

Big Sky Bison Chili

When Meg said she made chili with ground buffalo meat, I was skeptical. But then I noticed it for sale in the meat department of my local Safeway, so bison has hit mainstream America after being an “out west” specialty for a myriad of generations. Last Christmas, Meg and her husband took the kids to Big Sky, Montana, for a family ski trip. Don had been there the year before with his ski buddies and thought they would all enjoy the mountain. He also recommended a great place for chili --The Cabin Bar and Grill, which is situated right next to the mountain. After tasting the house specialty, bison chili, Meg knew she had to have the recipe. The owners, Kelly and Curly Shea, were very friendly and kindly gave the recipe; this is her adaptation of their recipe.

Buffalo, also known as bison, is considered a “new” meat on the commercial market, an ironic label considering it is an ancestral meat to the Native American community. Since it is lower in fat than beef, and tastes remarkably like it as well, it is very appealing to modern cooks. It is part of the sustainable farming movement: free-range, hormone-free, grass-fed meat. All of a sudden it is easily available, too. It is now available at grocery stores, at the farmer’s market, or even online (Local Harvest). Because it is so low in fat, it is a meat that needs to be braised or stewed at a low temperature for a long time in the slow cooker to keep it from drying out. Buffalo is available ground like hamburger; handle and cook it exactly as you would beef. This chili recipe is a good place to give this new meat a try. The canned chipotle chiles are smoked, dried and sold reconstituted, canned in adobo sauce. They are fiery hot, so only a dash is needed to flavor an entire pot of chile. They keep for a long time in the refrigerator or freezer, so don't hesitate to buy a can for this recipe. This chili is now a favorite of kids and adults alike. Enjoy with some Honey-Top Cornbread (page XX).

Recommended Size: Large Round or Oval

Machine Setting and Cook Time: Low Heat: 8 to 9 hours

Serves 6 to 8

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 1/2-pounds ground bison

1 1/2 cups chopped onion

2 (14 1/2 -ounce) cans of diced tomatoes, undrained

4 tablespoons chili powder

2 teaspoons ground cumin

1 1/2 teaspoons ground coriander
3/4 teaspoon dried crumbled sage
1/2 teaspoon allspice
2 (16-ounce) cans black beans, drained
1 (16-ounce) can pinto beans, drained
1 (16-ounce) can water
1/2 cup beef broth
2 chopped chipotle peppers in adobo sauce, chopped
1 fresh ancho green chili, seeded, deveined, and stem removed, chopped
Sour cream, for serving
Shredded medium or sharp cheddar cheese, for serving
Corn chips, for serving

1. In a very large skillet over medium-high heat, cook the ground bison in a tablespoon of the olive oil until meat is brown. Place in the crock. Add the remaining olive oil then the onion to the skillet and cook until tender, 5 minutes; add to the crock. Then add the undrained tomatoes, chili powder, cumin, coriander, sage, allspice, beans, water, broth, chipotle peppers, and ancho chile; stir to combine.