



## **Braised Beef Brisket**

There are as many recipes for beef brisket as there are cooks who make it, but this is one of my favorites. I usually start preparing this dish about 3 to 5 days ahead of the time I plan on serving it. Get your brisket from a good meat market. Some butchers always have briskets available, others get them sporadically and you may need to special order your brisket.

Serve with braised leeks or roasted red onions, roasted or mashed potatoes and sautéed greens such as chard or cavalo nero. And be sure to make a little more than you think you'll need. Everyone loves leftover brisket.

- 1 beef brisket, about 6 or 7 pounds
- Coarse salt (such as kosher salt or coarse sea salt)
- 1 tbsp good quality olive oil
- 1 yellow onion, cut in 6 or 8 wedges
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped in 1-inch chunks
- 2 stalks celery, chopped in 1-inch chunks
- 2 leeks, halved and chopped in 1-inch slices
- 5 or 6 cloves garlic, left whole and unpeeled
- 1 bay leaf
- 4 cups (approx.) beef stock, heated until hot
- 1 bottle dry red wine, such as a peppery Cotes-du-Rhone, simmered until reduced by half
- 1 can (about 28 oz) whole tomatoes, drained and coarsely chopped
- Coarsely ground pepper

Wipe beef with damp cloth and pat dry. Using a sharp knife (a long slender knife, such as a slicing knife, works well; be careful not to cut yourself), trim off excess fat. Then wipe the brisket again with a damp cloth and pat dry. Sprinkle generously with coarse salt all over and place in a shallow porcelain or glass casserole dish and cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate overnight or for 2 to 3 days, turning the brisket every 12 hours or so.

About a day or two before you plan on serving the brisket, remove from casserole dish and place on clean surface (a stainless-steel baking sheet works well) and let get to room temperature.

In large heavy braising dish or soup or stew pot that can comfortably accommodate the brisket, heat about 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Add brisket and cook until browned all over; this can take about 5 or 6 minutes. Remove from pan and set aside.

Drain off excess fat from pan, leaving a thin film. Add onion, carrots, celery, leeks, garlic and bay leaf to pan. Then pour in beef stock and red wine and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat until liquid is gently simmering. Stir in tomatoes and season with coarsely ground pepper. Let simmer for about 5 minutes and taste stock. Add a little salt only if it needs it.

Add brisket to pan, cover and cook for about 3 to 4 hours or until tender, turning halfway through. Check brisket regularly to make sure the liquid is not bubbling too hard. Liquid should come slightly more than halfway up sides of brisket; meat should not be swimming in liquid.

When brisket is done, turn off heat and let cool. Then remove brisket from braising liquid and wrap well in foil. Strain liquid and refrigerate. Remove any fat that congeals at the top.

Several hours before serving, heat braising liquid in large pan. Add brisket to pan, turn once or twice to moisten meat all over, and turn off heat. Let meat sit in pan juices until shortly before serving time. Then turn heat to medium-low and heat until meat is warmed through. Just before serving, slice brisket into 1/2-inch slices and arrange on platter. Spoon a little of the braising liquid on top and place the rest in a bowl with a spoon for passing.

Makes about 6 servings.

**Wine suggestion:** There's something in brisket that brings out the Cabernet *sauvage* in me. I often turn to a younger California Cab to complement the meaty, upfront flavors of this dish. Though often times, we pull a 4-to-8-year-old Chateauneuf-du-Pape from the cellar to complement this brisket, one of our family's all-time "*cuisine carolaise*" favorites.

– *Jim White*