

# Beef Rendang

Researching this recipe was a very educational process in that it added weight to three features that I generally hold to be true. Firstly, for any given recipe there are as many variations as there are cooks/chefs. Secondly, many commentators on Internet content are insulting idiots, in this case racist insulting idiots. The racism involved here was between Indonesians and Malays all offensively disputing the heritage and preparation of Beef Rendang. Thirdly, American interpretations frequently simplify recipes to the point of being unrecognisable.

I hope this potentially daunting list of ingredients encapsulates the essence of the celebratory dish which, I think, originated in Indonesia but was adopted with gusto by the Malaysians. It was certainly very tasty and well worth the effort, though not the burning of my hand with v. hot *kerisik*, which seems to be one of the distinctive ingredients. Read on.

## Planning

|               |         |
|---------------|---------|
| serves:       | 4       |
| prep time:    | 30 mins |
| cooking time: | 3 hrs   |

## Ingredients

2 tbs kerisik: ½ block  
creamed coconut or 40g  
dessicated coconut  
3+1 fresh lemongrass stalks  
4cms chunk of fresh ginger,  
skinned & sliced  
4cms chunk of fresh  
galangal, skinned &  
sliced  
4 fat cloves garlic, skinned &  
sliced  
1 medium onion, roughly  
chopped  
6 red chillis (dried seem  
traditional), soaked &  
seeded to taste &  
chopped  
1 tsp ground turmeric  
2 tbs sunflower oil  
900g beef, topside or shin,  
trimmed and in large  
cubes.  
6 cardamom pods, lightly  
crushed  
4 whole cloves  
4 star anise  
4 kaffir lime leaves (fresh, if  
possible), finely  
shredded

## Method

OK, first the story of kerisik. What is kerisik? Kerisik is traditionally freshly grated coconut which is then dry roasted for 30 minutes or so, followed by pounding smooth in a pestle and mortar. Be my guest. Some people here substitute that most useless of cooking ingredients, dessicated coconut; dry toast it in a wok/frying pan until golden brown and blitz it in a spice grinder. I tried this approach first and was singularly unimpressed. I found a "cheat" on the Internet which melts then "toasts" creamed coconut in a microwave so I gave that a go. Much better! Chunk half a block of coconut cream and zap it in a microwave. Use full power but do it in 10-15 second bursts, stirring in between. At first the coconut cream will just melt but it will eventually begin to turn brown, though it does so on the bottom of the pot so you wont see the colour change until you stir - stick to 10-15 second bursts, stirring well in between. Stop when it is quite a rich brown, certainly darker than golden but not black. Take care, being oily it's above boiling point and extremely hot! Use oven gloves to remove it from the microwave attempting not to throw it all over yourself and the kitchen floor, as I did. Set your kerisik aside to cool.

The fresh spice paste. Starting with three of the fresh lemongrass stalks finely sliced, put everything down to the teaspoon of turmeric into a blender. Add a little water to help the liquidizing and blitz to a paste.

At last you can start cooking the rendang which will now take about 2 hours. In a suitably sized casserole, fry the wet spice paste in a little sunflower oil for about 5 minutes; it is said that it should darken a little though I'm not convinced mine did. Add the cubed beef to the spice paste and brown it all over. Toss in everything from the cardamom pods to the tamarind paste. Crush the fleshy end of the fourth lemongrass stalk and add that, too. Stir in the tin of coconut milk and bring gently to simmering point. Over low heat, continue simmering gently, uncovered and stirring frequently

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zest of 1 lime  
2tsp tamarind paste  
1 tbs soft brown sugar  
400ml can coconut milk  
Salt

to avoid scorching, for 1½ hours or so when the beef should be tender and most of the liquid evaporated. (Rendang is referred to as a dry curry.) Finally, stir in the sugar and about 2 tablespoons of your reserved and painstakingly made kerisik. Put the lid on to allow the sugar to melt while you prepare some rice to accompany your feast.

Add salt to taste before serving with plain boiled/steamed rice (I prefer to use Thai fragrant rice) and, maybe, some steamed green beans.

Sit back with a bottle of wine and a smug, self-satisfied smirk on your face.