

French Red Wine Braised Chuck Roast

A whole chuck roast braised low in dry red wine and homemade beef stock with thyme, bay, and orange peel, in the style of a Provençal daube. Sear it first. Set it in the morning and come home to dinner, or make it a day ahead and serve it to company. It is better the second day.

The method, in one breath. Dry the meat and season it ahead. Sear it hard and do not move it. Color the vegetables, toast the paste, deglaze with wine. Stock in, lid on, low heat until a fork slides in. Cool it. Tomorrow, strain and reduce the liquid, trim the meat while it reduces, finish the sauce with cold butter, and hold the beef in it until the table is ready. It works on any tough cut in any pot.

Yield	Prep	Dutch oven	Slow cooker
8 to 10 servings	35 minutes, plus 30 to rest the seasoned roast	300°F / 150°C, 3½ to 4½ hours (3 to 3½ for two smaller roasts)	LOW 7 to 8 hours (6 to 7 for two), or HIGH 4 to 5

Ingredients

Ingredient	American	Metric
The meat		
Beef chuck roast (one roast, or two smaller ones)	about 5 lb total	about 2.25 kg
Kosher salt	2½ to 3 tsp, divided	14 to 17 g, divided
Black pepper, freshly ground	1½ tsp, divided	3 to 4 g, divided
Garlic powder	1 tsp	3 g
Onion powder	1 tsp	2 to 3 g
Beef tallow, bacon fat, or olive oil	2 to 3 Tbsp	30 to 45 ml
Cold butter, to finish the sauce	1 to 2 Tbsp	15 to 30 g
The vegetables		
Yellow onions, thick wedges	2 large, about 4 cups	about 500 g
Carrots, peeled, 2 inch pieces	4 large, about 3½ cups	about 500 g
Celery, 2 inch pieces	3 ribs, about 1½ cups	about 150 g
Garlic, smashed	6 cloves	18 to 24 g
Tomato paste	2 Tbsp	30 g
All-purpose flour (optional, for a thicker sauce)	2 Tbsp	15 g
The liquids		
Dry red wine	2 cups	475 ml
Homemade beef stock (see note)	4 cups	950 ml

Ingredient	American	Metric
The aromatics		
Bay leaves	2	2
Fresh thyme	6 to 8 sprigs	8 to 10 g
Orange peel, no white pith	2 wide strips, 1 orange	2 strips
Crushed red pepper flakes (optional)	¼ tsp	about ½ g
Flat-leaf parsley, chopped, to finish	¼ cup	about 15 g

Wine. A dry red you like in the glass: Côtes du Rhône, Grenache, Syrah, Merlot, Pinot Noir, or a red blend. It does not need to be expensive, but it does need to be one you enjoy. This is not the place to use up the bottle someone gave you that you did not care for. Reducing intensifies everything, and a wine you did not like in the glass will be far worse in the pot. Skip anything labeled cooking wine; it is salty and thin, and it concentrates into something vinegary instead of bringing out the wine and the stock.

Stock. Homemade matters here more than almost anywhere. The collagen in a real bone stock is what gives the reduced sauce its body and shine. Store-bought will make a braise; it will not make this sauce. If it is what you have, use low-sodium and expect a thinner finish.

Cloves. Traditional recipes add two whole cloves. I leave them out; I don't care for the flavor here. Add them with the bay if you do.

The Dutch oven method

- 1. Season ahead.** Pat the roast dry, very dry; a wet roast steams instead of browning. Season all over with 2 teaspoons of the salt, 1 teaspoon of the pepper, the garlic powder, and the onion powder. Leave it on the counter for about 30 minutes while you cut the vegetables. Heat the oven to 300°F / 150°C.
- 2. Sear it. This step is not optional.** Heat a large Dutch oven over medium-high. Add the fat. When it shimmers, lay the roast in and leave it alone. Brown it deeply, 4 to 6 minutes a side, turning only when it releases from the pot. On a thick roast, stand it up and sear the sides too; a crust on the top and bottom only is half a sear. If you have two roasts, sear them one at a time; meat that touches steams instead of browning. Move it to a plate. The browned bits on the bottom stay; they are the flavor.
- 3. Color the vegetables.** Lower the heat to medium. Add the onions, carrots, celery, and a small pinch of salt. Cook 8 to 10 minutes, stirring often, until they soften and pick up some color on the edges. Add the garlic for 1 minute.
- 4. Toast the tomato paste.** Stir it in and cook 2 minutes, scraping it around the pot, until it darkens slightly and smells savory rather than raw. If you are using flour, sprinkle it over now and cook 1 minute more.
- 5. Deglaze.** Pour in the wine and scrape up every browned bit with a wooden spoon. Simmer 8 to 10 minutes, until it reduces a little and the sharp alcohol smell softens. The pot should smell deep and rich. If it smells like vinegar, it is usually the wine, and there is no fixing that later.
- 6. Build the pot.** Return the roast and every drop of juice from the plate. Add the stock, the bay leaves, thyme, orange peel, pepper flakes if using, and the remaining ½ teaspoon of pepper. All 4 cups of stock go in, plus every drop of juice the roast released on the plate. Be generous: this liquid becomes the sauce, and it will reduce to a third or less of what you start with, so a shallow braise leaves you with a spoonful. With these amounts in a 6 quart pot the liquid comes more than halfway up the roast, and that is right. Do not add salt beyond the recipe here; reducing concentrates it, and this is not the moment to taste for seasoning.

