

Ropa Vieja with Mojo and Avocado

Serves 4-6

2 lbs beef flank steak, cut into large pieces to fit in pan
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Canola oil
1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
3 mixed bell peppers (green, red, yellow), thinly sliced
6 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
½ teaspoon ground allspice
2 bay leaves
½ cup dry white wine
14oz can peeled whole tomatoes, crushed
1 cup chicken stock, plus more if needed
¼ cup pimento-stuffed olives, sliced
1 tablespoon white vinegar
½ cup cilantro leaves and tender stems
Sliced avocado and **mojo**, for serving

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Season flank steak liberally with salt and pepper. Heat oil in oven-proof pot (such as a dutch oven) over medium-high heat until shimmering. Working in batches, lay steak in the pan and cook until browned on each side, about 3 minutes per side. Transfer steak to a plate and set aside.
2. Add onion and peppers to the same pot and cook until onion and peppers are soft, about 10 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute.
3. Stir in the tomato paste, cumin, oregano, allspice and bay leaves and cook for 1 minute.
4. Deglaze the pan with the white wine, scraping the brown bits off the bottom of the pan. Bring to a simmer and reduce for 2 minutes.
5. Add the tomatoes and stock. Return beef to pot, nestling it under the liquid among onions and peppers, along with any of its accumulated juices. Add more stock or water if needed to cover the beef.
6. Cover and transfer to oven, then let cook until beef is very tender, about 1 1/2 hours.
7. Once the beef is tender, remove beef from pot and, using 2 forks, pull apart into very thin, long shreds. Return beef to pot, stirring to combine with vegetables and cooking liquid.
8. Stir in the sliced olives. If it looks like there is too much liquid, return the pot to medium heat and simmer until juices have reduced just enough to coat the beef in a rich, saucy glaze. Season with salt and pepper. Stir in vinegar and cilantro, and serve with **rice and beans and sliced avocado**.

Cuban Mojo

Makes about 1 cup

1 head garlic, peeled, minced, and mashed
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
½ cup fresh orange juice
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
¼ cup fresh lime juice
¼ cup minced onion
1 teaspoon fresh oregano
½ cup Spanish olive oil

Whisk together all of the ingredients until well combined. Season with more salt if needed. Allow to rest at room temperature for at least 30 minutes or refrigerate for later use.

Rice with Black Beans

Recipe adapted from Maricel Presilla of Cucharamama, Zafra, & Ultramarinos of Hoboken

Serves 6

15 oz canned black beans, liquid reserved
2 tablespoons olive oil
4 oz slab bacon, trimmed and diced
1 medium yellow onion, diced
1 medium green bell pepper, diced
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon oregano
1 bay leaf
2 cups long-grain rice
2 ½ cups chicken stock
1 tablespoon sherry vinegar
1 tablespoon sherry
Kosher

1. Heat olive oil in heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. Add bacon and sauté until golden brown.
2. Add onion, green pepper, cumin, oregano, and bay leaf and cook until vegetables just begin to soften.
3. Add rice and toss until coated with oil. Add beans and stock, sherry vinegar, and sherry and stir well. Season with salt. Bring everything up to a simmer and cook, uncovered, until stock is absorbed.
4. Fluff rice with large slotted spoon. Reduce heat to low, cover and cook for 20 minutes until cooked through. Season and serve.

Fish Escabeche

Serves 4

4 x 8oz skinless spanish mackerel filets
12 cloves garlic, minced
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 cups flour
1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
4 bay leaves
2 large green bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and cut into ¼" -thick rings
1 large yellow onion, cut into ¼" -thick rings
2 cups distilled white vinegar

1. Rub the fish filets with a little bit of olive oil, salt, pepper, and about half the garlic. Let sit for 20 minutes to marinade.
2. Place flour in a shallow plate, and dredge each filet with flour to coat, shaking to remove excess.
3. Heat 1 cup oil in a deep skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, fry the fish filets, turning once, until browned on both sides and cooked through, about 5 minutes.
4. Using a slotted spoon, transfer fish steaks to a serving bowl or platter; set aside. Add bay leaves, peppers, and onion, and cook, stirring, until softened, about 4 minutes. Add the remaining garlic and cook until fragrant, about a minute.
5. Add vinegar, and bring to a boil; cook for 2 minutes.
6. Pour over fish and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour before serving. Serve at room temperature or chilled.

Maduros (Fried Sweet Plantains)

Serves 4-6

3 large ripe plantains, peeled and bias cut into 1-inch thick slices

***Plantains must be very black skinned!

Vegetable oil, for frying

1. Heat about ½ inch of oil in a pan until shimmering.
2. Working in batches, fry a few slices of plantain at a time until deeply golden, turning once.
3. Remove to a paper towel lined tray and sprinkle with salt.

Pastelitos de Guayaba (Flaky Guava-Filled Pastry)

Makes about 8 pastries

- 1 sheet puff pastry (8x11 inches), defrosted
- ¼ cup flour, for rolling out dough
- 6 oz guava paste, sliced into thin pieces
- 6 oz cream cheese
- 1 egg, beaten, for egg wash
- ¼ cup coarse cane sugar, for sprinkling (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Sprinkle a clean work surface with flour. Lay puff pastry on surface and sprinkle with a touch more flour. Using a rolling pin, roll the puff pastry out until it is a 12 x 12 " square.
3. Draw an imaginary line down the center of the puff pastry. On the left side of the pastry, place slices of guava paste in 2 rows about 2 inches apart so that you have 8 pieces of guava paste, spaced evenly. Top each piece of guava with 1 tablespoon of cream cheese.
4. Carefully fold the right side of the pastry over the left side to cover the guava. Press lightly around the lumps of guava. Cut the pastry into 8 squares. Brush each square with egg wash and sprinkle with coarse sugar
5. Transfer to a parchment lined sheet tray and bake in oven for about 25 minutes until puffy and golden brown. Cool a few minutes before serving. Enjoy!