

Ric's Ropa Vieja

Ropa Vieja, translated to mean "Old Rags" or "Dirty Laundry," is one of the world's great peasant meat dishes. The long cooking with acidic components---tomatoes, wine, soy sauce and beer ---leaves the beef in tender shreds -- hence the nickname. Essentially Cuban, Ropa Vieja transcends all cultures and is one of the most popular dishes at New World. This recipe has been requested by some of my customers to be served at Bar Mitzvahs, Catholic weddings, tropical theme parties and even Christmas dinners.

The quintessentially Latin flavor comes from the fresh green sofrito.

Serves 6 – 8 Richter Scale –1

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

3 tablespoons safflower or peanut oil

5 pounds fresh grass fed beef brisket or chuck shoulder, trimmed of excess fat and cut into fist sized large chunks

1 batch Sofrito (see recipe)

12 ounces lager beer, like Red Stripe, Bud or Corona

2 cups dry red wine

1/2 cup soy sauce

1/2 cup minced Spanish onion

1/4 cup minced garlic

1/2 cup stuffed Manzanilla green olives

1/4 cup capers (capotes, the large ones, are best for this recipe)

4 cups organic plum tomatoes with juice, squished through your fingers

3 ounces organic canned tomato paste

1/2 cup bell pepper cut in 1-inch strips

Fresh Green Sofrito:

1/2 cup coarsely chopped green pepper

8 medium peeled garlic cloves

1/2 cup coarsely chopped Spanish onion

1/2 packed cup chopped cilantro, stems and leaves both or Recao if available

1 tablespoon kosher salt

a generous twisting of freshly ground black pepper

1/8 cup olive oil

1/8 cup water

To make the sofrito, mince the cilantro stems and leaves from end to end into very short pieces. (The stems are full of flavor and if you can mince them fine, they won't be stringy). Puree the cilantro with the bell

pepper, onion, garlic salt and pepper and olive oil in a food processor, adding a few tablespoons of water to make a soft pesto.

Cut the meat into big fist sized chunks. Remember, this is a long cooked event and they will shrink during the braising process.

In a heavy pot, lightly sauté the Sofrito in the oil. Don't let it brown.

Salt and pepper the meat and, when the sofrito is lightly cooked and begins to smell good, add the meat to the sofrito in the pot. Using a large spoon, turn the meat in the sofrito, coating it well.

Add all of the rest of the ingredients except the bell pepper and tomato paste. Add enough water to cover the meat . Bring to a boil, skim off the scum that forms and then reduce to a slow simmer to braise for 2 – 3 hours. Add more water if necessary to keep the meat covered.

(Cooking the meat at a very low simmer will create a very tender dish. If you boil it too hard too long, the proteins in the meat will tighten, leaving it chewy and dry).

After 2 – 3 hours of cooking, break the meat up into shreds somewhat with the back of a spoon.

Add the tomato paste and bell pepper strips and cook slowly for an additional 20–30 minutes. Make sure the meat is covered with liquid at all times while cooking.