

Il ragu (stuffed beef rolls in tomato ragu)

A dish traditionally made for Sunday dinner in the southern regions of Italy. From “Passione – The Italian Cookbook” by Gennaro Contaldo recommended by Lisa Bowles.

Whilst this recipe suggests sirloin steak, Lisa cooked two batches for a blind tasting to compare sirloin with topside cut and cooked in exactly the same way. It all tasted extremely good (like everything Lisa cooks) and none of our eight expert tasters could tell which was sirloin and which topside.

Ingredients (Serves 6)

For the beef rolls

12 small thin sirloin steaks
25g Parmesan cheese
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
A handful of flat-leaf parsley, torn
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the sauce

6 tablespoons olive oil
150ml red wine
1 onion, very finely chopped
1 celery stalk, very finely chopped
2 tablespoons tomato concentrate or puree, diluted in 400ml lukewarm water
2 x 400g tins of chopped tomatoes
A handful of fresh basil leaves, torn

Arrange the slices of meat on a chopping board and flatten them with a meat tenderiser. Season with salt and pepper, then sprinkle with the Parmesan, garlic and parsley. Roll each slice up tightly and secure with cocktail sticks.

For the sauce, heat the olive oil in a large saucepan. When hot, lower the heat, add the meat rolls and seal well on all sides. Increase the heat again, add the wine and simmer until it has reduced by half. Remove the meat and set aside.

Add the onion and celery to the pan and stir well. Cook until the remainder of the wine has nearly evaporated, then put the meat back in the pan and pour over the diluted tomato concentrate and chopped tomatoes. Season with salt and pepper and stir in the basil. Lower the heat and cover with a lid, but not completely to let some of the steam escape. Cook gently for 2 hours, stirring from time to time. Check the seasoning.

Serve the tomato sauce with some cooked pasta such as tagliatelle or large rigatoni. Then serve the meat rolls as a main course with a green salad.