

An Illustrated Guide to Beef Roasts

Supermarkets carry many kinds of roasts, often with confusing labels. Here's how to know what you are buying, and how best to cook it. BY SHANNON BLAISDELL

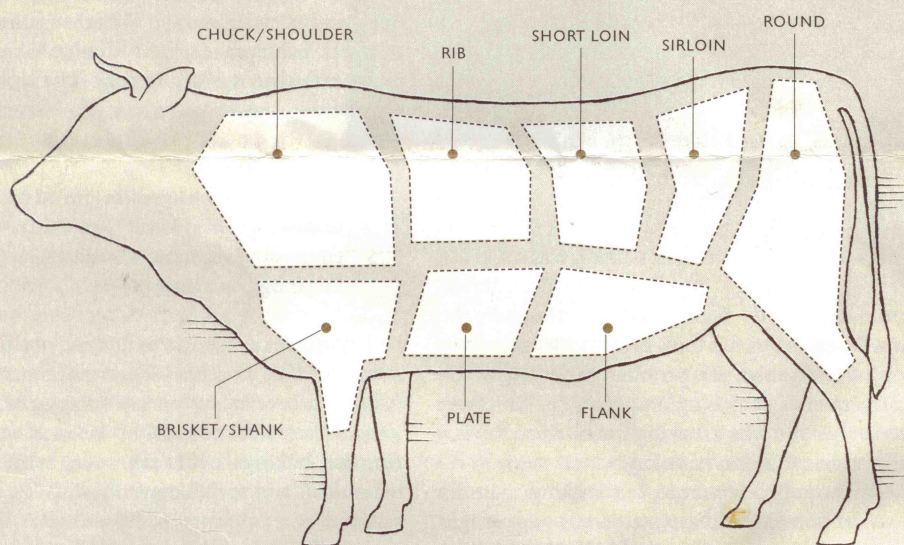
Choosing a beef roast can be an exasperating and confusing endeavor. To help make this job easier, we identified the roasts most often found in the supermarket (as well as their aliases), cooked them in the test kitchen, and evaluated each on a range of qualities, from tenderness to fattiness. We also rated each roast for flavor (★★★★★ being best) and cost (\$\$\$\$\$ being most expensive).

Our thanks go out to Christopher Radley, sales manager of John Dewar & Co., and Mike Lewis, butcher extraordinaire at Star Market. These meat experts helped to guide us through this process.

By definition, a roast is a thick cut of meat that is suitable for cooking by dry heat (roasting) or moist heat (braising or pot-roasting). Tender cuts with little connective tissue respond well to

dry-heat cooking. Tougher cuts, which generally come from heavily exercised parts of the animal, such as the shoulder and rump, respond best to braising (being cooked in a relatively small amount of liquid in a closed container for a long period of time). The primary goal of braising is to melt the collagen in the connective tissue, thereby transforming a tough piece of meat into a tender one.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIMAL CUTS



Butchers refer to the first, basic cuts made to an animal as primal cuts. In a cow, there are eight primal cuts, and beef roasts generally come from five of these, listed below.

Chuck The chuck section includes ribs 1 through 5 (the ribs are numbered from the head to the tail) as well as the shoulder blade bone. Roasts from the chuck contain a lot of connective tissue and generally require moist heat cooking to become tender.

Rib The rib section contains ribs 6 through 12. A full 7-bone rib roast, or a whole standing rib roast, can tip the scales at more than 16 pounds, so butchers divide the rib into two

distinct cuts. Both are very tender, very expensive, and generally cooked by dry heat.

Short Loin This part of the cow is usually cut into premium steaks. The tenderloin is the most common roast from the short loin. It is very tender and is usually roasted.

Sirloin The sirloin is sometimes referred to as the hip area. The meat from the sirloin is not as tender as that from the short loin, but these cuts are still generally roasted.

Round Cuts from the steer's butt and leg are tender enough for roasting (though not nearly as tender as the cuts from the rib or the short loin), but they are often braised.

CHUCK ROASTS

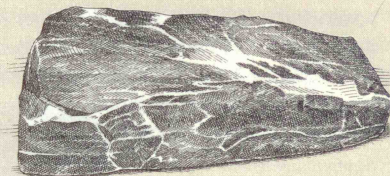
Top Blade Roast

Alternate Names: Chuck Roast First Cut, Blade Roast, Top Chuck Roast

FLAVOR ★★★★★

COST \$\$

BEST WAY TO COOK Braise



This broad, flat cut was far and away the best chuck roast we tasted—flavorful, juicy, and tender. Its connective tissue is unattractive but not unpleasant to eat.

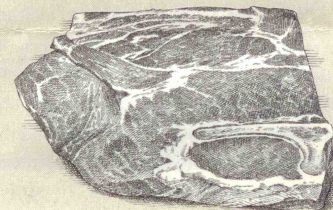
Chuck 7-Bone Roast

Alternate Names: Center-Cut Pot Roast, Chuck Roast Center Cut

FLAVOR ★★★★★

COST \$\$

BEST WAY TO COOK Braise



A bone shaped like the number seven gives this cut its name. We enjoyed the deep flavor of this thin cut, which needed less liquid and less time to cook than other cuts from the chuck.

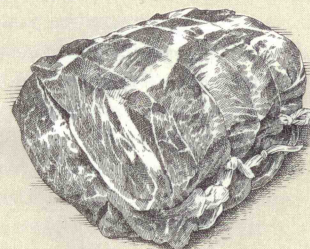
Chuck-Eye Roast

Alternate Names: Boneless Chuck Roll, Boneless Chuck Fillet

FLAVOR ★★★

COST \$\$

BEST WAY TO COOK Braise or Roast



This boneless roast is cut from the center of the first five ribs (the term *eye* refers to any center-cut piece of meat). It is very

Illustration: John Burgoyne