

Italian Ragu

Ragus are Italian meat sauces that are slowly-slowly simmered, allowing the tough cuts of meat used to become tender, and sinews to dissolve and thicken and bind the sauce. There are as many versions of *ragu* as there are cooks, but to my taste, home-ground meat makes a *ragu* with superior flavor and texture. It takes only a few minutes to chop the meat using a food processor, and the sauce can be made up to 2 days in advance and refrigerated, or it can be frozen for longer storage. Serve this *ragu* with *pasta* — something with curly or ribbed edges for the meat to cling to — or with *polenta*. The recipe can be easily doubled.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 pounds beef chuck, cut into 2-inch cubes
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ½ carrot, minced
- ½ large onion, minced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 cup Cabernet Sauvignon or Zinfandel
- 2 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh sage leaves
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme leaves
- 5 large, very ripe red tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped; or 1 cup Italian-style canned tomatoes, chopped, with their juice
- 1 cup beef broth
- 1 teaspoon butter, optional (see Note)

INSTRUCTIONS: Before beginning, see grinding tips on this page

is good. Brown them well, about 2 to 3 minutes, then turn and brown on the other side, sprinkling them with a little of the salt and pepper. Using a slotted spoon, remove the clumps to a bowl and repeat until all the meat has been browned.

Reduce the heat to medium and add the carrot, onion and garlic; sauté until lightly browned, about 5 minutes.

Increase the heat to high and add the wine, scraping up any clinging bits. Add the meat and half of the parsley, sage and thyme. Cook until the wine is almost gone, about 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes and half of the beef broth, reduce the heat to very low, and simmer until the liquid is reduced to a thick sauce and the meat is very tender, about 2½ to 3 hours. If evaporation occurs too quickly, and this will depend upon the kinds of tomatoes used, add a little more of the beef broth. Just before serving, stir in the