

Spanish-Style Braised Chicken

Bone-in chicken infuses the most flavor in a stewpot, emerging succulent after braising. The flavors of Spain—smoky paprika, dry sherry and bold green olives—combine in this hearty dish.

Season the chicken with the ½ tsp. salt and the ¼ tsp. pepper.

In a large Dutch oven or deep sauté pan over medium-high heat, warm the olive oil. Working in batches, brown the chicken on all sides, about 6 minutes per batch. Transfer to a platter. Add the onion, bell pepper and garlic, reduce the heat to medium and sauté until the onion has softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in the paprika and oregano. Add the sherry, bring to a boil and stir to scrape up the browned bits. Stir in the tomatoes and their juices.

Return the drumsticks, thighs, wings and breasts, in that order, to the pot and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover and cook until the chicken shows no signs of pink at the bone when pierced with a knife, about 40 minutes. During the last 5 minutes of cooking, add the green olives.

Transfer the chicken to a warmed deep platter and cover with aluminum foil. Skim the fat off the sauce and boil until reduced by one-fourth, about 5 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings with salt and pepper. Pour the sauce over the chicken and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Chicken for Dinner* (Weldon Owen, 2009).

Braised Winter Vegetables with Coconut and Red Curry

Coconut milk lends richness and exotic flavor to these creamy braised vegetables. Its slight sweetness echoes that of both the root vegetables and squash, while offsetting the spicy red curry paste, pungent Asian fish sauce, and bright lime and cilantro that season the broth.

In a saucepan over medium heat, warm the oil. When the oil is hot, add the garlic and ginger and sauté until fragrant but not browned, about 1 minute. Add the curry paste and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the fish sauce, sweet potato and celery root and stir to combine. Reduce the heat to medium-low, pour in the coconut milk and cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Add the squash and cook until the vegetables are just tender when pierced with a sharp knife but not falling apart, 12 to 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, finely grate the zest from the lime and cut the fruit into wedges. Stir the lime zest into the vegetables.

Divide the vegetables and braising liquid among warmed bowls, top each with 2 cilantro sprigs and a lime wedge, and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *New Flavors for Vegetables*, by Jodi Liano (Oxmoor House, 2008).

January 10, 2010

Ingredients for Spanish-Style Braised Chicken

- 1 chicken, about 4 lb., cut into 10 pieces
- ½ tsp. kosher salt, plus more, to taste
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground pepper, plus more, to taste
- 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 Tbs. smoked Spanish paprika
- ½ tsp. dried oregano
- ⅓ cup dry sherry
- 1 can (28 oz.) diced tomatoes with juices
- ½ cup coarsely chopped green olives

Ingredients for Braised Winter Vegetables with Coconut and Red Curry

- 2 tsp. canola oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ¼-inch slice fresh ginger, peeled and grated
- 2 tsp. red curry paste
- 1 tsp. Thai fish sauce
- 1 sweet potato, about ½ lb., peeled and cut into ½-inch chunks
- 1 celery root, about ½ lb., peeled and cut into ½-inch chunks
- 3 cups unsweetened coconut milk
- 1 delicata or other winter squash, about ½ lb., peeled and cut into ½-inch chunks
- 1 lime
- 8 fresh cilantro sprigs

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Tips & Tricks

Selecting Pots: The best pots for braising are heavy ones that distribute heat evenly and retain it well to allow for slow, even cooking. Braising usually calls for first browning or caramelizing the ingredients, then adding liquid (generally about halfway up the sides of the meat and vegetables) and cooking the food slowly; your cooking vessel must be able to distribute heat evenly throughout the pot to create a protected environment during the extended cooking time. A tight-fitting lid is critical to enable the liquid and ingredients to concentrate in flavor. The proper braising pot will produce tender, succulent meat with a flavorful sauce, rather than unevenly cooked meat with a sauce that has reduced too much or tastes burned.

