

THE PA COOKING SCHOOL *Lesson 6*

BRAISING

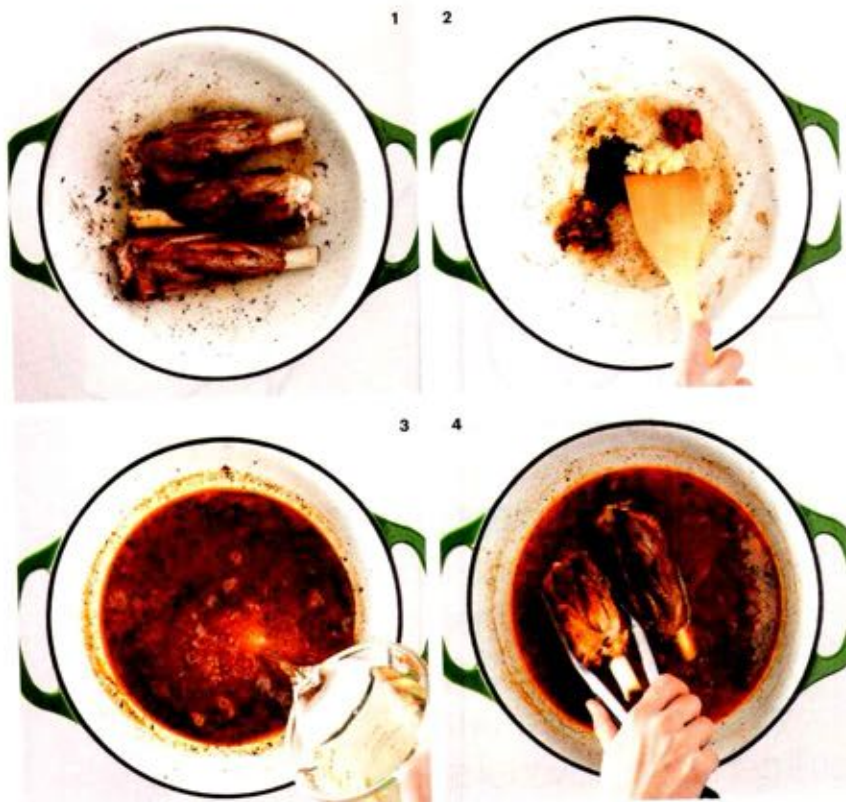
FOUR SIMPLE STEPS.

That's all it takes to master the ultimate cold-weather cooking technique. Once you've got them down, you'll get tender, flavorful results every time—whether you follow a recipe or not

RECIPES BY Molly Stevens

→ It's a well-kept kitchen secret: Braising makes heroes out of weekend cooks.

There is no other technique that asks so little yet gives so much back. As long as you can remember four simple, universal steps (and have the patience to wait as the braise fills your house with the most tempting of scents), anyone—anyone—can elicit oohs and aahs from a table full of friends and family. Really, it's that easy to produce restaurant-quality results from a home oven, whether you're talking fork-tender short ribs or fall-off-the-bone pork shoulder. Basically any number of cuts of meat that benefit from a seared exterior and a thick, rich, glistening sauce that has been building all day. If you're looking to dial it up in the kitchen (with minimal effort), braising is a secret you need to be in on. Just don't tell everyone. Okay?



KEY STEPS

How to Braise

It's what you do before the braise goes into the oven that counts. There are ways to refine the finished product (think of steps 5 and 6 as extra credit). But as long as you nail these key moments, everything else is just gravy.

- 1 SEAR YOUR MEAT:** Season the meat on all sides. Pour oil into a heavy lidded pot (like a Dutch oven; see page 83) set over medium-high heat, then add the meat. Don't crowd the pot and take time to get deep color all over. Remove meat; set aside.
- 2 SAUTÉ THE MIREPOIX:** Cook chopped onions, celery, carrots, etc., in the drippings left behind from searing, stirring frequently. Like the sear, use medium-high heat and aim for a caramel-y brown color—without scorching your ingredients.
- 3 DEGLAZE THE POT:** Add the braising liquid, stirring and scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pot with a wooden turner. These bits are flavor bombs. When they're dissolved in the cooking liquid they enrich the entire dish.
- 4 BRAISE IT:** Return the meat to the pot, with any accumulated juices and the broth. The meat should not be submerged—you're braising, not boiling, those lamb shanks! (Adding too much broth will ultimately dilute the sauce.) Bring the liquid to a simmer, then cover and slide into a 325-degree oven.



