

# Steve's Chili Cooking Guide

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Chili is easy and fun to make. It is healthy. And best of all it's hard to screw up. I have no set recipe – no set ingredients, cook time or temperature. Each time I prepare and cook it differently and each time it comes out great (at least that's what I'm told). Here's my secret - basically you throw a bunch of Mexicanish ingredients into a pot (or sauce pan) and cook it until you think it's ready.

There are only two ingredients that I always include: **tomatoes** and **chili powder**. Everything else is optional. The measurements I include here are for a good sized pot of chili that can serve 4 people.

## Instructions

1. If using meat, cook it separately
2. Put pot or sauce pan on low/med heat.
3. Dice "hard" vegetables (onions and/or potatoes) and add to chili pot.
4. Prepare and add other ingredients. It may not look like there is any liquid. That's okay, be patient and the liquid will appear.
5. After about 10 min, start adding spices.
6. Continue tasting and refining spices.
7. When the right consistency is reached – typically when onions and/or potatoes are al dente, take off heat.
8. Serve and await compliments.

## Ingredients

### Tomatoes

Tomatoes are the base for the dish. You have 2 options:

1. Buy fresh tomatoes and chop them. This is what I usually do. I generally get 3 tomatoes at the store (the cheap big ones).
2. Used canned tomatoes. Look for diced (not 'petite cut') and I recommend using the ones that say 'no salt added'. You'll get plenty of salt from other ingredients. 2 cans is enough.

### Salsa

Salsa is primarily tomatoes, but I don't recommend using a bunch of salsa in place of plain tomatoes – it would overpower other ingredients. But salsa has great ingredients and flavors and is a welcome addition. I dump a jar of salsa in my chili about half the time. If you do, you can cut back a bit on your tomatoes.

## Beans

I love beans and wouldn't enjoy chili without them. They are a great source of fiber and protein and I love the flavor. I use a lot of beans in my chili – about 4-6 cans per batch. This is probably a bit excessive but I'm the one cooking it so kiss my ass if you got a problem with it. When buying cans of beans, any kind will do – black, white, light red, dark red, whatever. They all taste pretty much the same so it's a matter of size and consistency. Black beans are nice and small. I like dark red kidney beans because they have a firm skin which makes them less mushy and more recognizable during consumption.

Make sure you **always drain and rinse** cans of beans! The liquid they are canned in is thick and super salty – gross. I dump them all into a strainer and run them under the sink for a while. Get them as clean as possible.

If you dare, you can get dried beans and soak them yourself. But that's another hassle and requires a day to do, so stick with the cans at first.

I don't recommend refried beans. They are very salty and turn chili into paste.

## Meat

Any type of meat will do – ground beef, steak, ground turkey, chicken, chorizo (sausage), or even pork. Personally I like ground meat. I also like to keep my chili as close to fat free as possible, so I go with ground turkey (look for 99% fat free stuff, because not all is) or super lean ground beef. But it's your choice.

Cook the meat first to a light-med brown in a separate pan. I like to sprinkle chili powder, garlic, and cumin over my ground meat and knead it in with my hands before throwing it in the pan. I believe it makes a difference when biting into it.

With lean meats, toss a bit of oil to help the browning. With non-ground meat, you can use water to speed things up. Just drain before tossing into the chili pot.

Don't feel forced to use meat. It's expensive and most of the time people don't miss it. If you leave it out, I recommend plenty of beans to provide protein.

## Corn

In my opinion, corn is more of an aesthetic ingredient than anything. It doesn't have much nutritional benefit and the taste gets overpowered by other components. When I use corn, I use about half a can. A little bit goes a long way. Use too much and your chili will look more like doody (or vice versa). Drain and rinse for good measure. I recommend salt free or low salt cans.

## Onion

I use one or two onions in my chili. I use red normally but use whatever kind of onion you wish. Dice them up pretty good...long strands of onion aren't very good in chili. I put onion in first because of all the ingredients it typically takes the longest to cook in the chili pot.

I recommend using onions as a barometer to indicate when the chili is done cooking. Wait until the onions are at the consistency you want (I prefer slightly crunchy) and take the pot off the heat.

