

Chili de chanco con manzanas invisibles
(Pork chili with disappearing apples)
by the Humble Chef

What you'll need

Ingredients

1/2 cup of water (boiling)
About 3lbs. boneless Boston butt (pork), cut into ~1" chunks (starting from 3.5 lbs, trimming excess fat)
1.5 lb. ground pork
6 strips thick-cut bacon (applewood-smoked is nice, here) cut crosswise into 1/2" lardons
3 dried ancho peppers
3 dried guajillo peppers
3 dried cascabel peppers
3 chipotle chiles in adobo sauce, minced
(It may be possible to make substitutions in the chile peppers)
2 tbsp ground cumin
1/2 tsp cayenne
3 bay leaves, crumbled
2 tbsp dried oregano
1 tsp ground coriander
1/4 tsp ground cloves
1/4 tsp ground ginger
1.5 tsp freshly-ground black pepper
1.5 tsp ground cinnamon
2 medium-to-large onions, diced or minced (somewhere toward the fine end of that)
4-6 cloves of garlic, minced (or through a garlic press)
1 red bell pepper, cut about as fine as the onions
2 bottles of Paulaner Salvator, Tröegs Tröegenator, or similar amber Doppelbock
1 14.5-oz. can of fire-roasted diced tomatoes (or crushed if you prefer)
3-4 Granny Smith (or other baking) apples, cored and peeled and cut into 1/2" chunks (about a pound, before coring, etc.)
2 tbsp cider vinegar
1 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp tomato paste
1 tbsp chili sauce
2 tbsp lime juice
Tabasco sauce
Salt
Freshly-ground black pepper
{If desired, 3 tbsp corn starch and 3 tbsp water, mixed to form slurry}

1 ½ tsps pork (or chicken) soup base (e. g., Better Than Boullion), in enough boiling water to dissolve

Equipment

A water kettle (or some other way to boil water)

A Dutch oven or a soup pot big enough to cook the chili in, at least 7 quarts

A stick blender and/or food processor

What you'll do

1. Preheat oven to 350 F. Place all the dried peppers on a baking sheet and bake for ~5 minutes, or until you can really smell them. Tear the dried peppers in half, remove seeds and large ribs, coarsely chop. Mince the chipotles. Puree in ½ cup water. Add cumin, cayenne, coriander, bay leaves, and oregano to make a paste. Set aside.

2. Preheat the oven to 300 F. Season the pork chunks generously with salt.

3. In the pot you're going to make the chili in, cook the bacon over medium-low heat until fat is rendered and bacon is crisp, probably not more than 10 minutes. Remove bacon to paper-towel-lined plate. Remove bacon fat to small bowl or heat-proof measuring cup (which will be easier to pour from).

4. Increase heat to medium-high. Cook the ground pork, then set aside; remove rendered fat from pot. Working in batches, brown the pork chunks, adding bacon fat as necessary. Reserve all the pork in a bowl and set aside.

5. Lower heat to medium. Add 3 tbsp of bacon fat to the pot, then saute the onions and red pepper until softened, maybe 5-6 minutes. Add garlic and saute until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add chile mixture and saute until fragrant, maybe 2-3 minutes.

6. Add bacon and pork. Add lime juice, tomato paste, chili sauce, soy sauce, vinegar, tomatoes, adobo sauce, beer, cinnamon, black pepper, cloves, ginger, and apples. Dissolve soup base in just enough boiling water, and add that. Stir to combine.

7. Bring to boil, then cover and place in oven and cook for ~2 hours, stirring every hour, or until meat is tender and apples have broken down and dissolved and juices are dark and rich and starting to thicken.

8. If desired, add cornstarch slurry. (We haven't needed to, ever, cooking it on the stovetop or in the oven.)

9. Adjust seasonings with generous amounts of salt, black pepper, and Tabasco sauce. Serve in bowls drizzled with crema and topped with shredded cheese and maybe chopped cilantro.

Note: You could probably prepare this in a slow-cooker, if that was the only chili-friendly pot you had that was big enough (or if you needed the stove for other things). What you'd probably want to do is perform steps 3-5 in something like a skillet or saute pan, moving the pork in step 4 to the slow-cooker as it browned. Once everything was in the slow-cooker, you'd cook it for ~2 hours on high or ~4 on low, or until done. Since you'd need to cover the pot (because that's how slow-cookers roll) you'd be more likely to need the cornstarch slurry (the chili thickens up fine on the stove, simmering uncovered, or in the oven likewise uncovered).

You can also do the main cooking, once all the ingredients are in, in a 325F oven, stirring every hour or so, until the chli is done. This is how we cook it these days.