How to Take Your Braise to the Next Level

ADD MORE VEG: If your recipe includes added vegetables (such as fennel, potatoes, or greens), add them to the pot 45 minutes before the meat is done. Check the liquid. If it's low (say, less than an inch), add a splash more. Return pot to the oven.

REDUCE THE SAUCE:

When the meat is fork-tender, remove it and any vegetables. Skim surface fat, then simmer until you've got a rich sauce that coats the back of a spoon. Return meat (and vegetables, if using) to the pot to heat through.

There's more braising shots where these came from. For more detailed step-by-step photos of this dish, go to bonappetit.com/go/braising.

ESSENTIAL
EQUIPMENT

Wooden
Turner



Its broad, flat end is ideal for scraping up all the flavorful browned bits on the bottom of the pot, and it won't scratch the enamel surface. Calphalon wood turner, \$10; amazon.com



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> Your Braise
Needs More Than
Just Meat

Most braises prescribe a standard mirepoix, usually the classic onion-carrot-celery combo. But for a twist, add one of these ingredients as well.



CITRUS ZEST

A couple of wide strips of orange, lemon, or lime zest add a subtle citrus perfume.



MUSHROOM

Wild or cultivated mushrooms (either fresh or dried) give any dish a deep, woodsy flavor.



ANCHOVY

Minced anchovies provide an umami blast—savory, briny, and complex without tasting fishy.



GINGER

A fine julienne of fresh ginger (or galangal, if you can find it) adds a note of sweet heat and fresh spice.



LEMONGRASS

This lemony stalk (related to citronella) provides a bright citrus hit with a distinct floral aspect.

INDIAN-SPICED
CHICKEN WITH CHICKPEAS
AND SPINACH



Spinach is added
to the pot at the
last minute, while
the chicken
rests, covered, on
a platter.

INDIAN-SPICED CHICKEN WITH CHICKPEAS AND SPINACH

6 SERVINGS Golden and fragrant, this dish is a meal on its own, or it can be served with steamed basmati rice or warm flatbread.

- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 6 bone-in chicken legs (thigh and drumstick), skin removed
- Kosher salt
- 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 2 large onions, thinly sliced
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1½ Tbsp. grated peeled ginger
- 2 tsp. ground coriander
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 tsp. ground turmeric
- ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1 15-oz. can chickpeas, rinsed
- 2 cups (or more) low-sodium chicken broth
- 5 oz. baby spinach (about 8 lightly packed cups)
- ¼ cup Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves with tender stems

Place a rack in lower third of oven; preheat to 325°. Heat oil in a large heavy pot over medium-high heat. Season chicken with salt. Working in batches, cook chicken, reducing heat as needed to prevent over-browning, until golden brown on all sides, 8–10 minutes per batch. Transfer to a plate.

Add butter and onions to drippings in pot; season with salt. Cook, stirring often, until onions are soft and golden brown, 10–15 minutes.

Stir in garlic, ginger, coriander, cumin, turmeric, and cayenne. Cook, stirring constantly, until spices are fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in chickpeas and 2 cups broth. Return chicken and any accumulated juices to pot. Add more broth if needed to cover chicken about three-fourths of the way up. Bring to a simmer. Cover pot and transfer to oven. Braise chicken until fork-tender, 45–55 minutes. **DO AHEAD:** Chicken can be made 3 days ahead. Let cool slightly, then chill, uncovered, until cold. Cover and keep chilled. Rewarm before continuing.

Using tongs and a slotted spoon, transfer chicken to a platter and cover with foil to keep warm. Add spinach to pot, cover, and remove from heat. Let stand until spinach is wilted, 5–7 minutes.

Stir yogurt into cooking liquid. Season with salt. Return chicken to pot. Warm over low heat (do not boil or yogurt may curdle).

Transfer chicken to a large deep platter. Pour spinach and chickpea sauce over. Sprinkle with cilantro.

BRAISED LAMB SHANKS WITH FENNEL AND BABY POTATOES

6 SERVINGS Add the vegetables partway through braising to ensure they will have enough time to be infused with meaty flavor without overcooking. Serve with a loaf of your favorite crusty bread for sopping up the juices.

