

cinnamon, just a hint of heat, and the earthy warmth of cumin. A lot of recipes call for citrusy coriander and savory bay leaf, so I added those to the blender as well. The complex smell of the marinade hit me as the blades spun, and my mouth began to water. I was on the right track.

The yogurt sauce I'd had that day contained caramelized onions. I wondered if it had been an ingenious use of the onions left over from the marinade, so I tested the theory while my beef marinated. I sautéed finely chopped onion in a little bit of reserved marinade and then stirred it into a mix of tangy yogurt and fresh cilantro. The familiar taste of the sauce was more proof that I was headed in the right direction.

But when the kebabs hit the grill, I knew for sure: My shashlik had that same unmistakable aroma, and true to the original, it tasted even better than it smelled. That street corner moment was mine to relive, again and again, in my own backyard.

SHASHLIK-STYLE BEEF KEBABS

Serves 4 to 6

Sirloin steak tips are often sold as flap meat; we prefer to buy one large piece and cut it into pieces ourselves. We cook this beef past medium-rare in order to get more charring and to keep it from being too chewy. If you prefer it less cooked, remove it from the grill sooner (125 degrees for medium-rare).

MARINADE

- ½ cup coarsely chopped onion**
- ¼ cup vegetable oil**
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar**
- 4 garlic cloves**
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce**
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt**
- 1 tablespoon sugar**
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin**
- ½ teaspoon pepper**
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander**



A little sugar in the marinade adds a hint of sweetness and encourages charring.

- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- 1 bay leaf, crumbled**

BEEF AND SAUCE

- 2 pounds sirloin steak tips, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces**
- 1 onion, chopped fine**
- ⅓ cup water**
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil**
- ½ cup plain whole-milk yogurt**
- ⅓ cup chopped fresh cilantro**
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice**
- 6 (10-inch) wooden skewers, soaked in water for at least 30 minutes**

1. FOR THE MARINADE: Process all ingredients in blender until smooth, about 30 seconds. Measure out 2 tablespoons marinade and set aside.

2. FOR THE BEEF AND SAUCE: Combine beef and remaining marinade in 1-gallon zipper-lock bag. Press out air, seal bag, and turn to coat beef in marinade. Refrigerate for 1 to 2 hours.

3. While beef marinates, combine onion, water, oil, and reserved marinade in 10-inch skillet. Cover and cook over medium-high heat until liquid has evaporated and onion is beginning to brown, 5 to 7 minutes, stirring

occasionally. Uncover, reduce heat to medium, and continue to cook until onion is well browned, 8 to 10 minutes longer. Transfer onion to bowl and stir in yogurt, cilantro, and lemon juice.

4. Thread beef tightly onto skewers, leaving ends of skewers slightly exposed.

5A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter mounded with charcoal briquettes (7 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

5B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Leave all burners on high.

6. Clean and oil cooking grate. Arrange kebabs on grill (over hotter side if using charcoal) and cook (covered if using gas), turning every 2 to 3 minutes, until beef is well browned, charred around edges, and registering between 135 and 145 degrees, 8 to 12 minutes. Transfer kebabs to platter, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 5 minutes. Serve with sauce.