

Here is my comfort food:

Your first (or second or third) time coming to my house for a dinner party, you're almost certainly going to be met with my take on picadillo. There aren't many dishes I'd say are my "signature," but this one fits the bill. I've learned that picadillo is something eaten throughout Latin America and the Philippines in a couple different variations, but I came to know it in one of its Cuban forms in Florida. My grandmother picked up a version when she lived in Key West and it was always my favorite thing to order when I went to the many and excellent Cuban restaurants throughout the state of Florida. I love picadillo because of a few things: it's a way to wow your midwestern family since cumin, bay leaf, salt, and pepper seem to push many midwesterners right up to the boundary of their spice tolerance. It's a deceptively simple dish to prepare and something you can let simmer all day. Finally it's a down to earth dish that carries a varied and complex history: A traditional home-cooked meal, each household that makes it seems to have their own take on it meaning that each version you try is going to have little quirks that carry that family's unique story.

1 lb. ground beef (the leaner, the better; Beef or other beef substitutes also work)
2 tbsp. olive oil
2 cloves garlic, chopped
1 med. onion, chopped
1 med. green pepper, chopped
1 (15 oz.) can tomato sauce
2 tsp. oregano
1/8 tsp. cumin
2 bay leaves
5 tbsp. dry wine
2 tbsp. brown sugar
1 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. pepper
1 1/2 oz. box raisins (optional)
1 tbsp. green olives, sliced (optional)

Lightly brown beef and set aside. Heat olive oil over medium heat. Add garlic until golden brown. Add onion and green pepper until softened.

Add tomato sauce, oregano, cumin, bay leaves, wine, sugar, salt and pepper. Let simmer for 5 minutes. Add beef and mix well, breaking up any clumps in the meat. Let simmer for 25-30 minutes (or longer). Add olives and raisins, if desired. Simmer for 5 minutes more. Serves 6. Serve with white rice, black beans, and maduros.