## Potatoes

Not very traditional, I like the consistency potatoes bring to the mix. Dice em kinda small or else they won't get cooked in time. Put these in right along with onion, because like the onion, they can't cook too long or else they get mushy. I use red potatoes and put about 2 good sized suckers in there.

## Cilantro

Also used as a garnish, I like to chop up a good fistful of cilantro and add it toward the end of cooking. Do this only if you like the taste of cilantro. Don't include the stems. Chop it up pretty fine.

## Jalapeno

If you like some heat, I recommend fresh jalapenos. Hot sauce is fine but disrupts the natural flavors. I usually take one or two fresh (not canned like for sandwiches) jalapenos and add them. We buy a container in the fresh produce section and freeze them. Thawing takes about 20sec in microwave. Cut them in half length-wise and remove the seeds. Fresh jalapenos are very hot, so **DO NOT TOUCH YOUR EYES DURING THIS!** Dice them up fine and throw them in. Wash your hands thoroughly afterward.

## Garlic

You can use garlic powder, but fresh garlic is also nice. I usually use both...and throw in about 3 cloves of freshly diced garlic in the beginning.

## Others

Again, the best part about chili is there is no one recipe for it. So add anything else you want! Use your judgment with quantity and how you cut them up. Here are some ideas – many of which I've used and been happy with:

- Mushrooms
- Tofu
- Broccoli
- Zucchini
- Banana peppers

Use your imagination. Try a fruit if you dare!

## Spices

Spices are all subjective. It's about adjusting to your taste. My advice is to add spices slowly and keep tasting. I taste my chili about 10 times during cooking and give a bit to others for their advice. This may seem obvious, but when spooning out a sample blow on it for a while. The only thing that's ever ruined chili for me is a burnt tongue (it's happened more than once). And of course always mix spices in well before sampling.

## Chili Powder

Add plenty of chili powder after all the ingredients have been added. I put a nice even dark layer across the whole pot. Sometimes I feel like I'm putting too much but upon tasting it's totally fine. So

don't worry about being a bit liberal with the chili powder. I recommend picking up a big container of it – they are cheap.

### **Cumin**

Accompanies chili powder well. I say use about 1/3 as much cumin as chili powder. This is not a critical ingredient but it improves the taste.

### **Garlic Powder**

Even with fresh garlic I end up putting some garlic powder. Sprinkle to taste. I use about 4 hefty shakes.

### **Black Pepper**

A little bit is a nice idea but it's a minor detail.

### **Salt**

Some ingredients - especially anything canned – provide enough sodium. But if you find your chili lacking in some way, try a little bit of salt. I almost never have to use salt.

### **BBQ**

I recommend putting a few hard squirts of BBQ sauce in there. It adds sweetness and smokiness. This is one of my secret ingredients. Recently I started using brown sugar and smoke flavoring instead of bottled sauce but that's a bit advanced.

### **Chocolate**

Lots of people swear by using chocolate in their chili. I always forget to pick up baker's chocolate so I haven't experimented much. But I hear it's good. Talk to me in the future and I might have some experiences to share.

## **Garnishes**

I serve chili in bowls and we use spoons. My chili comes out pretty thick and chunky. By the way, if you wanna have thinner chili you can add more tomatoes, some chicken stock, wine (taste as you add), or just plain water.

### **Cheese**

Grated cheddar is always a winner. If we don't have grated cheese, Jodi will weep.

### **Sour Cream**

My personal favorite. I put a big dollop on my bowl. I buy the reduced fat stuff and it tastes great. Fat free kinds sucks though.

### **Cilantro**

If you put some in the chili, save a bit to sprinkle on top afterward.

## Hot Sauce

Go nuts.

# Accompaniments

## Chips

We typically get tortilla chips, spoon our chili onto them, and shove them in our mouths. It provides a great crunch. Now that I think about it, my chili is closer to nachos than traditional chili. Oh well.

## Beer

Always a good idea.

**Thanks for listening!** I wish I could be more scientific for you, but I just can't. Maybe that's why I like making chili so much – my job is so scientific that I love going into the kitchen and just following my gut (pun intended). Again, it's hard to screw up a chili so don't be afraid. Good luck!!!

