



ANSON MILLS

Lost and Found Chili

Yield

4 to 6 main dish portions

Time

We suggest you make the chili over 2 days. Make the chile powder, spice mix, and then the chili proper the first day. The second day, make the limewater, skim the chili of fat, thicken it, and make the cornbread croutons.

Cooking Remarks

In developing this recipe, we tried every imaginable beef stew meat from chuck, to brisket, to shank, to short ribs—with bone and without. (Despite our determination to go with preservation-style chili, we just couldn't make it over to cured venison.) In the end, it was the unsurpassed flavor and tenderness of boneless short ribs that moved the jury. We were thus able to remove the gnarly non-dissolving band of connective tissue from the meat while it was still raw. Short ribs aren't cheap, but this isn't lunchroom chili. It is an elevated dish, every inch the dinner-party entrée.

The chiles threw us for a loop, too. We sought desperately to assemble a fluent set of flavors—some heat, some bright fruit, some raisin, some smoke. Getting the correct combination was tricky on its own, and it didn't help to discover utter mayhem among chile packages. We found packs of chiles bearing the same names that bore no resemblance to each other! We found packs of chiles with different names that looked exactly alike! We began to feel helpless and traduced. So we turned to Native Seeds Search. The pedigree of their chiles is as inexorable as the pedigree of Anson Mills corn. If you're serious about chili, get serious about chiles and buy from these guys!

After initially rehydrating chiles and pureeing them to a paste, we advanced to grinding dried chiles directly into an aromatic powder. It was easier to establish a pleasing ratio this way. Commerical chili powder, of course, has been beaten to death as a shelf item in grocery stores. It possesses no character, is usually stale and inexplicably out of balance, and trends toward enough cumin to burn the enamel off your teeth. In contrast, our freshly ground chile powder,

with its bright and diverse aromatics, expresses a brilliant dimension of flavors beyond the sum of its individual contributors. This nonlinear notion of flavor development is inherently Native American—fitting, because these chiles are their plants anyway, no matter who grows them.

Toasting chiles isn't so much about toasting in the usual sense. It is performed to move the chiles from leathery to parchment-like, and thereby persuade them to relinquish their seeds and allow their skins to be ground to a powder.

Oh, cumin! You aren't even native to North America, but what would chili be without you? Still, we'd like to slap you with a restraining order most of the time. Ground or whole seed, who cares, you nearly always commit a crime. We cannot count how many soups, bean dishes, servings of guacamole, and you-name-its we've purchased or were served in restaurants that have been brutalized by the impact of cumin. So readers, get yourselves some really fresh cumin seeds, please, and use the suggested amounts in this recipe.

The most exciting element of this recipe, in our opinion, is the culinary limewater and cornmeal we cook to mush for seasoning. In just a couple of easy steps, the limewater produces a tamale-like (nixtamal) flavor in the mush, evoking Native American foods of antiquity and bringing fresh synergistic dimension to both chiles and chili.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe, you will need a medium cast-iron skillet, a pair of rubber gloves, a pair of tongs, an electric coffee grinder or spice grinder, a fine-mesh sieve, a roasting pan fitted with a flat wire rack, a large Dutch oven, a small saucepan, a 2-cup glass measuring cup or small pitcher, and a small heatproof bowl.

Ingredients

for the chile powder

- 3 guajillo chiles (0.7 ounces)
- 2 pasilla negro chiles (0.4 ounces)
- 2 pasilla de Oaxaca chiles (0.3 ounces)
- 1 ancho chile (0.4 ounces)
- 8 árbol chiles (0.1 ounces)

for the spice mix

- 2 whole cloves

1 star anise
2 teaspoons cumin seeds
½ teaspoon coriander seeds
2 teaspoons whole-leaf dried oregano, preferably Mexican oregano
2 Turkish bay leaves

for the chili

4 pounds boneless beef short ribs
Fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons beef suet or olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, chopped very fine (1 cup)
6 garlic cloves, minced with 1 teaspoon salt (2 tablespoons)
4 cups Good Old-Fashioned Beef Stock, simmering
2 tablespoons tomato paste

for the nixtamal mush

½ cup spring or filtered water
¼ teaspoon culinary lime, such as Mrs. Wages or calcium hydroxide from Modernist Pantry
3 tablespoons Anson Mills Antebellum Fine Yellow Cornmeal

