

Cuban Ropa Vieja

Shredded beef in tomato-pepper sofrito - serves 6

Serves 6 • Prep 20 min • Cook 2.5 hr • Cuba

INGREDIENTS

The beef

- 2.5 lbs flank steak (or skirt steak)
- 1 onion halved, 3 garlic cloves, 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp salt
- 8 cups water or beef broth to braise

The sofrito & sauce

- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 1 red + 1 green bell pepper, in strips
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 can (14 oz) crushed tomatoes + 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tsp cumin, 1 tsp oregano, 0.5 tsp smoked paprika
- 0.5 cup dry white wine (optional)
- 0.5 cup pimento-stuffed olives + 2 tbsp capers
- To serve: white rice, fried plantains

METHOD

1. Braise the flank steak with the halved onion, garlic, bay leaf and salt in water or broth, covered, about 2 hours until fork-tender. Reserve 1.5 cups of the cooking liquid.
2. Cool the beef slightly, then shred it into strands with two forks, following the grain. This is the ropa vieja - shredded old clothes texture.
3. Make the sofrito: soften the sliced onion and pepper strips in olive oil 8 minutes, add garlic 1 minute more.
4. Add the tomatoes, tomato paste, cumin, oregano, paprika and wine. Simmer 5 minutes to deepen.
5. Return the shredded beef with the reserved braising liquid. Simmer uncovered 25 to 30 minutes until the sauce clings and thickens.
6. Stir in the olives and capers, adjust salt, and serve over white rice with fried sweet plantains.

Tip • Shred with the grain into long strands, not chunks - the name means old clothes for a reason, and the ragged strands catch the sofrito far better than cubes would. Braising the day before makes it even better.