

Bracirole de Manzo

Serves 6

FOR THE BRACIOLE

1 1/2 cups milk

2 cups 1/2-inch bread cubes, cut from day-old Italian bread with crusts removed

2 hard-cooked eggs, peeled and coarsely chopped

1/4 cup chopped fresh Italian parsley

1/4 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

1/4 cup raisins

1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted

1 clove garlic, finely chopped

2 pounds beef bottom round, cut into 12 slices each about 1/2 inch thick

12 slices imported Italian prosciutto (about 6 ounces)

1/4 pound imported provola or provolone cheese, cut into 1/4-by-1/4-by-1-inch sticks

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE SAUCE

One 35-ounce can Italian plum tomatoes (preferably San Marzano)

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 small onions (about 8 ounces), chopped

2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1/2 cup dry red wine

3 tablespoons tomato paste

2 fresh or dried bay leaves

Salt and hot red pepper flakes to taste

To make the stuffing:

Pour the milk into a medium bowl, add the bread cubes, and let soak until the bread is very soft, 20 to 30 minutes. Drain the bread, squeeze out excess milk from the cubes with your hands, and return bread to the bowl. Stir in the chopped eggs, parsley, Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, raisins, pine nuts, and garlic. Mix well, and set aside.

With the toothed side of a heavy meat mallet, pound each slice of beef round to a thickness of about 1/4 inch. Arrange one of the pounded meat slices in front of you with one of the short sides closest to you. Top with a slice of prosciutto, and tap the prosciutto with the back side of a knife so it adheres to the beef. Spread 2 tablespoons of the stuffing over the beef slice, leaving a 1-inch border around the edges. Place a stick of provolone crosswise over the edge of the stuffing closest to you. Fold the border over the provolone, then fold the side borders in to overlap the edges of the stuffing. Roll into a compact tube. Secure the end flap with a toothpick. Repeat with the remaining beef and stuffing, then season the rolls with salt and pepper.

Empty the tomatoes into a bowl, and squeeze them with your hands until coarsely crushed, removing the cores as you do. Heat the olive oil in a large, heavy casserole over medium heat. Stir in the onions and garlic, and cook until the onions are wilted, about 5 minutes. Add as many of the bracirole as will fit in a single layer, and cook, turning the bracirole as necessary, until golden on all sides, about 7 minutes. If necessary, repeat with any remaining bracirole. Adjust the heat under the pan as necessary to prevent the beef from scorching. Pour the wine into the casserole, bring to a boil, and cook until most of it has evaporated. Stir in the tomatoes, and bring to a boil. Add tomato paste and bay leaves, and stir until the paste is dissolved. Season lightly with salt and red pepper flakes, adjust the heat so the liquid is simmering, and cook, adding water as necessary to keep the bracirole completely submerged, until the beef is tender, about 3 hours.