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Essential Cooking Technique: Braising

Good cooking begins with high-quality ingredients and well-made cookware and tools, so knowing how to select the best ingredients and determine the right tools to use in the kitchen is key.

What is Braising?

Simmering food slowly in a moderate amount of liquid is a technique known as braising. Relatively tough cuts of meat, such as chuck roast and brisket, and fibrous vegetables, such as carrots, celery and leeks, are excellent candidates for braising. Braising liquid can be water or a more flavorful liquid, such as broth, stock, wine or beer. Onions, garlic, herbs or other ingredients are often added to the liquid for flavoring. Braising and stewing are closely related, although stews are made with more liquid and smaller pieces of food.

Meat to be braised is generally first browned in fat to give it color and add to its flavor. It is then cooked in a relatively small amount of liquid (usually only 1 to 2 inches deep) in a tightly closed pot or baking dish on the top of the stove over medium-low to medium heat or in a moderate (325° to 350°F) oven. The lid prevents liquid from evaporating, and the food is quickly surrounded by steam.

Braising results in tender, full-flavored dishes that are typically hearty, cold-weather fare. Some favorite braised dishes are pot roast, coq au vin and lamb shanks.

In classic French-style braising, the vegetables that are cooked with the meat or poultry to impart their aromatic flavors are not necessarily served. Instead, fresh vegetables may be added toward the end of cooking for the benefit of their fresher color, texture and flavor.

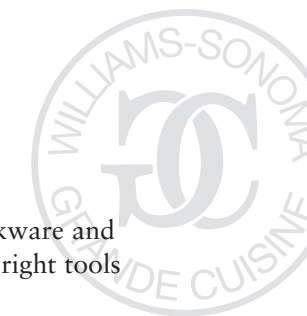
Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Kitchen Companion* (Time-Life Books, 2000).

Tips & Tricks

Choosing Cuts for Braising: Braised recipes usually call for pieces of poultry, tougher cuts of beef, lamb or pork, and fibrous vegetables. Many recipes use only the breasts and thighs of poultry, while others include the whole cut-up bird. Bone-in cuts are best as they provide the most flavor.

Browning: Browning meats and vegetables in oil before braising in liquid caramelizes the natural sugars, developing rich surface color and deep flavor. Do not skip this step. When browning the ingredients, resist the temptation to lift the pieces up every few seconds; this interferes with the browning process and can cause the food to lose moisture and stick to the pan.

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Flambéing Safely: Adding wines and other liquors to braised dishes contributes flavor, but it is important to do this safely. When flambéing, always transfer the liquor from its original bottle to another container before adding the liquid to the pot, as the flame can travel into the bottle and cause it to burst. Remove the pan from the heat when pouring in the liquor, especially if using a gas stove. Keep pot holders and towels out of reach of the flames.

Reducing Liquids: An important step in braising is reducing the cooking liquid. This typically involves simmering the liquid briskly for several minutes, reducing its volume, concentrating its flavor and thickening its body. During the process, some of the alcohol content of the wine or spirits will evaporate, eliminating any harsh edges and bringing out the flavor.

Using Leftovers: Braised dishes often taste better the next day, which is a boon for the busy cook. Cool the dish to room temperature, transfer it to an airtight container, and label with the contents and date. Use within 3 or 4 days. Rewarm the food over medium-low heat until heated through before serving.

Stuffed Cabbage Rolls

Various renditions of this Eastern European staple are found in Poland, Hungary and Austria. Here, the sweet-and-sour balance of the stuffing and braising liquid highlights the traditional flavors. The stuffed cabbage can be prepared a few hours ahead and reheated. Serve with buttered egg noodles.

To make the cabbage rolls, bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. Using a sharp paring knife, cut out the core from the cabbage. Lower the cabbage into the boiling water and cook until the leaves soften, about 5 minutes. Remove and set aside to cool. Gently peel off 12 large outer leaves. Drain the leaves and let cool. Coarsely chop enough of the remaining cabbage to make $\frac{1}{4}$ cup.