- ½ tsp. fennel seeds
- 6 lamb shanks (about 1 lb. each)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 4 Tbsp. olive oil, divided
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 anchovy fillets packed in oil, drained, chopped
- 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh thyme
- 1 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 1½ cups dry white wine or dry vermouth
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 large fennel bulbs (about 1½ lb. total), cut into 1" wedges
- 1 lb. baby red-skinned potatoes, halved
- ½ lb. medium carrots (about 3), peeled, cut into 3" lengths, halved lengthwise, if large
- ½ cup pitted, halved green olives (such as Picholine or Lucques), divided
- ¼ cup coarsely chopped flat-leaf parsley

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: A spice mill (optional)

Place a rack in lower third of oven; preheat to 325°. Toast fennel seeds in a small skillet over medium heat until fragrant, about

2 minutes. Let cool. Grind in spice mill or with a mortar and pestle.

Season lamb shanks with salt and pepper. Heat 2 Tbsp. oil in a large heavy pot over medium-high heat. Working in batches, cook lamb shanks, reducing heat as needed to prevent overbrowning, until browned on all sides, 8–10 minutes per batch. Transfer lamb shanks to a plate.

Add remaining 2 Tbsp. oil to pot and reduce heat to medium-low. Add ground fennel seeds, garlic, anchovies, thyme, and tomato paste and stir just until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add wine, scraping up any browned bits from bottom of pot. Bring to a simmer and cook until wine is slightly reduced, about 3 minutes.

Add broth and bay leaves. Return lamb shanks to pot, arranging shanks "head to toe" so they fit in an even layer (the meat should not be completely covered). Cover pot and transfer to oven. Braise for 1½ hours.

Turn lamb shanks over. Add fennel, potatoes, carrots, and ¼ cup olives and tuck in around lamb shanks, submerging some in the liquid (they will cook whether they are submerged or not). Braise until meat and vegetables are fork-tender, about 45 minutes longer. **DO AHEAD:** Lamb can be made 3 days ahead. Let cool slightly, then chill, uncovered, until cold. Cover and keep chilled. Rewarm before continuing.

Using tongs and a slotted spoon, transfer lamb shanks and vegetables to a serving platter. Scatter remaining ¼ cup olives over and cover with foil to keep warm.

Discard bay leaves from cooking liquid. Bring to a simmer over medium heat. Skim fat from cooking liquid. Simmer liquid until

BROTH (or stock) underscores the meatiness of the main ingredient. Match the broth with the protein when you can, but chicken broth is universal.

BEER, especially the lighter lagers, contributes a pleasantly sour note that is tailor-made for pork. Darker stouts and porters play well with beef, as do certain Belgian ales.

CIDER—fresh or fermented—adds sweetness to braised poultry and pork. Great in tandem with cider vinegar.

WATER is often overlooked as a braising liquid, but it works when you want to keep things light or if there are other strong flavors at play. It's always a better choice than poor-quality broth.

WINE adds nuance and a jolt of acidity to any dish. Use it in combination with broth, and, whether red or white, choose something dry. Cook with a bottle you'd actually drink.



> Make Your Braising Liquid Count

Most braises are done with stock and/or wine. But a splash of this or that brings balance, complexity, and depth to the final product.

> Finish Strong: How to Take Your Braise from Good to Great A proper braise needs no embellishment, but sometimes we can't resist adding a final flourish to brighten, boost, or add texture to the dish. Here are a few ideas to get you started: A **handful of just-chopped herbs** (parsley, mint, cilantro) adds color and freshness. **Grated citrus zest** and a **squeeze of juice** injects a bright note. A **splash of vinegar** balances the richness. A **pinch of Maldon sea salt** gives any dish a saline crunch. A **dollop of crème fraîche or heavy cream** will mellow. **Spice blends**, such as *shichimi togarashi* or *za'atar* lend a savory punch.

it thickens slightly, 15–20 minutes (you should have about 1½ cups). Season sauce with salt and pepper and pour over lamb shanks and vegetables. Sprinkle with parsley.

PORK SHOULDER BRAISED WITH APPLES

6 SERVINGS Some varieties of apples fall apart while cooking; here you want the apples to hold their shape. Pink Lady and Honeycrisp are good choices and are widely available. Serve with cheesy grits. For a recipe, go to bonappetit.com/go/grits.

- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 4 oz. thick-cut bacon, cut into ½" pieces
- 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 5 lb. boneless pork shoulder, cut into 6 pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 3 medium shallots, thinly sliced
- ½ cup Calvados or other apple-flavored brandy
- 1¼ cups apple cider, preferably fresh
- 2 Tbsp. (or more) apple cider vinegar
- 3 tart, firm apples (such as Pink Lady or Honeycrisp), peeled, cut into ½" wedges (about 4 cups)
- ½ tsp. Dijon mustard
- Chopped fresh chives

Place a rack in lower third of oven; preheat to 325°. Heat oil in a large heavy pot over medium heat. Add bacon and cook, stirring often, until browned and crisp, 6–8 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer bacon to a paper towel-lined plate and set aside.

