

**BRISKET:** As each animal offers only two brisket portions, this is a cut to treasure. One of the greatest braising cuts of all time, brisket makes for extraordinary pot roast that can be oven-braised or cooked on the stovetop. Alternatively, try cubing brisket to make an unforgettable stew, or smoke it for real barbecue. The key to cooking this cut is to take your time and always use the lowest possible heat.

## Brisket of Beef with Red Wine, Prunes, and Spices

**B**risket was the first piece of grass-fed beef I ever cooked, and it remains one of my favorite cuts. Slow-cooked to deep tenderness and flavor, this recipe offers a little heat from the ground peppers and a little sweetness from the fruit. It's a recipe I use over and over again with almost every brisket, except for the ones I smoke for real slow-cooked barbecue. If you prefer, you could substitute dried apricots for the prunes or make a half-and-half mix of dried fruit.

### SERVES 8

4 to 5 pounds grass-fed beef brisket	1 cup chicken, turkey, or beef stock, preferably homemade (see page 303, 318, or 124)
1 teaspoon sea salt	4 carrots, thickly sliced
1 tablespoon sugar	1 (14½-ounce) can whole or diced tomatoes
2 teaspoons ground cumin	1 whole head garlic, cut in half, outer papery cover removed
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper	½ pound dried prunes (about 1½ loosely packed cups)
1 teaspoon potent ground red pepper or hot (picante) pimentón de la Vera (smoked Spanish paprika)	6 sprigs fresh thyme
1 teaspoon sweet paprika	<b>For the garnish:</b>
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil	Minced fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 cup red wine (I use Merlot)	
6 onions, sliced	

Blot the meat dry. Blend together the salt, sugar, cumin, ground black and red peppers, and paprika and rub the mixture over the dried meat. Let the brisket rest on a rack to bring it to room temperature, about 1 hour. (You could apply the rub a day ahead: Refrigerate the meat until about 1 hour before you intend to cook it, then allow it to return to room temperature.)

Heat the oven to 325 degrees. Heat a large Dutch oven and add 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. When the oil has thinned and become fragrant, brown the meat well on both sides, fat side first, 7 to 10 minutes per side. It is ready to turn when it stops sticking to the pot. Transfer the browned meat to a deep platter and deglaze the pot with the red wine, scraping up any browned bits. Cook the wine down by half and pour it over the meat on the platter.

Wipe out the pot, add the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil, and sweat the onions until they are soft, translucent, and just beginning to brown. Deglaze the pot with ½ cup of the stock, scraping with a wooden spatula.

Return the meat and reduced wine to the pot, along with the remaining ½ cup stock, carrots, tomatoes, garlic, prunes, and thyme. Cover the pot and set it in the oven for 3 hours, turning the meat every half hour or so. The meat is done when it is meltingly soft and you feel no resistance if you pierce it with a skewer.

Remove the meat to a platter, and cook down the sauce if necessary. One great advantage of grass-fed beef is that the sauce will have very little fat—you can strain and skim it, but you will not collect much at all.

Cut the meat against the grain into thin slices. Top the slices with the sauce and garnish with a shower of parsley.