

cooking FRESH

SECOND HARVEST, SLOW COOKING

BY DANA BENIGNO



The crisp days of fall are perfect for warm and satisfying food that celebrates the flavors of the season. I look forward to the first chilly weekend when my cooking changes from quickly grilled meats and vegetables to the rich flavors of slow cooked meat dishes. Fall also brings a second harvest of greens such as spinach and kale and a variety of root vegetables which, when roasted, have a sweet earthy flavor and goes perfectly with heartier fare.

The recipe featured this season uses one of my favorite cooking techniques: braising. Why is it my favorite? Because braised meat is moist and tender. The dish creates its own delicious sauce and it is the perfect way to make less expensive cuts of meat the star of any dinner party. Braising does require a little bit of time, but once you've put it in the oven, you can curl up with a good book or your favorite DVD and let the delicious aromas fill the air. (Don't be alarmed when a crowd gathers outside your door. There's plenty to go around.)

Dana Benigno, chef/owner of Chicagocooks.com, is a board member of Green City Market. As a board member she promotes the mission of organic, sustainable agriculture. And when she's braising and slow cooking from her home kitchen, it's a sure bet her neighbors know what's cooking!

WHAT'S IN SEASON

Apples · Pears (Western and Asian) · Cabbage

Brussel Sprouts · Garlic (Dried)

Cooking Greens, Asian Greens, Salad Greens

Broccoli · Cauliflower · Leeks · Onions (Dried)

Potatoes · Sweet Potatoes · Pumpkins · Spinach

Winter Squash · Dry Beans · Popcorn

Burdock Root · Jerusalem Artichokes · Radishes

Turnips · Rutabagas · Celery Root

Storage Root (Carrots, Beets, Parsnips, Salsify,
Parsley Root)

“What's in Season” is courtesy of Terra Brockman, reporting on what her brother Henry and sister Teresa each grow on their central Illinois organic farms. For seasonal recipes, inspiring stories about life on the farm, and where you can purchase fresh, seasonal produce from the Brockman family farms, visit www.henryfarm.com.

CHILI BRAISED SHOULDER ROAST

WITH ROASTED ROOT VEGETABLES TOSSED IN VANILLA AND BROWN SUGAR

The combination of the tangy and slightly spicy chili sauce with the sweet roasted vegetables spiked with a hint of vanilla and brown sugar is what makes this dish. The sauce is made from toasting three varieties of dried chilies and adding them to the braising liquid of red wine and tomatoes. Serve this with a warm spinach salad or wilted greens such as chard or kale and a good glass of red wine.

Preparation Time: 40 minutes

Cooking time: 3 hours

- 5 to 6 lb. lamb or pork shoulder roast, beef roast or beef short ribs
- 2 med. onions, chopped
- 3 ribs celery, chopped
- 3 large carrots, chopped
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 cup red wine
- 5 cups water
- 2 - 14 ½-ounce cans of diced (or home canned) tomatoes
- Salt & fresh ground pepper
- Chopped cilantro or scallions for garnish

Meat Rub:

- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 1 tablespoons chile powder
- 2 teaspoons oregano leaves
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper

Chili Paste:

(Note: Chilies are available in dried form at Dominick's, Whole Foods, and Mexican Markets)

- 6 Ancho Chiles
- 4 Pasilla Chiles or Anaheim Chile
- 1 Chipotle Chile (omit if you want less spice)
- 1 head of garlic, in their skins

The chili sauce will be very dark and slightly bitter to taste. However, once it is added to



The Secret to Moist Tender Meat: How to Braise

Textbook Definition of Braising: To cook covered in a small amount of liquid after a preliminary browning. Meats are simmered slowly until tender, which can take up to 2 hours or more. In almost all cases the liquid is served with the product as a sauce.

Why Braise?

Braising is perfect for less tender cuts of meat that have lots of connective tissue, such as pot roasts, pork or lamb shoulder roasts, veal, pork or lamb shanks or oxtails and pork bellies featured on many restaurant menus. The moisture from the cooking liquid and the low, slow cooking temperature makes the end result rich, moist and tender. Braised dishes can be made a day or two in advance and then re-heated before serving, which makes braised dishes particularly entertaining friendly.

the braising liquid, the juice from the meat and vegetables creates an earthy, complex, sweet flavor.

