

Mo's¹ Braised Short Ribs

This is a truly foolproof, ultimate comfort-food meal. Perfect in cooler weather. It can just as easily be featured as the main course of a fancy dinner for company as it can be served as a basic meal at the kitchen table for the whole family. Some say it's even better the second day, so make sure you make a bit extra for leftovers!

Prep time is only about ½ hour, but this is one of those “low and slow” dishes that requires braising for a solid 3 hours—although you just “set it and forget it” and it needs no further minding once it's in the oven.

The final interesting aspect of this recipe is that it is not sensitive in the least to any precise measurements or exact proportions. Simply adjust the actual quantities to suit the number of people you are serving, using nothing more than common sense. (C'mon—you know how much meat and veggies you'll put on your plate to eat...)

Ingredients:

Short Ribs (1-2 per person, depending on rib size and appetite)
Carrots (1-2 packages “fancy” peeled baby)
Onions (6 or so medium)
Celery (2 bunches, rinsed)
Garlic (1 head)
Bacon (1/8 lb. *smoked* slab, or 2-4 slices *smoked* thick cut)
Parsley (1 bunch fresh, preferably flat Italian parsley, but curly will do, too)
Tomato Paste (1 small can)
Salt (fine sea salt is best)
Whole Black Peppercorns (6-12)
Pepper (fresh ground is best)
Flour (2 tablespoons)

Optional:

Balsamic Vinegar (a tablespoon or so)
Dry Red Wine (1-2 cups)

You must use a relatively high-sided roasting pan for this dish with a tight-fitting lid. Alternatively, you can use a disposable aluminum roasting pan—such as one in which you would cook a turkey (although you may want to place it on a cookie sheet for strength).

¹ An endearing name my mother—who inspired me with her extraordinary chef skills—gave me from a young age.

- Preheat the oven to 350° F.
- Season the ribs generously with salt and pepper.
- Brown the ribs very well on all sides over high heat in a frying pan. You'll need to do this in small batches, so they're not too crowded in the pan. (If they're too crowded, they won't brown nicely.) Place them on a plate or platter when browned.

While the ribs are browning, do as much of the following as possible:

- Chop the celery stalks into about 1-inch lengths. Distribute in the roasting pan.
- Distribute the carrots in the roasting pan.
- Peel and quarter the onions. Distribute in the roasting pan.
- Rough chop a fistful of parsley. Distribute in the roasting pan.
- Crush, peel and rough chop 4-8 garlic cloves. Distribute in the roasting pan.
- Cut the bacon into cubes (lardons) and blanch them for 30 seconds in a small saucepan of boiling water. Drain and distribute them in the roasting pan.
- Mix half the can of tomato paste in a cup or small bowl with some hot tap water so that it pours easily, and pour it over the veggies in the roasting pan.
- Sprinkle a few whole black peppercorns and a bit of salt in the roasting pan.
- If you want, you can now sprinkle in a tablespoon or so of balsamic vinegar.
- Place the browned ribs on top of everything in the roasting pan, bone side down.
- If you want, add a cup or two of dry red wine. Then add just enough water to come 1/3 way up the side of the roasting pan. Or just use water if you're not using wine. (Don't worry, the liquid won't—and is not meant to—cover all the food.)

If using a flame-proof roasting pan: place on medium heat until the liquid just comes to a boil.

Cover and place in the preheated 350° F oven. After ½ hour, reduce the oven to 225° F, then let braise for 2 ½ hours more. Do not open the oven door or uncover, not even to take a peek!

If using a disposable aluminum roasting pan: Cover *very tightly* with aluminum foil and place in the preheated 350° F oven. After 1 hour, reduce the oven to 225° F, then let braise for 2 ½ hours more. Do not open the oven door or uncover, not even to take a peek!

When it's done—and you're about ready to die from how good it smells—take it out of the oven. Ladle out about 2 cups of the broth into a separator. (Separates the fat from the broth.) If you don't have a separator, ladle it out into a Pyrex (or equivalent) measuring cup or vessel that won't crack from the hot liquid, wait a minute or so for the fat to rise to the top and spoon it off. Re-cover the roasting pan to keep warm. Place the broth in a small saucepan and bring to a low boil. While boiling, very slowly sift in the flour (use a sifter to avoid lumps) while whisking the whole time. Whisk at the boil about 5 minutes or so, until the gravy thickens and just nicely coats the back of a spoon. Taste, and add salt if desired.

To plate: gently lift a rib or two out of the roasting pan and place on a dinner plate. (The meat will be falling off the bone; I usually gently separate the bones and put only the meat on the plate.) Using a slotted spoon, place some well-drained veggies on the plate. If you want a starch, extra-wide egg noodles are *perfect* with this dish (so remember to prepare them in time). Place the noodles on the plate. Then pour some gravy over to suit yourself. (Can be done tableside with a gravy boat.)

Eat and enjoy! Best served with a nice dry red wine (adults only, of course).