

LIVE WELL WATERTOWN



Simple Beef Chili with Kidney Beans (based on Cook's Illustrated March-April 2003)

Ingredients:

- 2 T olive oil
- 2 medium onions, small dice (about 2 cups)
- 1 red pepper cut into ½ inch cubes
- 6 medium garlic cloves, minced (about 1 T)
- 1 rutabaga cut into ½ inch cubes (about 2 cups)*
- ¼ cup chili powder**
- 1 T ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp red pepper flakes
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- ½ tsp cayenne pepper (optional)
- 2 lbs lean ground beef
- 2 cans (16 oz each) dark red kidney beans***
- 1 can (28 oz) diced tomatoes with juice
- 1 can (28 oz) tomato puree
- salt

Directions for cooking:

1. Heat oil in large heavy bottomed soup pot over medium heat until shimmering but not smoking, 3-4 minutes. Add onions, bell peppers, garlic, rutabaga, chili powder and all herbs and spices; cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are softened and beginning to brown, about 10 mins. Remove vegetables from pot with a slotted spoon and set aside, leaving juice and oil behind.
2. Increase heat to medium-high and add beef; cook, breaking up into pieces with wooden spoon until no longer pink and just beginning to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Add vegetables back with beans, tomatoes, puree and ½ tsp salt. Bring to a boil then reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally for about 1 hour. Remove cover and continue to simmer 1 hour longer, stirring occasionally (if chili begins to stick to the bottom of the pot, stir in ½ cup water and continue to simmer), until beef is tender and chili is dark, rich and slightly thickened.

Chili is best made a day (or even up to 5 days) ahead as flavors meld and improve with age. Leftovers can be frozen for up to a month.

Simple Beef Chili continued:

Modifications to the original recipe made here:

* There is no rutabaga in the original recipe, but it adds volume and decreases calories somewhat. You can add other roots such as carrots, parsnips and/or turnips diced to this chili instead of or in addition to the rutabaga. This makes it less heavy and adds vegetables that take on the chili flavor.

** I substituted 2 T smoked Spanish Paprika and 1 T ground chipotle for the chili powder. These ingredients add a particular character to the flavor that I like. Smoked paprika can be made with hot or sweet peppers, I think the Spanish version is somewhere in the middle, and chipotle is hot but not terribly hot and also adds a smoky flavor.

*** Beans in this chili recipe are dark red kidney because as canned beans they will hold their shape and texture through the 2 hours of cooking. Other varieties of canned beans could turn to mush. What I used here was dried Vermont Cranberry beans that had, as per their package directions, been soaked overnight then boiled in new water until they are sort of soft but can still do some cooking in the chili.

Other comments:

Fresh peppers in summer from the Farmer's Market are much more flavorful than those you can purchase in winter, and they freeze very well. Just dice and freeze, that's it. Diced local peppers from your freezer also make a much tastier chili than just dicing those big juicy winter hothouse peppers, and they are less expensive if you plan ahead.

Garden tomatoes also have a lot of flavor for making winter soups like this chili, and they are simple to freeze in summer when they are plentiful. Just dice and freeze, that's it. They can be frozen in plastic bags, same with the peppers. If you've left the seeds and skin in (which you do if they are simply diced) then again you are adding fiber and nutrients to your chili.