

Chilli con Carne

A classic blast from my past and still one of my favourite week day winter feasts. Why stop making tasty meals just because fashions change?

This will vary considerably from what might be considered a norm because it is based on a recipe my late lamented mother received and then interpreted. That happened in the 1960s when British food supplies were a little different; I suspect the peppers should have been red rather than green, for starters. In half this quantity, my mother also chucked in 2 tablespoons of hot Rajah brand chilli powder, which I think should've been mild chilli powder for flavour rather than heat. (I discovered this many years later on a trip to San Francisco.)

I've since modified my approach, tending to use fresh red chillies, though powder, or course, still works - add it to taste. I also now add a couple of star anise based on the eminent Mr. Blumenthal's approach. I prefer to make this with dried rather than canned beans but, if time is pressing, go ahead and take the short cut; it will reduce the cooking time by a couple of hours. This is also a large volume recipe (I tend to eat some and freeze some) but, given the quantities, it can easily be halved. Naturally, you should adjust the chilli content (how many, seeds or no seeds, powder instead) to suit your personal preferences.

For some variations, try using minced pork instead of beef and/or black turtle beans in place of the red kidney beans. Black beans cook considerably faster than red kidney beans so keep checking after about 2 hrs simmering.

Planning

serves:	8 - 10
prep time:	30 mins
cooking time:	4 hrs

Ingredients

500g dried red kidney beans, soaked overnight
2 tbs oil
2 large onions, halved and finely sliced
2 green peppers, deseeded and sliced
6 medium hot red chillies, chopped
6 cloves garlic, crushed
2 tbs cumin seeds, lightly dry toasted and crushed a little
2 star anise
1 kg ground beef
4 tbs mild chilli powder
1 tbs ground paprika
1 tsp ground black pepper

Method

Drain the soaked kidney beans, put them in a large casserole, cover them well in fresh water and boil them rapidly for 10 mins. (This is said to remove toxins from the skins.) Drain them again and reserve.

Clean out the large casserole and heat the oil over moderate heat. Add the onions together with the star anise. Sweat the onions until they begin to soften, stirring frequently. Now add the green peppers, stir, and sweat them until they soften also. Stir in the chillies, garlic and cumin seeds and cook for about 2 minutes more. Add the ground beef and continue to cook, stirring frequently to break up the beef and brown it. Stir in the mild chilli powder, paprika and black pepper and stir this into the beef and vegetable mixture. Add the tomatoes along with about half a can of water and the red kidney beans. Stir all together. (On no account be tempted to add salt at this stage - it will toughen the beans.) Bring everything to a simmer, reduce the heat to very low, cover the pan and simmer it, stirring occasionally, for about 3 hours until the beans are tender.

Once the beans are tender it is safe to add salt. I'd suggest about a tablespoon; I know, sounds a lot - this is a large volume - so do your own thing. Stir and cover again and cook for about a further 30 minutes to allow the salt to develop the flavours.

I'm a fan of rice with this, particularly Camargue Red rice if

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3 400g tins plum tomatoes,
chopped
salt

you can find it. It seems to me to be a pleasant equivalent of brown rice (which I personally don't particularly like).