accompaniments

1 recipe Slow-Cooked Purple Cape Beans
1 recipe Cornbread Croutons

Directions

1. Make the chile powder: Heat a medium cast-iron skillet over low heat until hot, about 3 minutes. Pull on a pair of rubber gloves. Working with one type at a time, toast the guajillo, pasilla negro, pasilla de Oaxaca, and ancho chiles (do not toast the árbol chiles) until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes, turning them occasionally and pressing them against the skillet with tongs or your gloved fingers. Pull the tops off the chiles (including the árboles) to remove the stems, and then shake out the seeds into a small bowl. Rip open the pods, pull out and discard the ribs, tear the chiles into pieces, and allow to cool until crisp. Grind the chiles in 3 batches to a fine powder in a coffee or spice grinder. Empty each batch into a fine-mesh sieve over a small bowl and sift the chile powder to remove bits of skin or ribs. Discard the contents of the sieve after sifting

each batch. When all the chiles have been ground and sifted, stir the chile powder to ensure that it's well blended. Turn the powder into a jar with a tight-fitting lid and set it aside.

2. *Make the spice mix:* Again heat the medium cast-iron skillet over low heat until hot, about 3 minutes. While the pan is heating, pull off and reserve the buds of the whole cloves. Break 2 petals from the star anise and crack them open to release the shiny seed within each. Toss the clove buds, the star anise seeds, and the oregano into the coffee grinder. Toast the cumin and coriander seeds in the hot skillet, tossing constantly, until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a small plate and let cool. Add the toasted seeds to the coffee grinder and grind the mixture to a fine powder. There will be about 1 tablespoon. Turn the spices into a bowl, toss the bay leaves on top, and set aside.

3. *Make the chili:* Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 425 degrees. Pat the short ribs dry with paper towels. If the short ribs are still in a slab, cut them into 3-inch-wide bands about 1 inch thick. Trim away excess fat and remove any silver skin. Trim off the tough band where the bone was attached. Sprinkle the meat with salt and pepper and place on a flat wire rack set in a roasting pan. Roast until the beef is browned and much of the fat has rendered, 45 minutes to 1 hour, turning the pieces after 30 minutes with tongs. Remove from the oven and let cool slightly. Cut the meat into 1-inch cubes; there will be about 1½ pounds.

4. Melt the suet or heat the olive oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-low heat. Add the onion and sauté until translucent, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté until fragrant, about 10 seconds. Stir in the spice mix followed by ¼ cup of the chile powder. Sauté for 30 seconds, and then add the simmering stock, the tomato paste, and the cubed beef. Stir to combine. Cover partially, bring to a simmer, turn down the heat to low, and simmer gently, stirring occasionally, until the meat is tender, 2 hours or longer. Remove from the heat, let cool slightly, and refrigerate overnight.

5. *Make the limewater for the nixtamal mush:* While the chili chills, in a small saucepan, bring the water to a simmer over low heat. Pour it into a 1-cup glass measuring cup or pitcher. Add the culinary lime and stir with a wooden spoon until the powder dissolves. Allow the limewater to stand for 2 hours without agitating the solids that settle on the bottom. There will be a thin, crisp lime skin on the surface of the water. The liquid beneath will be clear, and a layer of cloudy lime solids will be hover over the bottom of the pot. Set a fine-mesh strainer over the small saucepan. Pour the limewater gently through the strainer leaving the cloudy solids in the

measuring cup (the lime skin will remain in the strainer). Pour the lime skin and solids down the drain and rinse the sink well. Cover the limewater and set aside until needed.

6. When you're ready to serve, skim the fat from the chili while the chili is still cold. You won't be able to remove it all, and you *don't* want to remove it all—chili is no lean cuisine, and the residual fat packs a ton of flavor. (The residual fat will bind with the nixtamal mush that's used to thicken the chili). Bring the chili to a simmer over low heat.

7. *Make the nixtamal mush and finish the chili:* Bring the limewater to a simmer over low heat. Measure the cornmeal into a small heatproof bowl. Drizzle the hot limewater into the cornmeal, whisking to keep it from lumping. Scrape the slurry back into the saucepan and cook it over low heat, whisking constantly, until the slurry thickens to a thick corn mush, about 20 seconds. Scrape the mush into the simmering chili and whisk to break it up. Use a wooden spoon to mash pockets of mush against the side of the pot to melt them into the chili. Continue to simmer the chili until it has reached the consistency you like. Taste for seasoning, and serve hot with accompaniments.