



Chinese Braised Beef

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 15: Two Ways to Unlock Asian Flavor

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

In our recipe, we simplify Chinese red-cooked beef for the American kitchen. For meat that cooks up rich and tender, we use readily available boneless beef short ribs in place of traditional (but harder to find) shank of beef; short ribs also cook a lot faster. To streamline the classic cooking method, we eliminate the blanching of the meat, and we move the pot from the stovetop to the oven. A pair of thickeners—gelatin and cornstarch—add body to the sauce. Five-spice powder provides characteristic flavors without the bother of whole spices, and a combination of hoisin sauce and molasses contributes the underlying sweetness that completes the dish.

Serves 6

With its generous amount of soy sauce, this dish is meant to taste salty, which is why we pair it with plain white rice (see related content). A simple steamed vegetable like bok choy or broccoli completes the meal. Boneless beef short ribs require little trimming, but you can also use a 4-pound chuck roast. Trim the roast of large pieces of fat and sinew, cut it across the grain into 1-inch-thick slabs, and cut the slabs into 4 by 2-inch pieces.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/2** tablespoons unflavored gelatin
- 2 1/2** cups plus 1 tablespoon water
- 1/2** cup dry sherry
- 1/3** cup soy sauce
- 2** tablespoons hoisin sauce
- 2** tablespoons molasses
- 3** scallions, white and green parts separated, green parts sliced thin on bias
- 1** (2-inch) piece ginger, peeled, halved lengthwise, and crushed
- 4** garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- 1 1/2** teaspoons five-spice powder
- 1** teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 3** pounds boneless beef short ribs, trimmed and cut into 4-inch lengths
- 1** teaspoon cornstarch

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Sprinkle gelatin over 2 1/2 cups water in Dutch oven and let sit until gelatin softens, about 5 minutes. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees.
- 2.** Heat softened gelatin over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until melted, 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in sherry, soy

sauce, hoisin, molasses, scallion whites, ginger, garlic, five-spice powder, and pepper flakes. Stir in beef and bring to simmer. Remove pot from heat. Cover tightly with sheet of heavy-duty aluminum foil, then lid. Transfer to oven and cook until beef is tender, 2 to 2 1/2 hours, stirring halfway through cooking.

3. Using slotted spoon, transfer beef to cutting board. Strain sauce through fine-mesh strainer into fat separator. Wipe out pot with paper towels. Let liquid settle for 5 minutes, then return defatted liquid to now-empty pot. Cook liquid over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until thickened and reduced to 1 cup, 20 to 25 minutes.

4. While sauce reduces, using 2 forks, break beef into 1 1/2-inch pieces. Whisk cornstarch and remaining 1 tablespoon water together in small bowl.

5. Reduce heat to medium-low, whisk cornstarch mixture into reduced sauce, and cook until sauce is slightly thickened, about 1 minute. Return beef to sauce and stir to coat. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until beef is heated through, about 5 minutes. Sprinkle scallion greens over top. Serve.

TECHNIQUE

BEEF SHANK—EVEN BETTER THAN SHORT RIBS

Shank is a cut from the lower leg of the steer. Though it is very sinewy, it is actually quite lean. In the United States, it's often used to make low-fat ground beef. This is a shame because with braising, it becomes meltingly tender, and its liquefied connective tissue imparts a silky richness to a sauce that requires little, if any, defatting. If you can find shank and have an extra hour or two, it's the best and most economical choice for red-cooked beef. You'll find shank sold as both long cut and cross cut (with or without the bone). If using cross cut, decrease the gelatin to 2 1/4 teaspoons and increase the cooking time in step 2 to 4 hours. If using long cut, cut it crossways into 1-inch-thick slabs, omit the gelatin, and increase the cooking time in step 2 to 5 hours.

LONG-CUT SHANK: Lots of connective tissue; cooks in 5 hours.



CROSS-CUT SHANK: Less connective tissue; cooks in 4 hours.

