

SLOW-COOKER OSSO BUCO



Before



After

There was a time in the United States that most people, save a few in New York, had no idea what Osso Buco was, or even how to pronounce the name. Today, except for a few outlying areas, it is better known as a wonderful winter comfort food. In fact, I have an Osso Buco in the slow-cooker as I write this.

I cook for the two of us, that would be my Italian-Hungarian-Polish wife, Gale, and myself, so that is what I will give you - recipes for two. Some basic math and you can multiply by 2, or 4, or 6. Don't worry about the odd numbers. Go to the next highest number and then have the leftovers for breakfast.

The purists might insist that you have to use veal shanks. Given how veal is often treated, I refuse to buy that cut of meat. The truth is that you can use pork shanks (assuming your religion allows it), or beef shanks - hell, you can make it with turkey legs, and I have. Just be ready to take a nap after dinner.

Okay, my humor isn't why you called. You want to learn how to make an excellent Osso Buco. Rule number one - there are no damn rules. Like a good bolognese, or ragu, or tuna-noodle casserole, everyone's grandmother had their magic recipe that you grew up with and no one else will ever measure up.

Here's what you need, for the most part.

Some meat: About 12oz of whatever - lamb shanks are lovely, but so are pork shanks or any other meat you like. If using the shanks, try to find the cross-cut version or ask your butcher to cut the shanks in about 2" thick chunks.

- 1 medium onion chopped into bite-size pieces
- 2 stalks of celery cut the same - you can use other root veggies like turnips if your store insists on selling you 10 stalks of celery in a bunch.
- 1 medium carrot chopped bite-size
- 3 cloves of garlic roughly chopped
- 1 hefty sprig of rosemary
- 1 sprig of thyme (not mandatory in my kitchen)
- 3/4 cup of beef or chicken broth
- 1 Tbs or more of tomato paste
- 1/4 cup of sweet red wine or vermouth
- 1 can crushed tomatoes or 3 large Roma tomatoes coarsely chopped
- Salt & Pepper to taste - whatever that means

Note: I sometimes buy the already packaged Mirepoix (pronounced meer-pwah) If my market has it. It is already diced carrot, onion, and celery - it is so civilized.

Now comes the fun part, for me. Today's batch has some dried porcini mushrooms I had left over from something else. I also roughly chopped a small potato into the veggies because I like potatoes, and I'm Irish. Hell, you could toss in some okra, I guess, but it would probably disappear in the long cooking process. I also chopped up some green onions and threw in some pearl onions rather than mess with cutting up a regular onion. No rules.

So you have your chopped up veggies, wine, and broth. Toss it in a big bowl and stir it all together with some salt and pepper . . . To your taste.

While you're chopping vegetables, you want to salt and brown the meat in olive oil. You want to brown it well on all sides but not cook it through, unless it a turkey leg which doesn't have a sides.

Drop the brown meat into the slow-cooker and top it with the vegetable mix. Cover the cooker and set it to low and cook for 8 hours. If you're rushed, you can cook it on high for 4 hours, but it will be better on the 8-hour schedule.

Pull the meat out and cover to keep it warm. If you want to thicken the gravy a bit, a tablespoon of cornstarch in 1/4 cup of water or milk mixed thoroughly and added to the veggies and liquid and turned to the high setting on the cooker should get you a nice thick gravy. I like to stir it with a chopstick so I'm not breaking up what should be well-cooked veggies.

Put the meat on a plate (I like shallow bowls for this dish) and top with the veggies and gravy. You can add a side of pasta or polenta, but this is pretty hearty. Maybe a nice slice if Italian bread on the side.

That's it! Set down with a nice glass of red wine and enjoy the heck out of this dish. It's a classic.