

Bottle-of-Wine Brisket “Au Poivre” with Cinnamon, Crispy Dates, Fried Shallots, and Herbs

Serves 6-8

I recommend making this in advance (1 to 3 days) for a number of reasons. Slicing brisket and skimming fat is easier when everything is cold, and it's a breeze on the day of serving to have everything ready. But best of all, the meat will become more flavorful and soak up the goodness of the braising liquid as it sits. You can slice the brisket just before serving, but I like to do so as soon as the meat is chilled and firm, and then store the slices in the liquid. It's like surround sound, for your beef.

Use a brisket point rather than a brisket flat! The point is less lean, which means more flavor and more die-for richness. Ask the butcher to leave a nice fat cap on the exterior but to remove as much exorbitant other fat as possible. Can you use a flat cut if that's all you can find? Of course.

Ideally, crush the peppercorns with a mortar and pestle or spice grinder, unless your peppermill can grind to a fairly coarse texture.

3/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes

2 heaping tablespoons coarsely cracked black peppercorns

Kosher salt

One 4 to 4 1/2 pound brisket point (as opposed to brisket flat), trimmed of any exorbitant fat

1 large onion, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch wedges

3 stalks celery, plus leaves if they're present

1 bunch parsley, leaves and stems separated, stems tied together with butcher twine or celery strings

1/2 bunch thyme

3 cinnamon sticks

1 bottle red wine

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

Olive oil, for frying

1 1/2 pounds shallots (about 14 medium-large bulbs); half peeled and sliced, half peeled and halved lengthwise

3 ounces pitted dates, sliced (about 1/2 cup)

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees with a rack in the center. Yes, this is a hotter temperature than you might expect for a brisket, but because you're not browning it first, you'll get better caramelization this way. Trust!

2. Combine the red pepper flakes, half of the cracked black peppercorns, and 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon salt in a small bowl.

3. Rub the spice mixture on all sides of the brisket, pressing to adhere. (This is a great step to do in advance, even if only an hour ahead of time, to let the seasonings begin to make their way into the meat.) If you're opting to brown the brisket (to each their own/old habits die hard/if you've got the time), head to the searing instructions at the bottom of the recipe.**

4. Place the brisket in a large Dutch oven with a tight-fitting lid, fattiest side up. It's okay if it's a bit snug in the pot, as the brisket will shrink as it cooks. If you don't have a Dutch oven that's large enough, use a roasting pan or large baking dish and cover tightly with aluminum foil.

5. Scatter the onion, celery, parsley stems, thyme, and cinnamon sticks all around the brisket. Pour a bottle of wine into the pot, along with the red wine vinegar and 1½ cups water. Bring to a brisk simmer over medium-high heat, cover, and transfer to the oven.

6. Braise, basting the brisket halfway through, for 2½ hours. Uncover the pot, baste, and distribute the *halved* (as opposed to *sliced*) shallots around the roast. Recover, and continue braising until the meat is tender and jiggly, about 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes more. What's tender? Piercing the center of the brisket with a paring knife should offer little resistance, and the edges of the meat should be slightly pull-apart and just starting to shred at the edges.

7. Remove the brisket and shallots from the pot and transfer to a baking dish or vessel deep enough to hold the cooking liquid. (Ideally this will be something that you can reheat the brisket in before serving— just trying to save you some dishwashing.) Strain the liquid through a fine-meshed sieve, press ever so lightly, and discard the solids. With a big spoon, skim fat from the surface and reserve for frying the garnishes, if desired. Season the braising jus to taste with salt and pour over the brisket and shallots. Cover with plastic wrap and transfer to the refrigerator. Once chilled, skim the fat again, slice the brisket to your desired thickness against the grain (so easy when cold!), and return the slices to the dish, submerged again in the liquid. I like to do this slicing step as soon as the brisket is cold, in order to let the slices themselves take in the liquid and absorb all of that goodness. You can also just keep the brisket whole and slice immediately before rewarming and serving.

Alternatively, if serving immediately, strain the liquid (reserving the shallots for serving), skim fat, and carve as you wish! If cutting into slices is tricky because the brisket is hot and a bit fall apart, lean into the shred... that's fine, too.

8. Garnish making! (You can certainly do this while the brisket is braising. Just use olive oil in place of the brisket fat for frying.) Line a baking sheet with paper towels. Place skimmed brisket fat into a small skillet, supplementing with enough olive oil as necessary to come ¼-inch up the pan. (It's ok if a bit of the cooking liquid got skimmed up along with the fat; it will start to evaporate once hot.) Place over medium-high heat. Add the shallots in two batches. Fry, swirling the pan and stirring occasionally, until golden and crisp, about 7 to 9 minutes. They will likely fry a bit unevenly, and that's okay! Stop the cooking when the majority of the shallots turn medium-golden. Using a fine-meshed sieve, strain into a heatproof bowl or measuring cup, gently shake to remove excess oil, and scatter shallots onto the prepared baking pan and season with salt. (You can also remove shallots with a slotted spoon, but if you have one, using a strainer and a bowl makes the frying process pretty seamless.) Return the oil to the skillet and repeat with remaining shallots, adjusting heat to prevent burning and replenishing oil as necessary.

Reserve half of the parsley leaves for serving. Fry the remaining parsley leaves in very small batches, and **STAND BACK** as you add them to the skillet, as they will pop in the hot oil! When the splattering subsides, submerge the leaves in the oil and let cook just until crisp, about 15-30 seconds. Remove by straining through a sieve over a bowl or by using a slotted spoon; transfer to the sheet pan with the shallots and season with salt. If you strained over a bowl, return the oil to the skillet.

Over medium-high heat, add the remaining cracked black peppercorns to the skillet and toast, swirling the pan, until sizzling and fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the dates, stir to coat, and toast until whitened on the edges and slightly translucent in parts, about 1 minute more. The dates will crisp as they cool. Strain the mixture, reserving oil for another use if desired, and transfer to the sheet pan with the rest of the garnishes. (If desired, you can mix the whole mess of garnishes together in a bowl, and pass at the table, if you're a real DIY kinda person.)

9. Serve! If you haven't already sliced the brisket, do so, and return the slices to the pot or a heat-proof serving dish, along with the braising liquid. Transfer to a 400 degree oven (if in a pot, you can jumpstart things by getting the liquid bubbling on the stovetop first), basting occasionally until the brisket is warmed through and the cooking liquid is bubbling and reduced a bit. Give the braising jus and brisket slices one last taste and one last seasoning with salt, if necessary. Serve, with plenty of cooking liquid and the roasted shallots, topped with all the crispy garnishes and some fresh parsley, too.

****BROWNING INSTRUCTIONS, if you desire:**

Heat a large skillet or your Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add 2 tablespoons olive oil, swirl to coat, and add the brisket, fat side down first. If desired, place a heavy skillet, pot, or both on top of the brisket to encourage surface contact and increase browning. Sear until deeply golden, about 6-8 minutes. Flip, and repeat on the other side or two. (Points will likely have 3 sides to sear; if you're using a flat, you'll only brown two sides.)

Remove the brisket to a plate. Reduce heat to medium and add the onions and celery. Cook until golden on the edges, about 4-6 minutes. Add the parsley stems, thyme, cinnamon sticks, wine, vinegar and 1½ cups water, scraping the pan to deglaze. Nestle the brisket and any accumulated juices into the cooking liquid and cover. Return to the recipe and proceed with step 6.