



Multi-tasking Rich Beef Cheek Ragù



You could use this sauce with pasta, on top of a baked potato, with pasta dishes, soft cheesy polenta or simply with mashed potatoes and green vegetables. It is rich, unctuous and entirely wonderful. It also freezes beautifully, so if you get your hands on a quantity of beef cheeks, make a big batch, use some for supper and then sit back and gloat. Did someone say smug? This quantity is enough for two lasagne recipes.

Ingredients

- ♦ 1.8 kg beef cheeks, trimmed
- ♦ sea salt
- ♦ black pepper
- ♦ 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil or Irish rapeseed oil
- ♦ 120 g smoked bacon, chopped into cubes
- ♦ 4 carrots, chopped
- ♦ 4 onions, chopped
- ♦ 4 sticks celery, chopped
- ♦ 3 x 400 g tins chopped tomatoes
- ♦ 375 ml red wine
- ♦ 1 litre chicken stock
- ♦ a few sprigs of thyme
- ♦ 2 tablespoons aged balsamic or saba vinegar,
- ♦ or vino cotto

Serves 8

To Cook

Preheat the oven to 170°C/150°C fan/gas mark 3½. Cut the beef cheeks in half and season with sea salt and black pepper. Heat a couple of tablespoons of oil in a heavy frying pan and fry the beef cheeks in batches, allowing them to brown and caramelise. Do not overcrowd the pan, or the meat will steam rather than brown. Meanwhile, in a large, heavy-bottomed casserole dish, fry the bacon until golden, add the chopped vegetables and fry until softened. Add the tomatoes and then the beef cheeks. Pour the red wine into the frying pan and scrape away any crispy bits, then add to the casserole dish. Add the chicken stock, cover and cook in the oven for about 3 hours, by which time the beef cheeks should be falling apart.

Remove the lid and cook for about a further 45 minutes, stirring occasionally, until some of the liquid has evaporated and you have a rich, thick sauce. Break up the meat with a wooden spoon. When the sauce has cooled slightly, add the balsamic or saba vinegar or vino cotto, which adds richness, and check the seasoning. This will be even better if you allow it to cool, refrigerate it overnight and use it the following day.