



## Oh Christmas Tree & Braised Short Ribs

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For many the first weekend of December can only mean one thing. It's time to deck the halls and put up the tree. Many families will spend next Saturday afternoon wandering through the snow, saw in hand, looking for the perfect specimen to hang their baubles and bows.

The Nye's were never one of those families. Yes, we did have a tree. Yes, we did spend a wonderful Sunday afternoon decorating it. But we didn't trudge through the woods or a tree farm with a saw. We took (what should have been) the easy route. We bought our tree at the local garden shop.

One year was particularly memorable. Staying at home with my-then baby brother, my mother sent my dad, my sister Brenda and I to buy the tree. It was not without some trepidation. Convinced that Dad would just grab the first tree he saw, she put her two little girls in charge. As we tumbled into the backseat of the station wagon, she rattled off a list of instructions. We should buy a Douglas fir. Or was it a Blue spruce? Make sure it's not too tall or too short. It should be plump and full and fit in the bay window in the living room. Mum's instructions went in one ear and out the other. I was only seven. Brenda could handle it. After all she was in the fifth grade.

Most years we arrived at the garden shop just as the winter sun was fading and the temperature dropping. This one was no exception. We wandered through the rows of trees. Dad pulled out a likely candidate for our inspection. We checked for bare spots and tried to guess if it would pass Mum's critical eye. Tree after tree was rejected, until finally the most perfect evergreen was found. Or maybe we were just chilled to the bone and ready for our warm house and a cup of hot chocolate.

Our beautiful new Christmas tree was quickly purchased and tied to the roof of the car. Before the motor was turned off, Mum was out the door and in the driveway to inspect our purchase. Hugging her sweater for warmth, she watched it come off the car. In seconds she'd sized up all of the tree's flaws. First there was the big bare spot half way up one side. Then there was crooked trunk that would make the tree lean like the Tower of Pisa. Plus it was too tall to fit in the living room. Or maybe it was too small. I'm not really sure except that it was proclaimed far from perfect.

The tree was returned to the roof of the car and back we went to Diehl's. By now, it was probably 4:30, a lot colder and dark. A few bare bulbs feebly lit the stacks of trees. Again, we wandered around, inspecting and rejecting until finally, we were sure. Yes indeed, this time we had really, truly found the perfect tree. Either that or we were really, truly freezing and really, truly in need of a hot chocolate.

Again, Mum heard the car pull up and was out the door in a flash. In less than a minute she was back in the house to grab her coat and bundle the baby into his snowsuit. Dad tied the second tree back onto the car.

Back at Diehl's we watched the master as she carefully inspected and rejected tree after tree. Too skinny. Too short. Too prickly. Oops, too expensive. Too who-knows-what. Christmas is her favorite of all the holidays and Mum was filled with purpose. The Nye's would have a beautiful tree. A perfect tree.

And of course, in spite of the cold and the flickering twenty watt bulbs, she found it.

Wishing you and yours a joyful holiday season, filled with wonderful family memories. Bon appétit!

## Braised Short Ribs

*Whether you spend the afternoon cutting your own or wandering through the garden shop in search of the perfect Christmas tree, these hearty ribs will warm you up! Enjoy!*

Serves 6

2 ounces slab or thick cut bacon, roughly chopped  
 4-5 pounds beef short ribs  
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper  
 1 tablespoon paprika  
 1 large onion, finely chopped  
 4 medium carrots, finely chopped  
 4 stalks celery, finely chopped  
 3 cloves garlic, minced  
 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar  
 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard  
 1 1/2 cups crushed tomatoes  
 2-3 sprigs fresh thyme  
 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary  
 1 bay leaf  
 2 cups dry red wine  
 2 cups chicken stock  
 Garnish: fresh chopped parsley



Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Cook the bacon in a heavy casserole over medium heat until crisp and brown. Remove the bacon and reserve. Pour off any excess bacon fat, leaving just enough to lightly coat the pan and reserve.

Season the beef with salt and pepper and, working in batches, brown the beef over medium-high heat. Remove the beef and add to the reserved bacon.

Reduce the heat to medium. Drain any excess fat from the pan, leaving just enough to lightly coat. Add the onion, carrot and celery, season with paprika, salt and pepper and sauté until lightly browned. Add the garlic and sauté 1-2 minutes more.

Stir the vinegar, mustard and tomatoes into the vegetables. Slowly add the wine and chicken stock, stirring to combine. Raise the heat to high, bring to a simmer and simmer for 5-10 minutes.

Add the herbs, return the beef and bacon to the pot and bring to a simmer. Cover the pot and transfer to the oven. Cook at 350 degrees for 2 - 2 1/2 hours or until the beef is tender. Add more wine and/or stock if needed.

Carefully transfer the beef to a deep serving platter. If necessary, bring the sauce to a boil over high heat to reduce. Ladle the sauce over the beef, garnish with chopped parsley and serve.