With the cut of meat decided, we moved on to seasonings. We sautéed onion and then added our ground spices to the skillet. Chili powder and cumin blossomed in the hot oil, bringing a depth of flavor to the chili that was missing when we had added it to the mixture later. Canned chipotle chiles added even more complexity of flavor, and tasters preferred chili made with (gasp) tomatoes. Tomato puree plus a small amount of tapioca gave our chili just the right texture and kept it from being too thin or watery. (True, tapioca is a bit unconventional, but its thickening effect worked perfectly.) We were getting close to the perfect chili, but it was still a little dry, so we added chicken broth, which also helped carry the flavor of the spices throughout the chili.

At this point, we were happy with the flavor, but some tasters were left wondering about beans. While research confirmed that a real Texas "bowl of red" doesn't include beans (they're often served on the side), we liked the creaminess that they brought to the dish, and their starch helped balance its fiery heat. We tested stirring them in at the beginning of the cooking time as well as during the last half hour and found that the beans held up like chili champs and had the best flavor when we added them at the onset of cooking.

Slow-Cooker Texas Chili

SERVES 6 TO 8

Chuck-eye roasts are notoriously fatty, so don't be surprised if you trim off 1 to 1½ pounds of fat. Avoid precut beef labeled "beef for stew"—it could be beef round or boneless shoulder roast, which will turn out dry and tough. For a milder chili, use the lower amount of chipotle chiles; for a spicy chili, use the higher amount of chipotle. Serve with chopped fresh cilantro, minced onion, diced avocado, shredded cheddar or Jack cheese, and sour cream.

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 medium onions, minced
- 8 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 8 teaspoons)
- ¼ cup chili powder
- ¼ cup tomato paste
- 2 tablespoons ground cumin
- Salt
- 1 (28-ounce) can tomato puree
- 1 (5-pound) chuck-eye roast, trimmed and cut into 1½-inch chunks
- 2 (15.5-ounce) cans pinto or kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- ¼ cup Minute tapioca
- 2–4 tablespoons minced chipotle chile in adobo sauce
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons dark brown sugar, plus extra to taste
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh oregano leaves, or 1 teaspoon dried
- Ground black pepper

1. Heat the oil in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering but not smoking. Add the onions, garlic, chili powder, tomato paste, cumin, and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook until the onions are softened and lightly browned, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in the tomato puree, scraping up any browned bits.

2. Transfer the onion and tomato mixture to the slow cooker insert and stir in the beef, beans, broth, tapioca, chipotles, soy sauce, the 2 tablespoons of sugar, and oregano until evenly combined. Cover and cook on low until the meat is tender, 9 to 11 hours. (Alternatively, cover and cook on high for 5 to 7 hours.)

3. Gently tilt the slow cooker insert and degrease as much fat as possible off the surface of the chili using a large flat spoon. Season with salt, pepper, and brown sugar to taste, and serve.

PREP-AHEAD TIPS

You can store all the ingredients below together with the exception of the meat, which must be refrigerated separately.

- Cook the onion and tomato mixture as described in step 1, then transfer it to an airtight container and refrigerate.
- Drain and rinse the beans and refrigerate.
- Trim and cut the meat and refrigerate.