, sugar, and tomato puree. Bring to boil, scraping bottom of pot to loosen any browned bits. Cover, transfer to oven, and cook until meat is tender and chili is slightly thickened, 1 1/2 to 2 hours, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking.
6. Remove chili from oven and let stand, uncovered, for 10 minutes. Stir in any fat that has risen to top of chili, then add vinegar and season with salt to taste. Serve, passing lime wedges, cilantro, and chopped onion separately. (Chili can be made up to 3 days in advance.)

TECHNIQUE

WHEN IT COMES TO COOK TIME, CHUCK IS CHUCK

You might think that just because ground beef is made up of tiny pieces of meat, it doesn't need much time to cook. But ground chuck is exactly that—cut-up pieces of chuck roast—and as such contains the same proteins and collagen that require adequate exposure to moist heat to properly break down. Many chili recipes cook the ground meat for 45 minutes or even less. For optimally tender results, we simmer ours for 1 1/2 to 2 hours—almost as long as we do stew meat.

CUBED VS. GROUND: Both benefit from longer cooking.



TECHNIQUE

BETTER BROWNING THROUGH CHEMISTRY

Browning ground beef is a challenge since it expels juices more rapidly than chunks of meat do, and most of that moisture needs to evaporate before browning can occur. To limit the amount of liquid, the usual solution is to brown in batches. We stick with one batch but toss the meat with baking soda before cooking, which helps lock in moisture. To quantify baking soda's impact, we ran a simple

experiment.

EXPERIMENT: We cooked three batches of ground beef treated with baking soda and compared them with three otherwise identical untreated batches. We calculated the pre- and postcooking moisture level of each batch and compared degrees of browning.

RESULTS: On average, the untreated meat lost about 10 percent more moisture during cooking than the treated meat. That may not sound like much, but it makes a significant difference in how well ground meat browns: The treated batches were deeply browned, whereas the untreated batches didn't brown at all. (If we kept cooking the untreated meat, it would have eventually browned but would have been overdone.)

EXPLANATION: Raising the pH of meat increases its water-holding capacity, meaning that the proteins attract more water and are better able to hold on to it—not just during browning but throughout cooking. Besides keeping the meat from losing water that would make it steam versus brown, a higher pH also speeds up the Maillard reaction, making the treated meat brown even better and more quickly.

UNTREATED: Meat is flooded with liquid and fails to brown.



TREATED WITH BAKING SODA: Meat barely sheds moisture and browns nicely.



TECHNIQUE

KEEP THAT ORANGE SLICK

Because the main flavor compounds in most spices are fat soluble, skimming the bright orange fat from the finished chili will rob it of flavor. For deep, richly spiced complexity, don't remove the fat—stir it back in.