CD'S CHILI MOLE

If you've gotten a little bored with the regular old bowl of red, try this. It's pronounced "MO-lay," as in the famed Mexican sauce, not "mole" as in little pesky animals who leave holes in your lawn. This is a superb chili. Its taste is indefinable and elusive, its texture decidedly rich. Although you can certainly serve Chili Mole with all the traditional Fixins, it also works beautifully served in a more minimalist style, the better to approach the complex parade of flavors that rolls over your tongue with each bite.

Please promise me you won't be put off by the length of the ingredients list—it's mostly spices—or the seeming peculiarity of some of the ingredients: This is one you will not want to miss.

Note: I adore the crunch of the occasional whole coriander seed in the finished chili. If you don't, omit the coriander seeds, or use 1½ teaspoons ground coriander instead. Vn

FOR THE BEANS:

1 pound dried black beans, picked over, rinsed, and soaked overnight (see page 16) or quick-soaked (see page 17)

2½ to 3 quarts any well-flavored vegetable stock (or a 12-ounce bottle of beer plus enough water or vegetable stock to make up the difference)

2 bay leaves

1 ancho chile, stemmed (see box, page 162)

1 jalapeño pepper, stemmed

Freshly ground black pepper

⅓ cup dark raisins (I like monukkas)

FOR THE SAUTÉ:

Vegetable oil cooking spray

¼ cup olive oil

2 large onions, chopped

1 green bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped

1 jalapeño pepper, stemmed, seeds left in for heat or removed for mildness, chopped

1 poblano pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped

1 tablespoon cumin seeds

2 teaspoons coriander seeds

2 teaspoons ground cumin

2 teaspoons ground coriander

½ teaspoon dried oregano

¼ teaspoon cayenne, or to taste

¼ teaspoon aniseed

⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Tiny pinch of ground cloves

2 teaspoons sweet Hungarian paprika (if desired, ½ teaspoon can be smoked)

1 tablespoon hot chili powder

3 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped

FOR THE FINISH:

1 can (16 ounces) chopped tomatoes in juice

¼ cup tomato paste

1 to 2 ounces unsweetened chocolate, diced

2 tablespoons creamy, natural, unhydrogenated peanut butter (see box, page 323)

1 tablespoon tahini (or 2 tablespoons freshly toasted sesame seeds)

1 chipotle chile in adobo, stemmed, with 2 teaspoons adobo sauce

Salt

1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon agave syrup or honey (optional)

Chili Fixins (optional; see page 173)

1 Drain the soaked black beans and rinse them well. Place them in a large, heavy pot and add enough stock to cover them to a depth of 1½ inches. Add the bay leaves, ancho chile, jalapeño, and lots and lots of freshly ground black pepper (you can hardly add too much). Bring to a boil, then turn down to a simmer and cook, covered, for 1 hour. Lift the lid and add the raisins. Continue cooking until the beans are nearly tender and the raisins have more or less disintegrated, 30 to 60 minutes more.

2 Meanwhile, about 20 minutes or so before the beans are done, spray a large, heavy skillet with oil. Place it over medium heat, add the olive oil and, when it's hot, the onions. Sauté the onions until they start to soften, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in the bell pepper, jalapeño, and poblano and sauté for another 2 minutes. Then add all the remaining spices, lower the heat slightly, and cook, stirring constantly, for 1 to 2 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, until it just becomes fragrant, about 30 seconds. Remove the sauté from the heat.

"The kitchen is no place for fretting!"

—Lisa Esposito

3 Scrape the sauté into the simmering beans. Deglaze the pan with a little bean stock, stirring to loosen any browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Return this liquid to the beans.

4 Add the tomatoes and the tomato paste to the bean pot, and stir well. Simmer for another 10 minutes, then maintain at a low simmer while you continue with the recipe.

5 Place the chocolate, peanut butter, tahini, and chipotle in adobo in a food processor. Add a generous ladleful of the simmering beans (including the whole ancho and jalapeño, if you can find them), and buzz to make a thick, highly seasoned paste. Scrape this into the bean pot, turn the heat down as low as possible, and add salt to taste—it will take quite a bit. Simmer slowly, partially covered, until the seasonings are well blended, about 20 minutes longer.

6 Just before serving, pick out the bay leaves and the ancho stem. If you like, mash a couple of ladlefuls of the beans against the sides of the pot to thicken the chili slightly. Taste for seasonings: You want heat (perhaps a little more cayenne or adobo), richness (more chocolate), a little sweetness (add agave syrup as needed). Serve, with the optional Fixins, right away, or let it come to room temperature, then refrigerate it, covered, overnight and reheat it very, very gently (or in a slow-cooker) the next day. (It's much better after an overnight in the fridge.)

Serves 8 to 10 with Fixins