Increase heat to medium-high. Add butter to pot with drippings. Season pork shoulder with salt and pepper. Working in batches if needed, cook pork shoulder, reducing heat as needed to prevent overbrowning, until brown on all sides, 8–10 minutes per batch. Transfer pork shoulder to a plate.

Add shallots to pot and cook, stirring often, until shallots begin to soften, about 4 minutes.

Remove pot from heat; add Calvados and stir, scraping up any browned bits from bottom of pot. Return to heat and simmer for 1 minute. Add apple cider and 2 Tbsp. vinegar. Bring to a simmer, then return pork shoulder to pot, placing in a single layer on bottom of pot (the meat should not be completely covered).

Cover pot and transfer to oven. Braise pork shoulder, turning after 1 hour, until fork-tender, about 2 hours. Stir in reserved bacon. **DO AHEAD:** Bacon and pork shoulder can be cooked 2 days ahead. Let cool in braising liquid, uncovered. Chill, uncovered, until cold; cover and keep chilled. Rewarm before continuing.

Using tongs, transfer pork to a deep platter. Skim fat from cooking liquid. Place pot over medium heat and bring liquid to a simmer. Add apples and cook until apples are just tender and sauce is slightly reduced, 8–10 minutes.

Stir Dijon mustard into sauce; season with salt, pepper, and more vinegar, if desired. Pour sauce with apples over pork on platter. Sprinkle with chives.

SOY-BRAISED SHORT RIBS WITH SHIITAKES

6 SERVINGS Flanken-style short ribs, used for Korean barbecue, are cut across the bones instead of between the bones. (See Prep School, page 101, for a mini short-rib primer.) Start this recipe ahead of time; chilling the ribs after braising keeps them from falling apart when they are served (and all braised meats taste better the next day).

- 3 Tbsp. vegetable oil, divided
- 4 lb. cross-cut beef short ribs (flanken style), about 1½"-thick, cut into 2-bone pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ¾ lb. shiitake mushrooms, stems chopped, caps sliced, divided
- 1 bunch scallions, whites chopped, greens thinly sliced, divided
- 1 1" piece peeled ginger, thinly sliced
- 2 cups (or more) low-sodium beef or chicken broth

- ½ cup reduced-sodium soy sauce
- ½ cup dry sake
- ¼ cup (packed) dark brown sugar
- 3 whole star anise
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 8 oz. wide rice noodles, cooked according to package directions

Place a rack in lower third of oven; preheat to 325°. Heat 1 Tbsp. oil in a large heavy pot over medium-high heat. Season short ribs lightly with salt and pepper. Working in batches, cook short ribs, reducing heat as needed to avoid overbrowning, until brown on all sides, 10–12 minutes per batch. Transfer short ribs to a plate; drain all but 1 Tbsp. drippings from pot.

Add shiitake stems, scallion whites, and ginger to pot. (Cover and chill remaining mushrooms and scallions.) Cook, stirring often, until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add 2 cups broth, soy sauce, sake, brown sugar, star anise, and cinnamon; bring to a simmer.

Return short ribs to pot, nestling them bone side up in liquid in a single layer. Cover pot, transfer to oven, and braise until ribs are fork-tender, about 2½ hours.

Using tongs, transfer ribs to a shallow baking dish bone side down. Strain liquid from pot through a fine-mesh sieve into a large measuring cup; discard solids. Skim fat from cooking liquid. Add broth as needed so liquid measures 1¼ cups and pour over ribs. Let cool completely, then cover with foil and chill for at least 3 hours.

DO AHEAD: Ribs can be cooked 2 days ahead. Keep chilled.

Preheat oven to 350°. Bake short ribs, covered, until heated through, about 25 minutes. Remove ½ cup liquid from baking dish; set aside.

Heat remaining 2 Tbsp. oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat and cook shiitake caps until brown and tender, about 3 minutes. Add reserved braising liquid and all but 1 Tbsp. scallion greens and season with salt.

Place cooked noodles on a large, deep platter. Arrange short ribs on top of noodles; drizzle sauce from dish over. Spoon mushrooms with sauce over. Sprinkle with remaining scallion greens.