

Beef Rendang

Serves 2

Years ago I went looking for a rendang recipe on the Web. I found Indonesian rendangs, Malaysian rendangs and even a Singaporean rendang. Of the many recipes I found, most weren't even remotely alike and none really got me terribly excited. Not to be defeated, I made up my own recipe by taking what I thought were the best bits from each one. So, like my Thai Green Curry, my Beef Rendang is not what you would call "authentic". But, my goodness, it has character. It's like an old English stew on steroids!

The rendang hails from the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The famous Indonesian cookery writer, Sri Owen, tells us that a rendang not curry-like at all. She explains that an authentic rendang is cooked for a very long period of time until it is almost black and quite dry although the meat still remains succulent from all the cooking juices which it has absorbed. My recipe is nothing like Sri Owen's either as mine definitely is curry-like. It has plenty of thick sauce flavoured with the typical curry spices of coriander, cumin and turmeric.

One thing that unites all versions of the rendang is that they are hot, sweet and sour. The heat comes from dried red chillies, the sweet from coconut milk and raw sugar and the sour from tamarind and lemon. At least, that's where the hot, sweet and sour come from in my recipe. Others may differ.

ingredients

340g rump steak – trimmed weight (450g untrimmed)

1 × 2.5ml spoon groundnut oil to fry the steak

plus...

2 × 15ml spoons groundnut oil for the main pan

4 – 8 whole dried red Birdseye chillies (sometimes sold as "small extra-hot chillies")

a piece of cassia bark about 7mm × 40mm

1 dried bay leaf

1 medium sized red onion – finely chopped

1 × 5ml spoon finely grated ginger

2 cloves garlic – crushed to a pulp in a garlic press

1 × 5ml spoon ground coriander

1 × 5ml spoon ground cumin

1 × 5ml spoon turmeric

200ml tinned coconut milk

1 × 5ml spoon anchovy paste

finely grated zest of 1 lemon

5 grinds black peppercorns
1 × 5ml spoon dark, unrefined sugar (e.g. muscovado)
1 × 5ml spoon tamarind concentrate
an additional 4 × 15ml spoons coconut milk
lemon juice (to taste)
finely chopped fresh coriander leaf and fine stalks to garnish

special equipment

a non-stick frying pan at least 22cm in diameter at the base

method

1. You will need to buy more than the 340g of steak that you want to end up with. I have found that about you need about $\frac{1}{3}$ more which means you need to buy about 450g of steak to get 340g of useable meat after you have removed the fat and sinew.
2. Trim the steak of most of its fat (leave on a little for extra taste) and all the tough, sinewy bits. Cut the steak into bite-sized pieces. I prefer long, narrow strips myself but squares are fine.
3. Heat 1 × 2.5ml spoon oil in a non-stick frying pan over high heat and toss the pieces of steak in the oil until they begin to brown. If your steak drops a lot of liquid then boil it off rapidly and begin the frying once the liquid has evaporated otherwise your steak will just stew in the juice. Remove the steak from the frying pan and set aside in a bowl.
4. Heat 2 × 15ml spoons groundnut oil in a 20cm heavy bottomed pan over a medium/high heat.
5. Add the small whole chillies (4 =medium; 8 = hot), cassia bark and bay leaf and heat for 30 seconds or until the chillies have swollen up.
6. Reduce the heat to medium and add the finely chopped onion. Stir-fry the onion and spices for about 4 minutes.
7. Now add the grated ginger (don't forget to pour in any leftover ginger juice) and the crushed garlic. Stir fry for 2 minutes. Reduce the heat a little if the garlic is in danger of burning.
8. Reduce the heat to low and add the ground coriander, cumin and turmeric and stir fry for about 30 seconds or until the spices are nicely aromatic.
9. Add the reserved steak and all the juices that have gathered in the bowl. Stir to coat the pieces of steak with the spicy mixture.
10. Pour 200ml coconut milk into the pan together with the anchovy paste, lemon zest, black pepper, sugar and tamarind concentrate. Stir to mix so the anchovy paste and tamarind concentrate are completely dissolved. Don't worry about the "fishy" smell that will be coming from the warmed anchovy paste. The smell soon fades and eventually becomes a pleasant salty flavour.

11. Bring the liquid to the boil and simmer for 35 minutes. Stir the sauce from time to time, scrape off all the sauce from the sides of the pan and incorporate it back into the liquid. If the sauce gets too thick before the end of the cooking add a little boiling water to loosen the sauce so it can keep simmering away.
12. Now add the additional coconut milk and bring the sauce back to a simmer. Taste the sauce and add a little lemon juice if the sauce tastes too "heavy". You shouldn't need any salt because the anchovy paste is quite salty enough.
13. Simmer gently for a further 10 minutes (i.e. the steak should have 45 minutes simmering in all). The sauce should now be thick but still fluid.
14. Serve the rendang in a warmed serving dish garnished with finely chopped coriander.
15. The cassia bark and bay leaf should be removed before serving but any chillies left whole can be eaten if you wish. Watch out though – they are still very, very hot!



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