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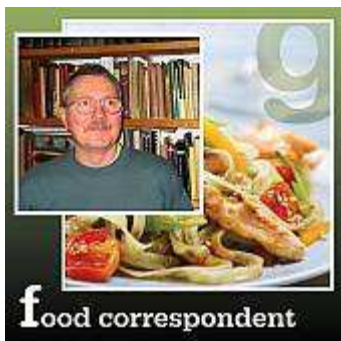
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RICHARD FRISBIE :: Braising Dinner

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Tags: [braising](#), [richard frisbie](#), [slow cooked](#), [braised](#), [meat](#), [frugal](#), [gather food correspondent](#), [hope farm press](#), [gourmet magazine](#)



I knew I'd been fixated on frugal, slow-cooked dinners, particularly braised meats, even to the point of mentioning ropa vieja in a November [article on the truffle dinner](#) at Barbettas. I just didn't know I was leading a trend.

The February '09 issue of [Gourmet magazine](#) is a braising issue, with recipes and techniques to make braising easy for everyone. This is timely, because braising - either in the oven or on top of the stove - renders cheaper cuts of beef and pork tender and delicious. You can even braise poultry and whole fish. Given the difficult economic times, who wouldn't want to learn how to turn less expensive roasts into moist, juicy delicacies? No wonder it's popular now!



an oven-proof dish holding sliced braised beef smothered in Hungarian Paprika sauce

Slow baking at low temperatures, or braising, dissolves the fat, sinew and connective tissue, the tough parts of cheaper meats, leaving even the coarsest-grained roast fork-tender. Critical to success is the liquid it is braised in. The idea is to create an environment in which meat cooks slowly, losing much of its moisture and, as slowly, regaining a mixture of the rich flavored moisture from the pan. The braising liquid can be as simple as broth, beer or wine, but is best when a "sofrito" of chopped sautéed vegetables is added to the pan to develop the complex flavor for the meat to absorb.

You'll need a "Dutch oven" style pan, something that can be tightly sealed, or use aluminum foil to contain and condense the

evaporating liquid. A crock pot is also effective, but I prefer a covered pan in the oven. You can brown the meat in it, sauté the sofrito in it, and bake in it - true one-pot cooking!



A **sofrito** is simply a sauté of vegetables that is the base for many soups and sauces. It can be as simple as finely chopping a red onion, a carrot and a celery stalk, then sautéing until soft and translucent in good olive oil. It can also have a pepper, a tomato and various seasonings stirred in. The Hungarian recipe I tried from Gourmet didn't have garlic or celery, but the sofrito, or *Iesco* as it is known in Hungarian, could have. The idea is to create a rich flavorful vegetable base from which to build your meal, so after following the recipe once to learn the taste, don't hesitate to add ingredients you think should be there.

Braising can also be accomplished on top of the stove. After bringing the liquid to an initial boil, a slow simmer - on my wood-fired kitchen range that means a "back of the stove" position - for 3 hours or so will return the same result. The oven offers the benefit of surrounding the pan with a steady heat, one I feel more comfortable walking away from.



My only confusion with the Gourmet's articles is that all the recipes seem to call for braising at 350 degrees, when all the available literature I'm aware of (my cookbook library) refers to an ideal temperature of 275 degrees. I ignored the increased temperatures as I made the meals, (350 degrees is not slow cooking!) and extended the cooking time as needed. The key to "doneness" is when a fork can pierce the roast with no resistance. After a few attempts you'll find the correct braising time. Until then, perform the fork test until you know your meat

is done.

Some recipes call for browning the meat first - in fact - most do. But one, in the cookbook [CLEAN FOOD](#), Chef Ric Orlando's *ropa vieja* calls for the meat to be cut into "fist-sized" chunks and brought to a boil before simmering for 2-3 hours. I can attest to the ease and excellence of his recipe - a recipe that, he says, "creates the most ordered item on my menu." So, while browning will bring out a richer color and complex flavors, especially when the pan is deglazed with the braising liquid, (or you are only using one pan) it can be eliminated. **(But don't do it!)**



Braised meals are best served the second day. It allows time to de-grease the liquid and for all the flavors to really come together. I know, I know - TWO DAYS! Think of it this way. It's barely a half hour of active cooking. While you have a kitchen surface messy with tonight's dinner prep, chop tomorrow's vegetables too. Then, while tonight's dinner is in the oven, brown the roast and make the sofrito. Put it in the oven when dinner comes out and then sit down to eat. Take the braised roast out of the oven 3 hours later and let it cool. Voila! Tomorrow's dinner is basically done (see **NOTE** below.)