In a bowl, combine the chopped cabbage, pork or beef, rice, egg, green onions, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Using your hands, gently but thoroughly blend the ingredients. Divide the meat filling among the cabbage leaves. Fold the core end of each leaf over the filling, then fold in the sides and roll up the leaf. Set aside.

Preheat an oven to 325°F.

In a large Dutch oven over medium heat, cook the bacon, turning, until crisp, about 5 minutes. Drain on paper towels. Crumble the bacon; set aside.

Add the onion, celery and carrot to the pot and sauté over medium heat until the vegetables are tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in the caraway seeds, tomatoes, broth, raisins and vinegar. Place the cabbage rolls, seam sides down, in a single layer in the pan, spooning some of the liquid over them. Cover, transfer to the oven and bake until the cabbage rolls are tender and the filling is cooked through, 1 to 1½ hours.

Transfer the cabbage rolls to warmed bowls. Ladle the cooking juices over the top, garnish with the bacon and serve immediately. Serves 6 to 8.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Essentials of Slow Cooking*, by Melanie Barnard, Charles Pierce & Denis Kelly (Oxmoor House, 2008).

Braised Celery with Bread Crumb Topping

This recipe transforms ordinary celery into a delicious braised side dish that’s fantastic on a cold winter day. Be sure to remove the stringy fibers from the stalks so the celery will be very tender when cooked.

Preheat an oven to 325°F. Using about half of the butter, generously butter a large gratin dish or baking dish.

Separate the outer celery stalks (about 10) from the shorter, paler, tender stalks (the heart). Set the heart aside. Thoroughly rinse the outer stalks. Trim off any part of each stalk that branches into leaves and set aside with the heart. Using a paring knife or vegetable peeler, scrape the outside of each stalk to remove the fibrous strings that run its length. Cut the stalks into 3-inch lengths. Arrange them in a single layer in the prepared baking dish.

Finely chop the reserved celery heart, tops and leaves. In a fry pan over medium-high heat, melt the remaining butter. Add the shallots, thyme, and chopped celery heart, tops and leaves. Season with salt and pepper. Sauté until the vegetables are soft and golden, about 10 minutes. Add the wine and stock and simmer until reduced by half, about 8 minutes.

Pour the mixture over the celery stalks in the baking dish. Cover with aluminum foil and bake until the celery has collapsed and feels very tender when prodded with a knife tip, about 1 hour. Remove the baking dish from the oven and increase the oven temperature to 400°F. Sprinkle the cheese and bread crumbs over the celery. Return the dish to the oven and bake until the cheese is melted and the top is crusty and browned, about 10 minutes more. Serve immediately. Serves 4 to 6.

Williams-Sonoma Culinary Expert

Chicken Cacciatore

Cacciatore is Italian for “hunter.” Food prepared hunter-style traditionally includes mushrooms, onions, tomatoes and herbs. Our version of this classic dish also incorporates bacon, which lends a deep, smoky flavor to the sauce.

In a deep sauté pan over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the bacon and cook, stirring occasionally, until brown and crisp, about 5 minutes total. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to paper towels; set aside.

Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Add the chicken to the pan and brown on all sides, about 7 minutes. Transfer to a platter. Add the onion to the pan and cook until tender and translucent, about 3 minutes. Add the bacon, chicken, mushrooms, garlic, oregano, thyme, wine, stock and tomatoes and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer until the juices run clear when the chicken is pierced with a knife, about 40 minutes. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Williams-Sonoma Kitchen

Ingredients for Braised Celery with Bread Crumb Topping

3 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 large head celery, about 2 lb.

2 large shallots or 1 small yellow onion, finely minced

1½ tsp. finely chopped fresh thyme

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry white wine

1 cup chicken stock

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated Gruyère, or $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Gruyère and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

3 to 4 Tbs. fresh bread crumbs

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