

# Chow Down On Chili



Chile is the pepper. Chili is the concoction.

And now that we've got that straight, let's talk chili. It's chilly outside these days so now's a perfect time.

The history of chili is long and varied. Even the International Chili Society debates the origins of chili. (Yes, there IS an International Chili Society). Chili has been around in one form or another since cooking began.

The origins of Texas chili seem to have come from a range cook who was working along the cattle trail, feeding the hungry men at the end of a long day of rustling steer. Here's his original recipe:

## *CHILI CON CARNE*

*Cut up as much meat as you think you will need (any kind will do, but beef is probably best) in pieces about the size of a pecan. Put it in a pot, along with some suet (enough so as the meat won't stick to the sides of the pot), and cook it with about the same amount of wild onions, garlic, oregano, and chiles as you have got meat. Put in some salt. Stir it from time to time and cook it until the meat is as tender as you think*

*it's going to get.*

I love that last part about cooking it as long as it takes to get it tender. My theory is chili was developed as a full-flavored dish to mask the flavor of what was probably pretty bad meat.

*I have another Texas chili story:*

Years ago, we invited a couple over to our house for a Sunday meal. The gentleman decided he'd like to make his favorite chili. He was from Texas and said Texans make the best chili. He would bring the ingredients and make it in our kitchen. Oh, and by the way, he needed to start by 11 AM or the chili would not be done in time for dinner.

Yep. They just sort of invited themselves over for the entire day!

We had just met this couple a couple of months prior so we didn't know them very well. We weren't sure what we were going to do with them for an entire day. Turns out we didn't really need to think too hard. They had plans.

In addition to all the ingredients they needed to make the chili, they brought fixings for Bloody Mary's and for martinis. Their plan was to play board games and drink all day.

They put the meat on the stove and started to tenderize it. Their methodology involved continuing to add things to the meat as the day progressed and continually cook it over low heat so it would become melt-in-your-mouth tender.

My husband and I are not adept at drinking all afternoon, but they were. Many a martini went down easy. We did enjoy playing the board games. Trivial Pursuit was in vogue then. We laughed and played a few rounds of that. In-between we watched football.

The chili-man kept at his chili and around 7 PM we actually ate dinner. The chili was excellent but I never asked for the recipe. I'm not good at 8-hour recipes. I don't have many of them in my recipe file.

No beans. No macaroni. No discernible vegetables. Nothing but meat. We made cornbread to round out the meal.

At chili contests, you'll see all manner of chili recipes now. White chili made with chicken and white beans. Chili made with hamburger or chili made with stewing meat. Veggie chili too. Chili is all over the place now.

**I recommend chili as a tailgate item.** Instead of firing up the grill behind your vehicle, I suggest you bring along a crock pot full of chili. It's easy to eat; conveniently held in one hand. The chili will even keep your hand warm as you eat it. The chilies in the chili will keep your tummy warm during the game too. You can serve it in those cardboard bowls and clean up in a jiffy.

**Chili is a traveler for sure.** I've heard of truckers who brown up their meat at home, toss everything else for the chili along with the browned meat in a crockpot, plug it into the lighter socket and head off down the road. Chili's done a few hours later, the cab of the truck smells fantastic and a crock pot full of chili makes several meals.

**Chili travels to the office too and makes a fine and dandy meal heated in the microwave.** A bowl of chili can even make a quick after-school snack.

I opened my cupboard the other day and found a jar of roasted red pepper strips. That inspired me to make a new chili. Plan Z Diet has a bunch of great chili recipes. Everything from simple Chili Con Carne to fiery Caribbean Chicken Chili. Comfort

food that's diet food. That's a BIG YUM.

Cheers,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Zola". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "a".





## **Chili Con Carne**

This is a meaty chili with some veggies tossed in for crunch factor. Makes a satisfying lunch. You can take chili to the office and heat in the microwave for a perfect Zola To GO! meal. You can also freeze individual portions for later retrieval and then heat them.