This dinner was inspired by the Gourmet article and a fantastic beef sale. The locally owned grocery store I frequent offered a beef shoulder roast for \$1.97 lb.. Gourmet's recipe called for veal shanks. Since the intent of this article is to use a basic cooking technique to make a cheap cut of meat palatable, I saw no need to buy expensive veal!

Braised Hungarian Paprika Roast

In a Dutch oven, brown on all sides a 4 lb roast in ¼ cup olive oil. Remove roast.

Chop, then sauté one onion and three Hungarian peppers in pan. Add a bay leaf and one tsp salt. When vegetables are soft, pour in 2 cups dry white wine and bring to a boil, stirring frequently. Add a 14.5 oz can of diced tomatoes and return to boil. Add 3 cups of low sodium Chicken broth and return to boil. Remove from heat, sprinkle over the surface and stir in 2 Tbs paprika (not hot) and return the roast to the pan. Liquid should come about halfway up the side of the meat. Put in a preheated oven at 275 degrees and cook tightly covered for approximately 3 hours. Fork test for doneness.

NOTE: When fork tender, cool, cover and refrigerate. One, two or three days later remove the congealed fat, remove the roast and set the pan on a moderate heat, mixing ¼ cup of sour cream (low fat is OK, fat free is not) into the braising liquid as it warms. Slice the cold roast and arrange in a shallow pan. Pour in warm braising liquid and heat through gently. Reserve the remaining liquid for passing with noodles, boiled potatoes or rice. Beets, steamed and buttered broccoli and carrots go beautifully with this meal. I opened a large bottle of Pinot Grigio and used 2 cups for the braise, leaving the rest to serve with dinner.

The **GOOD NEWS** is I was left with a cup of very tasty sauce to use with leftovers, or with another meal.

Richard Frisbie, FOOD Correspondent:

RICHARD FRISBIE is published twice a month to Gather Essentials: Food. It is a food junkie's take on growing, raising, preparing and - above all else - eating food. Together we'll explore the trends, addictions, equipment and regional specialties that make up the sometimes mundane and sometimes sublime cooking and dining experience. You can keep up with my other postings and Gather activity by joining my Gather network -- I look forward to hearing from you.

You can read all of my articles <http://rfrisbie.gather.com/> or find them with those of the other Food Correspondents, plus celebrity chef content and plenty of other Foodies at <http://foodtalk.gather.com>

BIO - Richard Frisbie writes culinary travel articles, is a columnist for his local newspapers, and is a regular contributor to the many Hudson Valley, Catskill Mountain and other regional New York publications. Online, he writes frequent articles for EDGE publications, GoNomad and Travel Lady, as well as Gather.

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Comments: 38

[Dena A.](#) Jan 21, 2009, 1:37pm EST

WOW .. this looks so yummy! Your not helping me ya know! I'm sitting at work and can't leave and I am hungry!!!! I will just have to daydream that I am eating some of this.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 21, 2009, 1:37pm EST

The cover article in Gourmet is for breads and biscuits - slow cooking a braised dinner would allow plenty of time for some of these great recipes to rise and bake - ummm Good!

[Katie Scarlett \(Site Bouncer Wanna Be\) O.](#) Jan 21, 2009, 1:59pm EST

You brought me in here with your initial comment about ropa vieja (a loved traditional dish here), then you mentioned sofrito, and lucky me, I get to leave with what looks like a fantastic recipe for the Hungarian Paprika Beef. It looks and sounds wonderful. Great article and photos, Richard.

