

In the Red . . .

In my last post, *Not Just a Little Chip Off the Old Block*, we explored the Cipollini Onion. With this post I thought, let's spend just a little more time with onions, a most foundational ingredient to cook with.

Here I want to share some perspective about cooking with red onions as well as a technique that transforms them into a versatile condiment or side dish.

During my years of cooking, I have come across many varieties of red onions—some as large as cannon balls or as small as golf balls—from local grocery markets to the farmer's markets I explore throughout the seasons.

Varieties such as Red Baron, Red Bull, Red Burgermeister, Red Hamburger, Red Wethersfield, and Red Zeppelin. The list goes on as I discover new varieties I've not encountered before, or as hybrid variations are introduced.

Most onions, red included, can be assertive when raw but become softer and sweeter when cooked. One approach to bringing out the sweetness of cooked red onions is to slowly braise them in red wine, which takes the end result to another level. Braising is a cooking method where food is initially seared or sautéed in a fat (oil and/or butter) and then slowly cooked in a liquid (stock or wine) in a covered pot or oven until tender.

Slow braising red onions in red wine results in a caramelized, deeply flavored dish. The approach is to cook the onions gently in a mix of olive oil, butter, red wine, vegetable stock, and herbs until they are reduced to a silky smooth texture. The red wine not only increases the depth of flavor of the red onions, it also enhances their overall color, since the natural red color often fades when these onions are cooked.

The result, as noted earlier, yields a versatile condiment that pairs seamlessly with grilled meats or a mix of sausages, served over polenta or included in a sauce for pasta, spooned atop a crostini over a triple cream cheese such as the Italian favorite La Tur, or a rich veined cheese such as Saint Agur—I think you get the idea!

So with that said, the following recipe is how I prepared a recent batch of slow-braised red onions in red wine. Let's get started.

Slow-Braised Red Onions in Red Wine

Ingredients

- 2 large red onions (most any variety), thinly sliced
- 2 cloves of garlic, finely minced
- 3 tablespoons of olive oil + 2 tablespoons of butter
- 1 cup dry red wine (many options)
- 1/2 cup vegetable stock
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon Herbs du Provence, lightly crushed between your fingers
- 1 to 2 bay leaves
- Salt and pepper to your taste

Method

Peel and thinly slice the onions.



Peeled red onions



Sliced

In a large stock pot with a lid or a Dutch oven, melt the butter in the olive oil over a medium-high temperature. Add the onions, stirring to break up the slices and thoroughly coat with the oil and butter.



Ready to braise

Season with the sugar, crushed herbs, bay leaves, and a light sprinkle of salt and pepper. Reduce the temperature to slowly sweat and reduce the onions until they begin to caramelize and soften, approximately 20 minutes' time.

Add the wine and stock, stirring for approximately 1 to 2 minutes, deglazing the bottom of the pot as needed.



Red wine added



In the braise

Cover the pot and slowly simmer for 30 to 45 minutes, stirring occasionally, allowing the onions to become silky smooth, deeply colored, and most of the braising liquid has reduced to a syrupy glaze.

Take the pot off the stovetop, remove the bay leaves, check and correct the seasoning to your taste, and allow the onions to cool to room temperature.



Red onion confit

Optionally, a teaspoon of aged balsamic vinegar can be added to the mix for additional depth of flavor and deeper color.

Depending on how you intend to use the braised red onions, they can be served at room temperature or gently warmed in the oven before plating.

That's all there is to it, so why not give this recipe a try? Right now, I'm leaning towards a crostini spread with the creamy La Tur cheese topped by the red wine braised red onions. Hmm, what to drink, a glass of Prosecco, or Barbaresco? Well, I leave that up to you.

Enjoy!



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