

Vietnamese Beef Stew with Lemongrass and Star Anise

Serves 4-6 as an entrée

Just like American beef stew, every Vietnamese cook has their own je ne sais quois for making bo kho. This is my version, with ingredients you can track down at your run-of-the-mill grocery store.

Adapted from The Red Boat Fish Sauce cookbook

For the Stew

3 pounds beef chuck roast steak, cut into 1 ½ inch cubes
2 teaspoons sea salt, divided
3 tablespoons neutral oil, divided
3 yellow onions, diced
3 stalks of lemongrass, minced
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoon fresh ginger, minced
1 tablespoon tomato paste or ketchup
1 tablespoon five-spice powder
2 star anise pods
1 small cinnamon stick
2 bay leaves
1 quart coconut water
1 tablespoon of rock sugar or maple syrup
6 large carrots, cut into 1-inch pieces
Good quality fish sauce, to taste

For Serving

1 cup Thai basil or spearmint leaves, shredded to a chiffonade
1 lime, cut into six wedges
Crusty bread or cooked rice noodles

Instructions

1. Mix the cubed beef with the sea salt.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a large pot over medium heat. Working in batches, sear the beef on all sides, transferring to a platter for later. Note: This is probably going to get messy, so have a splatter cover ready, or wear an apron.
3. In the same pan, add the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil and add in the onions and the remaining teaspoon of sea salt. Sauté for 5-7 minutes, or until they're just browning.
4. Add the minced lemongrass, garlic, ginger, five-spice powder, and tomato paste or ketchup. Cook until the mixture is fragrant (About 2-3 minutes.)
5. Add in the seared beef, star anise pods, cinnamon stick, bay leaves, coconut water, rock sugar or maple syrup, and an additional 2 quarts of water. Bring to a boil, skim for impurities, and then reduce to medium low. Cover the pot and simmer for 2 1/2 hours, stirring occasionally.
6. Using a strainer or slotted spoon, remove the beef onto a platter or bowl (It's okay if some stray onions or lemongrass are clinging to the meat). Discard the star anise pods, cinnamon stick, and bay leaves.
7. Using an immersion blender, puree the liquid until smooth. (You can do this in an upright blender, you'll just have to work in batches and have some extra bowls on hand.) Add the beef back into the pot, as well as the onions. Bring up to a boil again and then reduce the meat to medium-low. Simmer for another 30 minutes.
8. Adjust for seasoning, adding additional fish sauce to suit your palate.
9. Serve the stew in bowls, accompanied with a chunk of crusty bread or ladled over noodles. Garnish with the Thai basil and/or mint and wedges of lime.

Notes

- If you can't find five-spice powder, you can substitute for Madras curry powder. The flavor will be different, but still good.
- If you're having trouble tracking down fresh lemongrass and don't have a dairy allergy, try prepared lemongrass paste, available at most grocery stores in the fresh herbs section.