[Nellie \(is getting ready to kick a.....\)](#) Jan 21, 2009, 2:13pm EST

yummmm

[Aaron Lazar, \(author of LeGarde Mysteries\)](#) Jan 21, 2009, 2:35pm EST

Excellent, Richard. Thanks so much. I plan to try this soon!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 21, 2009, 2:36pm EST

Katie - Cooks illustrated Dec issue had Hungarian stew, and then Feb Gourmet has Veal Paprika - it was just time to make a traditional Hungarian braised dinner. AND - it is a good recipe. Gourmet fusses a bit more for the veal than I do for the beef. The nice thing - in the Cooking Class section they do a pilsner braised beef roast as a one pot meal. With the bread/biscuit recipes, this is a good issue to own (or view online! Enjoy!

[Katie Scarlett \(Site Bouncer Wanna Be\) O.](#) Jan 21, 2009, 2:41pm EST

Thanks Richard, I'll definitely take a look at it. I used to make Hungarian Veal Paprikash years ago, but no more. My husband hates veal. But beef, yes, can do!

[Sophie S.](#) Jan 21, 2009, 3:18pm EST

Never braised meat before--I don't think so, at least. Going to give this a try though.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 21, 2009, 3:55pm EST

Sophie - if you've ever made pot roast or stew, you've basically braised meat. Putting in a pot in the oven for 3 hours or so is just easier. FYI - the meat "pulls" nicely, too. Closer to summer I'll post a dynamite recipe for cole slaw that would go well with a pulled pork shoulder. YUM!

Katie - I love paprika - smoked, hot and sweet - so the Hungarian angle appealed to me. Enjoy!

[Ina ♥♥](#) Jan 21, 2009, 4:06pm EST

I always thought braised meat sounded delicious, even though I didn't know what braising was. It just sounded so *gourmet*.

Then, I read your article and realize that I've been braising meat for about 20 years and didn't even know it.

No wonder my roasts always taste so good and are so tender!

[Kimberly Ripley](#) Jan 21, 2009, 4:24pm EST

Sounds perfect to eat on a cold day like this!

Warren's is exactly a ten minute drive from my house, and if you came in by way of the traffic circle you were within shouting distance!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 21, 2009, 4:41pm EST

Yup, Kimberly, I did the circle. Brother and sister-in-law showed up from Goodwin Road in Elliot - also about 10 mins away. It was the last chance to see them before July - Family is important! AND about braising - I'm having leftovers tonight!

Ina - see that - you're a gourmet! Saying Braised instead of pot roast, or stew, is the same as saying "chipped beef on toast" instead of SOS (well, close, anyway:)

[Elaine M.](#) Jan 21, 2009, 5:49pm EST

I like your wait-two-days rule--works great for soups, too. I "taste" my cooking with my sense of smell a lot, and I find I can't really appreciate the final results very well when I have been smelling food cooking for a whole day. It is so much more enjoyable the 2nd or third day, when my nasal "palette" has cleared out.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 21, 2009, 6:04pm EST

Yes, Elaine - I often hear "I've been smelling that all day. I don't want to eat it tonight." when I get home after a days work to tend a crock pot meal. I'll cool and refrigerate meals for another day if the house wasn't empty all day.

[Terri V.](#) Jan 21, 2009, 6:08pm EST

Looks really good

[Dorine H.](#) Jan 21, 2009, 7:28pm EST

Braised dishes are such comfort this time of year!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 22, 2009, 11:18am EST

Thanks Terri - I had it for dinner (leftovers) on rice (with gingered carrots) last night, too. It just gets better and better. I froze the last of it for a lunch some snow day.

Hey Dorine - Hope you are feeling well. Thanks for stopping by - and, yes - with the temp below zero most nights this comfort food really hits the spot!

[Sophie S.](#) Jan 22, 2009, 4:04pm EST

Oh, I do that all the time then. But nothing I make looks that good.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 22, 2009, 4:22pm EST

Sophie - I simply sliced the cold roast, used an immersion blender on the liquid in the pot, then poured it over the meat. Chopped celery leaves give it texture and depth while offering a nice color contrast - that's it.

[Linda K.](#) Jan 22, 2009, 4:52pm EST

Richard, this looks wonderful. What do Hungarian peppers look like? I'm sure I've seen them but I don't remember. Did you use the smoked paprika?

