

Birria (Goat or Lamb with Sauce)

SERVES 6

Rick Bayless, a SAVEUR consulting editor, helped us adapt this recipe from Birriería El Tartamudo in Jocotepec.

4 cloves garlic, crushed and peeled
2 medium white onions, peeled and finely chopped
1 5-lb. piece young goat (preferably the leg) or
1 3-lb. bone-in lamb roast (preferably the shoulder)
1/4 cup rock salt
1 pasilla chile, seeded and halved lengthwise
1/2 tsp. ground cumin
2 tsp. dried marjoram
Freshly ground black pepper
1/2 tsp. ground ginger
2 tsp. sesame seeds
4 whole cloves
4 tsp. sugar
6 tbsp. white vinegar
15 small tomatoes (about 5 lbs.), peeled, seeded, and chopped
2 bay leaves
1 small cinnamon stick
1/2 cup finely chopped fresh cilantro leaves
2 limes, quartered

1. Preheat oven to 325°. Place garlic, half of chopped onions, and 4 cups water in a large ovenproof pot fitted with a steaming rack (it should sit just above water). Rub meat with salt (goat leg may be cut into two pieces) and place on rack. Cover pot and crinkle aluminum foil around edge of pot to form a tight seal. Place pot in oven and cook undisturbed for 4 hours or until meat is fork-tender and falling off the bone.

2. Place a small skillet over medium heat. Flatten chile halves on hot skillet and toast, turning once, 10-15 seconds in all. Place chiles in a small bowl and add 1 cup hot water. Cover and set aside until soft and pliable, about 30 minutes. Drain chiles and place in a blender or food processor. Add cumin, marjoram, pepper, ginger, sesame seeds, cloves, sugar, vinegar, and 3 tbsp. water and blend until smooth. Set aside.

3. When meat is done, remove from oven and strain, reserving steaming liquid. Allow meat to cool

slightly, then carefully remove and discard bones, gristle, and any fat, leaving meat in large pieces. Place meat in a roasting pan and brush all over with 3/4 cup of the chile sauce. Increase oven temperature to 350°. Return meat to oven and bake until chile sauce glazes meat, about 20 minutes. In the roasting pan, shred meat with 2 forks. Cover with aluminum foil to keep warm.

4. For the birria sauce, cook tomatoes in a large pan over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 15 minutes. Transfer tomatoes to a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Return tomatoes to pan, add remaining chile sauce (about 1/4 cup), bay leaves, cinnamon stick, and reserved steaming liquid. Simmer, uncovered, over medium-low heat until liquid reduces by about one-third, about 45 minutes. Remove and discard bay leaves and cinnamon stick.

5. To serve, place about 1 cup meat in each of 6 large bowls. Pour about 1 cup birria sauce over each. Garnish with remaining chopped onions, cilantro, and a squeeze of lime juice. Serve with a hot sauce, such as Tabasco, and fresh corn tortillas on the side if desired.