- 7. Braise.** Bring it just to a gentle simmer on the stove, cover with a tight lid, and move it to the oven. Cook 3½ to 4½ hours, turning the roast once halfway. Two smaller roasts will be done sooner, so start testing at 3 hours. It is done when a fork slides in with no resistance and the roast begins to relax into pieces. Time is a guide; the fork is the test.
- 8. Rest, then cool.** Lift the lid and fork test. If it is done, turn the heat off and let the whole pot come down off the boil and stop steaming, about an hour, with the lid set loosely on top. Then into the refrigerator, still loosely covered, overnight. Do not leave a full pot of warm stock on the counter all evening; two hours at room temperature is the limit. If you are serving tonight instead, move the roast to a board, tent loosely with foil, and rest it 15 to 20 minutes while you make the sauce.
- 9. The next day: lift the fat, lift the meat.** The fat has set on top in a sheet. Lift it off. Lift the roast and the vegetables out onto a tray and set them aside; what is left in the pot is the braising liquid, and that is the sauce.
- 10. Sieve and reduce.** Pour the liquid through a sieve into a wide pan, or back into the insert on Sear/Sauté. Simmer it uncovered until it has reduced by half to two-thirds and coats a spoon. With six cups in the pot this takes 25 to 40 minutes, and there is no shortcut; good food takes time. This is where most people stop, and it is why their braise tastes like home and not like a restaurant. Keep going. Taste it now, and now salt and pepper it.
- 11. Trim while it reduces.** The sauce does not need you, so use the time. Cut the rested roast into serving pieces and trim away any fat or connective tissue that did not melt into the braise. Keep the trimmings for the stockpot. No one should have to butcher at the table or pull anything from their mouth. The sauce will cover the cut faces, so trim with confidence.
- 12. Finish with cold butter.** Off the heat, add a tablespoon or two of cold butter and whisk until it disappears and the sauce turns glossy and clings to the back of a spoon. That is what makes it cling to the meat.
- 13. Hold in the sauce.** Return the trimmed beef and the vegetables to the sauce, cover, and hold on the lowest heat (the slow cooker's Warm setting, or a 200°F / 95°C oven) until the table is ready. The meat heats through gently and takes on the sauce, and dinner can wait for whoever is running late. It will hold 30 minutes without losing its shine; past an hour, the sauce tightens, so loosen it with a splash of stock.
- 14. Serve.** Lift the pieces onto warm plates. Spoon the sauce over the cut faces first, so the trimmed meat looks whole and glossy, then the vegetables around, and finish with parsley.

The slow cooker method

Same braise, same steps, one pot. Steps 1 through 6 happen in the slow cooker insert on its Sear/Sauté setting, or in a Dutch oven on the stove if your cooker does not brown hard enough; then everything moves into the cooker. Either way, the roast still gets seared and the pot still gets deglazed. Pouring raw meat and stock into a slow cooker is not a braise, and it is why slow cooker beef so often comes out grey.

After step 6, switch to Slow Cook on LOW for 7 to 8 hours (6 to 7 for two smaller roasts), or HIGH for 4 to 5. Turn the roast once if you are home. Fork test the same way. Rest the meat, then reduce the sauce right in the insert on Sear/Sauté, or pour it into a pan on the stove. A slow cooker loses almost nothing to evaporation, so you will have all your liquid waiting; that is the point. Reduce, trim, taste, salt, butter. Then switch the cooker to Warm, put the trimmed beef back into the sauce, and let it hold until plating.

Instant Pot. It works, and it is faster: sear on Sauté, deglaze, then pressure cook on high for about 60 to 70 minutes with a natural release. What it cannot do is sit all day. If you want to start dinner in the morning and forget it until evening, that is the slow cooker's job.

Better the next day. A braise is always better on day two, which is what makes it such a good dish for entertaining: all the work is done before anyone arrives. If the sauce has tightened in the cold, loosen it with a splash of stock while it reheats.

What good looks like

Going right: the crust on the seared roast is dark brown, not grey. The pot after deglazing smells deep and winery, not sharp. The finished meat gives to a fork without being pulled. The sauce coats the meat and stays on it; nothing runs to the edge of the plate.

Going wrong: a sharp, vinegary smell means the wine; use a bottle you would drink. Grey, tight meat means it was not seared or it was pulled too early. Give it another 30 minutes and test again. Dry meat on the plate usually means it was sliced without resting. A sauce that tastes thin and flat was never reduced; it is braising liquid, not sauce, and the only fix is time on the heat.

Keep it safe: food should spend as little time as possible between 40°F and 140°F. Let the pot come off the boil for about an hour with the lid set loosely on top, then refrigerate. Two hours at room temperature is the limit, and a sealed hot pot in the fridge cools too slowly to count.

Serving

Mashed potatoes, polenta, buttered egg noodles, or a thick slice of sourdough to drag through the sauce. A sharp green salad cuts the richness.

Leftovers and scraps

Five pounds is a lot, and that is on purpose. When you braise, make more than the meal needs; the leftovers are top notch. Better still, turn them into a different dish instead of the same one twice. The meat is lovely as the filling in homemade ravioli, as a layer in a lasagna, or layered into a potato casserole, with a spoon of the reduced sauce. The trimmings from step 11 go into the freezer bag for the next pot of stock. The only ingredient you can leave out without changing what this is: the orange peel.