

Creating A Great Chili

Do you know the difference between chili and chile? Chili with an “i” is a dish that mixes chile peppers with other ingredients. Chile with an “e” refers to a hot pepper; the plural is chilies.

While chili is a dish commonly described as a spicy stew with meat and tomatoes, it differs from place to place. One chili debate is whether or not it should contain beans. Regardless of your definition of chili, it is a great dish when hankering a heartier food.

Chili is commonly made of tomatoes, beans, chile peppers, meat, garlic, onions, and cumin. However, there are many variations to the basic chili. Whereas a meaty chili con carne is probably the most traditional version of this dish, chili can take many forms. The key ingredients that bind them all together are the chili spices. Making chili is easy. It’s always nice to have a twist on a classic dish, so learn to customize your homemade chili.

Use A Different Protein:

- Use a half-pound of ground meat and add an extra can of pinto beans.
- Make chili without beef (vegetarian) with two cans of extra beans instead of the beef.
- To make chili without beans, use 2 lbs. ground meat instead of one.
- Mexican chorizo makes a spicy alternative to beef and increases the flavor of the chili.
- Use other ground meat, such as ground turkey, chicken, pork, Italian sausage, or wild game.
- Shredded chicken breast and chopped chicken thighs work well in chili.

Add Flavorful Liquids:

- Instead of water, use tomato or vegetable juice.
- Low-sodium beef broth instead of water gives the chili an extra flavor boost.
- Using dark beer instead of water adds an earthy flavor.
- A small amount of red wine imparts richness, depth, and body to beefy chili.
- Liquid smoke will add a smokey dimension to the chili.
- A moderate amount of espresso, strong-brewed black coffee, or instant coffee granules will amp up the deep, complex flavors of chili.
- Sriracha hot sauce will add a spicy, tangy, slightly sweet heat to chili.
- Cola adds an alluring, mysterious, sweet taste.
- Coconut milk will make a creamy, rich chili.
- Add a squeeze of lime juice for tang and a clean, fresh taste.

Customize The Spices:

- Adding a couple of chipotle chiles in adobo will give the chili a spicy and smokey flavor.
- Smoked paprika (1 teaspoon) will add smokiness without extra heat.
- Cocoa powder (1/2-1 Tablespoon) or unsweetened baking chocolate adds another flavor note to the chili.
- Cinnamon (1 teaspoon) plays nicely with the chili peppers.

- Use a small amount of nutmeg, cloves, allspice, and other sweet spices to make the chili more aromatic.
- Add a touch of sweetening with molasses, honey, or brown sugar.

Add Extra Vegetables and/or Fruit:

- Make an extra veggie-licious chili by adding finely diced zucchini, bell pepper, and shredded carrots.
- Include frozen corn kernels.
- Diced sweet potato, pumpkin, or butternut squash adds a unique, pleasing contrast and beautiful color.
- Olives have a briny flavor that lends a salty depth to the chili.
- Many Asian dishes incorporate fruit into savory dishes, so try mango for a tropical twist.
- Sweet, tart cranberries will temper the heat of chili.

Chili freezes and reheats beautifully. Freeze it in single servings for lunches or in freezer bags for a quick and easy weeknight meal. Defrost the chili by thawing it in the refrigerator, microwave, or on the stovetop. Add additional water if necessary.

If it's chilly outside and you've decided to eat something warm and cozy for dinner – chili it is! Find some ways to make a classic chili recipe even better.