



PIMENTO CHILLI (CHILE Y PIMIENTO CON CARNE)

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Chilli con carne (literally chilli with meat in Spanish) is the official state dish of Texas and is heavily influenced by its neighbour, Mexico and is similar in many ways to the traditional Mexican mole; a sauce made with chillies, spices and bitter chocolate which is generally poured over meat. Although purists will insist that a chilli con carne should only contain meat in a chilli sauce with no tomatoes or beans, our recipe is a version more familiar to most of us; it combines the fiery heat of red chilli flakes and the fresh fruity flavours of red chillies and pimentos with the more complex smoky flavour notes of the dried chipotle and ancho chillies.

Pimentos (or pimientos) (*genus: Capsicum, species: Capsicum annum, cultivar: Pimento*) are closely related to the red bell pepper (or capsicum) and are mild and sweet red chilli peppers; if brined pimentos are unavailable for this recipe, red peppers can be substituted either grilled or roasted (until black), peeled, diced and added as below in lieu of the pimentos or diced raw and added to the vegetables to cook.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 4 - 6

For the spice mix

- 1 dried chipotle (smoked jalapeño) chilli, finely chopped
- 1 tsp dried ancho chilli flakes
- ½ tsp dried red chilli flakes
- 2 tbsp chilli powder (mild or hot depending on taste)
- ½ tbsp paprika
- ½ tbsp smoked paprika
- 1 tbsp dried oregano
- ½ tbsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp garlic granules
- 1 tsp celery salt
- 1 cinnamon stick or ¼ tsp ground

For the vegetable base

- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 medium onions, finely diced
- 1 medium carrot, finely diced
- 1 stick celery, finely diced
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 large red chillies, halved & shredded
- 2 tbsp tomato purée

For the beef

- 2 tbsp beef dripping or vegetable oil
- 750g chuck steak, finely chopped or minced
- 125ml red wine
- 750ml beef stock
- 1 tbsp black treacle
- Salt & freshly ground black pepper
- 400g (1 can) chopped plum tomatoes
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 tsp Worcestershire sauce

To finish

- 250g (1 x 400g can) brined pimento peppers, drained & cut into 1cm dice
- 50g dark chocolate (70%), chopped
- 720g (3 x 400g tins) drained, cooked beans e.g. kidney, cannellini, borlotti, black eye, flageolet or a mixture of various

To serve

- Spiced potato wedges or boiled rice
- Tortilla chips (optional)
- Sour cream & sliced chillies

METHOD

For the spice mix

- In a small bowl, mix together the chipotle chillies, ancho chillies, dried chilli flakes, chilli powder, paprika, smoked paprika, dried oregano, cumin, garlic granules, celery salt and cinnamon stick (or ground cinnamon).

For the vegetable base

- Heat the vegetable oil in a casserole over a medium heat and add the onions, carrot and celery; sweat gently, stirring occasionally to ensure even cooking, for approximately 10 minutes until the vegetables are soft but without any colour.
- Add the garlic and chopped red chillies; continue to cook for a few minutes until the garlic has softened. Add the tomato purée, stir well and cook, stirring frequently for 5 minutes. Set the vegetable base to one side in the casserole.



For the beef

- Heat the dripping or vegetable oil in a large frying pan until very hot and add the beef, season with salt and freshly ground black pepper and fry until well browned and starting to caramelise.
- Turn the heat to medium, stir in the spice mix; cook for a couple of minutes stirring constantly, until fragrant. Pour in the red wine and simmer until absorbed by the meat and almost completely reduced, ensuring that the base is scraped with a wooden spoon or spatula to remove any residue stuck to the pan.
- Add the beef stock and black treacle, bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 15 minutes until the liquid has reduced by approximately one quarter.

To cook

- Stir the chopped tomatoes, bay leaf, and Worcestershire sauce into the casserole along with the contents of the frying pan; bring to a very gentle simmer, cover with a lid and cook, stirring occasionally to prevent the sauce from catching on the bottom of the saucepan, for approximately 2½ hours until the sauce has thickened (if the sauce becomes too thick stir in a little water). Alternatively, the casserole can be covered with a lid and placed in a preheated oven at 140°C.

To finish & serve

- Remove the lid from the casserole, stir in the diced pimentos, chopped chocolate and the beans; continue to simmer gently for a further 20 - 30 minutes. Check the seasoning adding salt and freshly ground black pepper as required.
- Ladle into bowls with spiced potato wedges or rice, spoon over a little sour cream (and/or grated cheese if preferred); serve tortilla chips on the side.

