



WELL SEASONED

BY SUZANNE PODHAIZER

Braised Beef Short Rib Borscht

I used coarse sea salt throughout the recipe, so adjust the amounts accordingly if you're using a different type of salt. I did the cooking in a heavy, stainless-steel-clad sauté pan that is 12 inches in diameter and 3 inches deep. Use something similar, or just slightly larger.



SPICE BLEND:

Mix up the spice blend before you start the rest of the cooking, or do it just after salting the beef. For ease, I made all the measurements equal, but if you particularly like or dislike one or more of these seasonings, tweak the amounts as you prefer.

1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1 teaspoon caraway seeds

1 teaspoon celery seeds

1 teaspoon dill seeds

1 teaspoon juniper berries

1 teaspoon mustard seeds

1 teaspoon salt

4 bay leaves

Whisk the spices in a small bowl.

BRAISED BEEF SHORT RIBS:

4 pounds or so of beef short ribs

2 teaspoons salt

2 tablespoons neutral oil appropriate for high heat, such as grapeseed or canola

1 pound onion, around 2 medium, or 1 super large

Your spice blend

1 can or tube tomato paste

1-quart chicken stock

1 tablespoon paprika or smoked paprika

5 large cloves garlic



Up to 30 minutes before you wish to start cooking, remove the ribs from their packaging and pat dry with paper towels. Sprinkle with salt, turning so that you season all sides. Let sit for a few minutes to dry out further, as this will help you get a nice sear.



Preheat the oven to 300°F. Place the sauté pan over medium-high heat, and let it get nice and hot. Just before you put in the meat, add the oil, wait until it shimmers, and then lift and turn the pan to coat the bottom.

Place the ribs in the pan with the fattiest of the two larger sides down. Sear until the meat takes on a rich, golden-brown hue, and releases easily from the pan when you lift it. Flip and cook on the other large side, looking for the same cues to know that it's ready. Then, turn the beef and sear all of the smaller edges, propping the meat against the side of the pan when needed. While the beef is cooking, dice the onion, open the tomato paste can, and smack each garlic clove with the side of a knife, slip off the peel, and cut into slices.

Reduce the heat to medium, and re-

move the pieces of beef to a plate. Immediately add the onion to the pan, stirring so that the moisture from the onion helps deglaze (scrape up the browned beefy deliciousness from) the pan. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are golden brown and fragrant. Mix in the spice blend and cook, stirring, until you can smell the spices starting to toast.

Stir the tomato paste into the onions and spices, and continue cooking until the tomato paste darkens slightly in color. Then, add the chicken stock, and stir or whisk to turn the whole mess into a sauce. Put the beef back into the pan, along with any juices that collected on the plate while it rested. Add the paprika and garlic.

Because acidic ingredients can cause aluminum foil to disintegrate, I make a pan-sized circle out of parchment paper and place it atop the ingredients before covering the vessel with foil. If your pan has a lid, that makes things easier.

After 90 minutes, check the meat, and flip the pieces. The braise should be done after around 3 hours. You want the meat to be tender enough that the bones can easily be slipped out. However, you can over-braise meat (it gets stringy and dry), so ideally, you want to catch it as soon as it reaches tenderness. Remove the pan from the oven, and put the meat into a bowl to rest while you finish the soup, covering the bowl with a towel or a plate so the beef doesn't dry out.



VEGGIE PREP:

Sometime within an hour of when you expect the beef to be ready, prep all of your vegetables. I leave peels on all of the roots. In nearly all cases, the peel is the most nutritious part of the vegetable, and in any case, they'll soften beautifully as the borscht cooks.

I prep the vegetables in different ways so that the finished soup has a variety of shapes and textures. Change the vegetable quantities and types as you desire.

- 1 ½ pounds red beet, diced**
- 1 pound green cabbage, sliced into 2-inch strips, but not with particular finickiness.**
- ½ pound carrots, cut into half-moons**
- ½ pound potatoes, diced**
- ½ pound turnips or rutabagas, shredded on the largest holes of a box grater**

ASSEMBLE THE SOUP:

- Prepared veggies**
- 1 quart chicken stock**
- 2 tablespoons vinegar, I used artisan beer malt vinegar, but red wine or cider vinegar would work well. Don't use distilled vinegar.**
- Salt, pepper, additional vinegar, and paprika to taste.**
- Any additional spices you desire.**

Place the hot-from-the-oven pan containing the beef braising liquid over medium heat and add your prepared veggies and the additional quart of chicken stock. The liquid should just cover all of the ingredients. Simmer until the vegetable cubes are tender and the shredded veggies have sort of melded



into the liquid, around 30 minutes.

Add the vinegar, and then season to taste with salt, pepper, additional vinegar, paprika, and other spices. Taste first, decide what the soup needs, and add little bits at a time until the flavor is full, enticing, and well-balanced. Borscht is traditionally a little bit sour, but make it so that you like it, whatever that means.

TO SERVE:

- Borscht**
- Braised beef ribs, chopped or pulled**
- Sour cream**

DILL

Spoon the borscht into bowls. Add some of the meat, dollop with sour cream, and sprinkle with dill.



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