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 22, 2009, 5:08pm EST

Hi, Linda. The Hungarian peppers look much like Cubanelle peppers. OK - they are pale green, long (but not skinny) and mildly hot. Our local Hannaford has 10 or so varieties of peppers to choose from. I REALLY like smoked paprika. It is definitely not Hungarian, but I did use 1 Tbs sweet and 1 Tbs smoked paprika in the recipe.

[Ms. Meacham: Money Maven](#) Jan 22, 2009, 5:16pm EST

You trend setter you!! ;) Braising is a fabulous, low-cost way to bring out the best flavors in many meats. Great post **Richard**; it's now featured at the [Frugal Eats group](#). Thank you so much for the submission.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 22, 2009, 6:09pm EST

Thanks Ms. Meacham!

[David C.](#) Jan 24, 2009, 5:04am EST

yes, braising is a great method, which I've been getting into a lot this winter. Just did a nice pork shoulder braise the other day in fact.

[Madame Donna C.](#) Jan 24, 2009, 2:31pm EST

Good information and a flavorful recipe, Richard! Last summer one of my online friends sent me a beautiful Hungarian cookbook. You've inspired me to try more of those recipes in addition to yours too.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 24, 2009, 2:40pm EST

Ah, Madame - Hungarian food is so good. Lucky you.

[Kathryn E.](#) Jan 24, 2009, 2:42pm EST

Great tips! I made a great chicken soup in the slow cooker, and will now try a beef stew...

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 24, 2009, 2:48pm EST

Hi Kathryn - perfect (below zero) weather for stew! The slow cooker works for this, but I always like it better in the oven (shrug) I don't know why. Good Luck!

[M. Bradley McCauley McCauley](#) Jan 25, 2009, 9:57am EST

You sure know how to make a gal want to get into the kitchen. Also, after doing some family research, I learned that I have a Hungarian background. My grandfather was born in Palanka in the German area of Palanka. I wondered why I was such a fan of paprika. I look forward to more of your recipes.

[M. Bradley McCauley McCauley](#) Jan 25, 2009, 9:59am EST

The key to "doneness" is when a fork can pierce the roast with no resistance--is that what my mom meant when I would ask her how long to cook something and she'd tell me, "till it's done."?

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 25, 2009, 1:30pm EST

Mary - that's why I like the old cookbooks. The directions would say something like "cook in a hot oven until done" I like your Mom's directions. You certainly wouldn't want to cook it much more or much less, would you?

Hungarian food is so good, you have great roots!

[Edward Leavitt](#) Jan 27, 2009, 8:46am EST

Looks good enough to eat!

[Amanda "middle of nowhere" C.](#) Jan 27, 2009, 6:25pm EST

I think 350 degrees is to warm, too. The meat won't get very tender.

Thanks for your advice on handling rainy days and Mondays. Maybe I'll have a glass of wine. I'm not a regular drinker, so it doesn't take much.

[Sandra T.](#) Jan 29, 2009, 2:17am EST

Thanks for posting to Gather Recipe Review! I still think it sounds great.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 29, 2009, 10:36am EST

Thanks Edward - it was!

Amanda - wine is better than a knife!

It was, Sandra - thanks!

[Mariana T.](#) Jan 29, 2009, 12:15pm EST

The braising liquid can be as simple as broth, beer or wine, but is best when a “sofrito” of chopped sautéed vegetables is added to the pan to develop the complex flavor for the meat to absorb.

What a wonderful article and I can certainly learn so much from hanging around you my friend. I commented back to your comment by the way! Anyway, I always love your presentations. I think I've convinced a friend of mine to join Gather - he wants to join my group - lol but I'm going to send him to your area right away - he loves to eat - is a pianist for SF Ballet Co. and is a close friend since childhood...He'll be spinning his wheels! Salud

[Mariana T.](#) Jan 29, 2009, 12:17pm EST

Do you need my address to send that Winter Doldrum part invitation? Salud

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 29, 2009, 12:19pm EST

Thanks Mariana - tell him I'm on the board of our local music concert series - Saugerties Pro Musica - and love musicians.

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