In a dry skillet over medium-high heat, toast the cloves of garlic in their skins until brown. When cooked, remove from their skins and set aside.

Toast each chili by holding it over a burner using tongs. Toast it lightly on all sides. Continue with the remaining chilis. They will puff up slightly as they are toasted. Place the toasted chilies into very hot water and soak for fifteen minutes until soft.

Drain the chilies and place into a food processor or blender with the garlic. Blend until smooth. Place the sauce in a coarse wire mesh strainer. Work the sauce through the strainer with a wooden spoon in order to remove the seeds and any large pieces of chili skin. Reserve the pureed mixture and discard the seeds and skins.

For the meat:

Pre-heat the oven to 325 degrees.

Place all of the dried spices, salt, and pepper for the meat rub in a small bowl and stir to combine. Sprinkle the roast on

Photos by Dana Benigno

ROASTED ROOT VEGETABLES

WITH VANILLA AND BROWN SUGAR

Use whatever root vegetables you like such as sweet potatoes, beets, rutabagas, parsnips, turnips and even radishes. I like to choose a combination of sweet and earthy varieties such as beets and sweet potatoes. Fennel root is also a nice addition to roasted vegetables.

- 2 large sweet potatoes
- 2 parsnips
- 2 large beets
- 2 turnips
- 3 carrots
- 2 large sweet onions, peeled and sliced into wedges
- 2 tablespoons olive oil or vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 teaspoons good quality vanilla such as Nielson Massey
- 2 tablespoons of brown sugar

Peel and chop the root vegetables into 2-inch pieces. Toss the vegetables in the olive or vegetable oil and roast until golden brown and tender.

During the last hour of the cooking of the roast, place the sheet pan on the bottom rack of the oven and roast the vegetables while the

meat continues to cook. The vegetables are done when you insert a pairing knife into a piece and it easily slides off the knife.

Just before serving, heat the butter in a skillet large enough to hold the root vegetables. Add the vanilla and brown sugar and stir to combine. Add the root vegetables and toss to coat with the vanilla, butter and brown sugar. Cook until golden brown. Serve immediately.

Serves 8

Advance Preparation:

Roast the root vegetables and let cool. Store covered in the refrigerator. Re-heat in a large skillet and toss with the butter, brown sugar and vanilla just before serving.

Braise the roast until tender and let cool. Remove the meat from the pan and slice. Puree the sauce and add the meat back to the pan, keeping it together in slices. Reheat in a 375 degree oven for 20 to 30 minutes before serving.

To serve, place a portion of root vegetables on the plate. Ladle some of the sauce next to the root vegetables and top with slices of the meat and more sauce. Garnish with scallions or chopped cilantro if desired.

all sides with ½ of the meat rub.

In a heavy casserole, heat enough vegetable oil to lightly coat the bottom of a dutch oven or large oven safe pot with a lid. When the oil just begins to smoke, add the meat and brown well on all sides.

When the meat is golden brown remove from the pan and lower the heat to medium low. Add the onions, celery, and carrots to the pan and the remaining meat rub. Cook for about 5 minutes until the vegetables have begun to wilt slightly.

Add the chili paste and stir to coat the vegetables. Add the wine and tomatoes and increase the heat to high. Stir the liquid using a spoon to help scrape the brown bits from the bottom of the pan. Place the meat back into the pot and bring to a simmer.

Cover the pot and place in a 325 degree oven for 2 ½ hours. Check for doneness by inserting a pairing knife into the meat. When the meat slips off the knife without any resistance whatsoever it is done. If the meat clings slightly to the knife cook for an additional 30 minutes and check again. You may also need to add a little water to the pan if the liquid has evaporated. The total cooking time will vary from 3 to 3 ½ hours.

When the meat is done, remove it from the pan. Skim the excess fat, if any, from the top of the sauce left in the pan. Puree the sauce with a handheld blender or let the sauce cool and puree in a blender. The sauce will be slightly coarse and rustic in texture. Taste the sauce and season with additional salt and pepper if needed. If the sauce tastes a little too tangy, swirl in a tablespoon or two of butter.

