

Cooking con Clotilde Dec/Jan 05 (Holiday Edition)

STEWES

The most famous Spanish Caribbean stew is the legendary Cuban *Ropa Vieja*, which literally means "Old Clothes". Puerto Rico has its own *Carne Guisada* or stewed meat. The Dominican Republic has an incredible ox tail stew. *Ropa Vieja* is another dish that different people cook in different ways. The following recipe is my version, after which an unmarinated, traditional version follows.

La ropa vieja de Clotilde (Clotilde's Ropa Vieja)

Let the record show that I do not have any old clothes, since I get rid of anything I have not worn for awhile! However, this is my own marinated version of a dish I serve frequently when I am having a buffet supper with as many island dishes as I can load on a table. Of course, they always complement each other. This is another dish that works out well for the holiday table, since it can be prepared ahead of time.

For the beef

2 pounds Flank steak, marinated for 48 hours before serving in ¼ cup olive oil, 10 mashed garlic cloves, (in a mortar with a pestle) 1 tablespoon sea salt, 1 teaspoon ground pepper and ¼ teaspoon ground oregano in a non-reactive covered container or big Ziplok bag.

For poaching the meat

1 cup beef stock
1 carrot, chopped
2 onions, finely chopped
1 julienned green pepper

For the sauce

¼ cup olive oil
4 garlic cloves, finely minced
1 large onion, finely minced
1 green bell pepper, seeded and finely minced
½ cup tomato sauce
¼ cup dry white wine
¼ teaspoon ground oregano
sea salt to taste
2 teaspoons red wine vinegar
½ cup beef stock (saved from flank steak poaching)
¼ cup dry white wine
1 package defrosted peas
1 4 oz jar pimento strips

Instructions

1. 4 hours before serving, bring marinated meat to room temperature.
2. 3 hours before serving, in a large saucepan or caldero, boil flank steak in broth; add chopped carrot, chopped onions, minced garlic and minced red peppers. Reduce heat; cover and cook for 2½ hours.
3. Remove meat from caldero. Allow to come to room temperature (30 minutes). Shred by hand until you have the entire steak shredded. Set aside.

4. In the meantime, in a skillet heat olive oil, and sauté garlic, onion and julienned green pepper until translucent. Add tomato sauce and wine. Cook over medium heat for 5 minutes. Mix well.
5. Pour pimento jar contents into sauce. Add shredded meat and defrosted peas. Mix well. Serve over white rice.

Serves 6 – 8

Ropa Vieja II

This is the traditional Ropa Vieja recipe I promised you. See what you think of it. It comes straight from Cuba, from Doña Nitza Villapol, who has been interpreting Cuban cuisine for the past 40 years.

Ingredients

2½ lbs flank steak, cooked covered for 2 hours in 1 cup beef stock
¼ cup annatto (achiote) oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
6 garlic cloves, mashed
1 large bell pepper, julienned
1, 8 oz can tomato sauce
1 teaspoon salt
1 bay leaf
½ cup dry white wine
1 4 oz jar pimentos

Instructions

1. In a large saucepan or caldero, cook the flank steak over low heat, covered by 1 cup beef stock for 2½ hours. Allow meat to cool. Tear into shreds with your fingers. Set aside.
2. Slice onion and julienne pepper. In large saucepan or caldero, heat annatto oil and sauté garlic, onion and bell pepper. Add tomato sauce, salt, bay leaf, the shredded meat and the wine. Stir; cook for 20 minutes over low heat, stirring frequently. Add pimentos. Serve over white rice.

Serves 8

Carne Mechada

Carne mechada is a roast stuffed with ham, sausage and olives and cooked in its braising liquid. The symphony of herbal and spicy flavors makes it into an attractive party dish. You can make it with pork or beef, but I prefer veal, because it is lighter and easy to digest. This version of *carne mechada* is ideal for the holidays, since it can be made ahead of time and improves with age. This dish calls for a big red wine, such as a Chateaufeuf du Pape. White rice is a perfect side dish. Felicidades!

For the marinade

1/3 cup olive oil
3 tablespoons white wine vinegar
1 tablespoon *Adobo* seasoning™
½ tablespoon dried oregano
3 ½ pound boneless veal roast, seared in 1 tablespoon olive oil

For the stuffing

1/3 cup dried currants, soaked in 1/3 cup sherry

½ cup manzanilla olives, chopped
¼ pound smoked ham, diced (you may substitute pastrami)
1 chorizo, chopped (you may substitute veal sausage)
3 garlic cloves, finely minced

For the braising liquid

2 cups tomato sauce
2 cups beef broth
1/3 cup sherry from the marinated currants
1/3 cup basic recadito (a cilantro- parsley based condiment made by Goya TM and available at Latino markets and on the Internet)
Remaining stuffing
6 red potatoes, peeled and cut into pieces
Salt and pepper to taste

1. For the marinade, combine the olive oil, vinegar, *adobo* and oregano in a small, non-reactive bowl and season the meat with this mixture. With a sharp knife, cut an incision through the center of the meat.
2. Combine all of the stuffing ingredients. Stuff the meat, tie with strings, cover, and let stand for an hour at room temperature.
3. In a Dutch oven or *caldero*, heat olive oil over medium high heat and sear meat on all sides. Combine all of the braising ingredients. Add to the meat and bring to a boil.
4. Reduce the heat to a simmer. Cook, covered, for one hour. Add the potatoes and cook for 10 minutes, or until the potatoes are done. Let meat rest for 10 minutes before slicing and serving with the sauce.

