



Vietnamese Beef Pho

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 15: Southeast Asian Specialties

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

To produce Vietnamese beef *pho* broth with the flavor and complexity of the real deal without the fuss, we blanch ground beef in water to make the base for our broth. To the broth, we add fish sauce, ginger, cinnamon, sugar, star anise, cloves, salt, and peppercorns to bring complex spice notes. To serve, we add cooked rice noodles plus wafer-thin slices of easy-to-find strip steak, which cook in the hot broth. We also served the traditional garnishes: bean sprouts, basil sprigs, lime wedges, hoisin, Sriracha, and extra fish sauce.

Serves 4 to 6

Our favorite store-bought beef broth is Rachael Ray Stock-in-a-Box All-Natural Beef Flavored Stock. Use a Dutch oven that holds 6 quarts or more. An equal weight of tri-tip steak or blade steak can be substituted for the strip steak; make sure to trim all connective tissue and excess fat. One 14- or 16-ounce package of rice noodles will serve four to six. Look for noodles that are about 1/8 inch wide; these are often labeled "small." Don't use Thai Kitchen Stir-Fry Rice Noodles since they are too thick and don't adequately soak up the broth.

INGREDIENTS

- 1** pound 85 percent lean ground beef
- 2** onions, quartered through root end
- 12** cups low-sodium beef broth
- 1/4** cup fish sauce, plus extra for seasoning
- 1** (4-inch) piece ginger, sliced into thin rounds
- 1** cinnamon stick
- 2** tablespoons sugar, plus extra for seasoning
- 6** star anise pods
- 6** whole cloves
- Salt
- 1** teaspoon black peppercorns
- 1** (1-pound) boneless strip steak, trimmed and halved
- 14-16** ounces (1/8-inch-wide) rice noodles
- 1/3** cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 3** scallions, sliced thin (optional)
- Bean sprouts

~~Sriracha sauce~~ Thai or Italian basil

Sriracha sauce

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Break ground beef into rough 1-inch chunks and drop in Dutch oven. Add water to cover by 1 inch. Bring mixture to boil over high heat. Boil for 2 minutes, stirring once or twice. Drain ground beef in colander and rinse well under running water. Wash out pot and return ground beef to pot.
- 2.** Place 6 onion quarters in pot with ground beef. Slice remaining 2 onion quarters as thin as possible and set aside for garnish. Add broth, 2 cups water, fish sauce, ginger, cinnamon, sugar, star anise, cloves, 2 teaspoons salt, and peppercorns to pot and bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, partially covered, for 45 minutes.
- 3.** Pour broth through colander set in large bowl. Discard solids. Strain broth through fine-mesh strainer lined with triple thickness of cheesecloth; add water as needed to equal 11 cups. Return broth to pot and season with extra sugar and salt (broth should taste overseasoned). Cover and keep warm over low heat.
- 4.** While broth simmers, place steak on large plate and freeze until very firm, 35 to 45 minutes. Once firm, cut against grain into 1/8-inch-thick slices. Return steak to plate and refrigerate until needed.
- 5.** Place noodles in large container and cover with hot tap water. Soak until noodles are pliable, 10 to 15 minutes; drain noodles. Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add drained noodles and cook until almost tender, 30 to 60 seconds. Drain immediately and divide noodles among individual bowls.
- 6.** Bring broth to rolling boil over high heat. Divide steak among individual bowls, shingling slices on top of noodles. Pile reserved onion slices on top of steak slices and sprinkle with cilantro and scallions, if using. Ladle hot broth into each bowl. Serve immediately, passing bean sprouts, basil sprigs, lime wedges, hoisin, Sriracha, and extra fish sauce separately.

TECHNIQUE

BEEF SO THIN THAT IT COOKS IN THE BOWL

Traditionally, the steak for *pho* is sliced very thin and placed raw in the serving bowl. (It cooks, but ideally remains slightly rare, in the hot broth.) To cut thin slices against the grain, freeze the meat until it's very firm (this also prevents the meat from overcooking). Then stand the meat on its cut end and, using the sharpest, thinnest blade you have, point the tip downward and push the blade down and away from you in one stroke.



TECHNIQUE

BEST ROUTE TO CLEAR STOCK

Boiling ground beef (or, more traditionally, beef bones) for stock coaxes out great beef flavor but also soluble proteins and melted fat that render the liquid cloudy and leave a layer of scum on its surface. Frequently skimming away those impurities as the liquid cooks is one way to clear up the stock, but it's a tedious chore (especially when there are solids, like onions or spices, that you don't want to remove) and it never completely clarifies the stock. Blanching and rinsing the meat before adding it to the cooking liquid is a far more efficient method. The brief (2-minute) boil thoroughly agitates the meat so that its proteins and fat slough off but doesn't cook it long enough to wash away

much flavor. A quick rinse rids the surface of any stubborn clingy bits.