

Braised Lamb Shanks

This is a recipe that my dad and I have been sharing for years. We love to call and brag to each other when we've cooked it, knowing how delicious it is. It's really a treat to prepare and enjoy. I love this dish because the flavors are so complex that it can be paired with a variety of wines. It's also gorgeous when served and warms up the winter months. The herbs can be grown in your own garden, adding to the individuality of the meal. It's important to have a cast iron Dutch oven. A crockpot doesn't get the same results where this dish is concerned. Preparing the shanks and the braising liquid takes about an hour before they begin to slow cook. The total cooking time should be around 4 hours. Once the shanks are added you can work on something else-like opening wine.

My wine selections come from the Sierra Foothills. Mountain wines from gorgeous volcanic soils provide the richness and range that this dish deserves. I love Rhone blends because the unique combination of the varietals, predominately Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvedre, change over time with the food. The Rhone style blends give dried herb, black pepper, and cinnamon spice that dance with delicate aromatics of bright plum and pomegranate. Roasted meat aromas are usually characteristic of Syrah blends and lamb is a classic pairing of complimentary flavors.

Ingredients

1 cup all purpose flour
1 T cajun seasoning
4 large lamb shanks
salt and pepper
2 T olive oil
2 T butter
1.5 cups chopped strong yellow onion
3/4 cup chopped carrots
3/4 cup chopped celery
4 T minced garlic
2 plus cups El Dorado Syrah or Zinfandel
1 small can fire roasted chopped tomatoes
2 bay leaves
2 T fresh chopped parsley
1.5 T minced fresh rosemary leaves
2 sprigs fresh thyme
2 cups chicken broth
2 cups beef broth

Instructions

1. In shallow dish combine flour and cajun seasoning.
2. Season shanks liberally with salt and pepper, then dredge shanks in flour. Shake to remove excess.
3. In large Dutch oven heat olive oil and butter. When hot add the shanks. Do not crowd or they will steam. Cook until well browned on all sides. Remove and set aside shanks.
4. Add onions, carrots, and celery to pan, stirring to start the deglazing process. Cook until soft and caramelized around edges.
5. Add garlic. Cook for about a minute to bloom.
6. Add wine and bring to a boil stirring to deglaze pan. Reduce liquid by half.
7. Add tomatoes and bay leaves. Cook for about a minute.
8. Add parsley, rosemary, thyme, chicken broth, beef broth and shanks. Reduce to simmer, season with salt and pepper, cover tightly and cook turning meat occasionally until meat is tender. Cook at least 2 -3 hours. The meat should just fall off the bone.
9. Remove the shanks and keep warm. Keep sauce in warm pan. Serve the shanks with the sauce over polenta, mashed potatoes or homemade pasta.