Yield: 10-12 servings

Note: If you want to make fresh recadito (instead of using the Goya product, which comes in a jar), this is what you do.

Fresh recadito

½ medium yellow onion, diced
1 Italian frying pepper, seeded and diced
3 garlic cloves, peeled
3 sweet chili peppers (*aji dulce*), seeded and chopped
12 sprigs cilantro leaves, chopped
6 springs Italian flat parsley, chopped
1 tablespoon olive oil

1. In a blender or food processor, add one tablespoon oil to all the ingredients combined and mix well. Place in a jar, cover and refrigerate up to three days.
2. If you decide to mix the recadito in the old fashioned way, in a mortar, take the garlic, cilantro and parsley leaves, add the oil and grind to a coarse paste. Add other ingredients to the paste until well blended. Add to the braising liquid.

APPETIZERS

BACALAITOS FRITOS (Codfish Fritters)

You will find these fabulous codfish fritters all over the Spanish Caribbean; from roadside stands to formal dances and private homes, they are consumed with great gusto. They are easy to make and irresistible, which makes them ideal for the holiday season. Serve them with beer, cocktails, wine, whatever you want. *Bacalaitos* go with everything. The problem is that once you get started, you can't stop eating them.

Yield: Makes 70 *bacalaitos*

1/2 pound (1 1/2 cups) salted codfish
1 1/2 cups flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
3 cloves garlic, crushed
1/4 teaspoon ground dried oregano
1/8 teaspoon pepper
2 sweet peppers, seeded and crushed
2 cups water
1 teaspoon salt, if desired.
Vegetable oil for deep frying

1. Cut codfish in small pieces. Soak for 24 hours. Remove bones, shred fish. In a saucepan, bring to a boil. Discard liquid.
2. Mix flour, baking powder and water into a deep bowl. Mix well.
3. Add oregano, garlic, pepper, sweet peppers and shredded codfish to flour mixture. Let mixture rest for 15 minutes. If necessary, add salt.
4. Stir mixture before frying.
5. Heat oil (370 degrees on frying thermometer) in a deep fryer. Fry mixture by teaspoonfuls until golden.
6. Drain on white paper towels; serve hot as appetizers.

Mantecado de guayaba

For a different holiday treat, try making some guava ice cream and serve it with *Mantecaditos de Astorga*. Guava ice cream provides a change of pace from the traditional *flanes* and *cazuelas*. *Mantecaditos* complement the uniquely perfumed guavas, a cross between peaches and strawberries. This is another recipe that can be made ahead of time, so it frees you to do all those holiday chores before the last minute closes in.

2 1/2 pounds guavas
4 cups milk (Save out 1/4 cup to dissolve cornstarch and 1/2 cup to beat with the egg yolks)
1 1/2 cups heavy cream
1 3/4 cups sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
4 teaspoons cornstarch, dissolved in 1/4 cup milk
4 egg yolks, beaten lightly with 1/2 cup milk
6-8 drops red food coloring

1. Peel guavas with vegetable peeler. Cut peeled fruit in half and puree in a blender or food processor.
2. Strain fruit puree through cheesecloth, pressing with a wooden spoon to eliminate seeds. Measure two cups of puree. Set aside.
3. In a heavy saucepan, mix milk, cream, sugar, cornstarch dissolved in ¼ cup of milk, and egg yolks, beaten lightly with ½ cup of milk, stirring with a wooden spoon.
4. Bring mixture to a slow simmer while stirring, without letting it boil. Cook for 5 minutes, or until it coats a wooden spoon.
5. Remove from stove. Cool mixture, mix with the guava puree and add food coloring. Refrigerate mixture until cold.
6. Follow instructions for your ice cream machine. Freeze for two hours before serving.
7. Yield: Two quarts

DESSERTS

MANTECADITOS DE ASTORGA

These almond cookies are famous in Spain, where they originated centuries ago. The raisin-studded Caribbean version is what we have here. Both children and adults love them, and they are wonderful with ice cream.

Yields 12-20 balls for baking. I prefer to make small balls, but that is a matter of personal preference.

1/3 cup confectioners' sugar
1/4 cup butter at room temperature
1 teaspoon almond extract
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon. baking powder
12-20 raisins
Confectioners' sugar for sprinkling

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. In a medium bowl, mix butter with sugar and almond extract, using a wooden spoon.
3. Sift pre-measured flour with baking powder. Add gradually to sugar, using a wooden spoon.
4. With your hand, shape dough into individual balls the size of a marble. Set a raisin in the middle of each ball.
5. Place on an ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 350° F for 10 minutes. Sprinkle with confectioners' sugar. Cool and serve.