



Chili Is Personal



Yep, I am playing with fire. Actually writing a column about Chili. To actually think that I know enough, or have enough information about chili to have a real chili guy want to read it. Absurd. I should quit now.

I have entered 3 different chili contests. Now, my chili is real good. Nice texture, flavor, just enough heat. But I shouldn't have entered any chili contests. Those guys are good. My stuff is pretty good hot beef stew compared to the big boys. Chili is personal. Every family wants a different style. A different heat. It is a great kid's meal. It is a wonderful quick lunch. And it is one of the most hotly contested dishes in the culinary world.

Now this doesn't mean that I'm not an aficionado of great chili. To me, chili should be more about flavor, but also about substance. The texture of the beef has to be good, and there has to be some seared flavor in it, hard to do with ground beef, or fine diced stew beef. The red should be a bit from tomatoes, but a majority from peppers. The best chili will be hot in temperature, and will allow the crackers to become red after a few minutes. The heat from the peppers should be enough that you cannot eat the chili right away. You need to have a short spoonful, a little at a time, to get your mouth used to the fire. By the end of the bowl, you should be so used to it that it just feels hot, not on fire.

Chili cook-offs are high powered events. I have entered chili contests, and I have found myself in with the best chili cooks in the state. My best chili is pretty good, but it is not in the same league as these serious chili folks. These people are fanatic about their chili, and compete fiercely for the honor of first prize. There are several great chili cook-offs in the Hudson Valley each year, and some great chili cooks. Jim Heywood of Red Hook has been nationally recognized for his Chili, and for his Ribs. To attend a cook off with someone like Big Jim is to find out what good chili is all about.

There are few dishes which are more American. Everyone likes chili, from school kids to truck drivers. Some melted cheese, and some crackers, make for a perfect meal. Its origins are in the southwest, where hot food is a little hotter than around here. If you were to

travel to Oklahoma, for instance, the chili might be a little spicy for your taste. Western chili is eaten carefully. Start out with a few small spoonfuls, and savor the heat. This will get your mouth ready for the fire to come. By the time you finish the bowl, you should be sweating slightly and ready for more.

This chili recipe is a good jumping off point. It makes a very nice, fairly mild version of the classic, which can be easily altered to create a signature dish, ready for competition. Get your sombreros out, fire up the gas stove, and start cooking.

HOMEMADE CHILI

Coarse ground beef	2#
Onions, small dice	4 each
Garlic cloves	2 each
Vegetable oil	2 oz
Beef broth	1 x 14 oz can
Tomato puree	1 x 10 oz can
Fresh jalapenos, diced	2-3 each
Chili powder, mild	1 Tbs
Cumin, ground	2 Tbs
Oregano, ground	1 tsp
Salt to taste	

In a large heavy skillet, brown the meat in hot oil. Remove meat, and replace with onions and garlic, cook until soft. Add broth, the saved beef, and the tomato puree, and bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer, and allow to cook for about a half hour, stirring occasionally.

Add the remaining ingredients during the last 10 minutes of cooking. The addition of a can of red kidney beans is an option. Adjust the seasonings. Cool, and refrigerate or freeze for future reheating.

John Griffin

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