

## WINTER BEEF STEW

One of my favorite winter dishes is an all-American beef stew that has been passed down in my family from my mom's grandmother. Great-grandmother got the recipe back in the 90s—the 1890s, that is. The seasoning ingredients, a bay leaf, brown sugar, Worcestershire sauce, cider vinegar and ketchup are in everyone's pantry. Any measurements have long since been lost, so you're going to have to do this by trial and error.

Get about two pounds of beef stew meat. I generally cut the meat pieces in half. Assemble an onion, 6-8 small boiling onions, a couple of carrots, 8-10 button mushrooms, a couple of cloves of garlic, and a collection of your favorite root vegetables. I generally use a couple of small turnips, a couple of parsnips, a rutabaga, and maybe even a celery root. Plus a couple of potatoes, and maybe even a yam. Use what you like.

Peel and cut your root vegetables into pieces roughly the size of the meat. Sprinkle the cut meat with salt and pepper and dust with flour—I like Wondra flour for this, which is a mixture of flour and cornstarch. Heat a couple of tablespoons of cooking oil in a large Dutch oven or covered kettle, and brown the meat, being careful not to crowd the pan. (You may have to brown the meat in two batches.)

While the meat is browning, peel and chop the onion, trim and peel the boiling onions, peel and mince the garlic cloves, and trim the mushrooms. When the meat is browned, remove it from the pot and put it into a small bowl. Now I like to brown the root vegetables a little bit in the fat left in the pan—adding a little oil if necessary. You just want to get a little caramelization color on the veggies, then scoop them into another bowl.

Add a little more oil to the pan if necessary, and add the chopped onion and minced garlic. Saute over medium heat until the onion is softened. Add the browned beef, any juices that have accumulated in the bowl, and a can of beef broth. Bring to a boil and then turn the heat down, cover and simmer for about an hour. After an hour, add the carrots and the other root vegetables, plus the pearl onions. Hold off on the potatoes, yams, and mushrooms. Add a bay leaf. I add some salt, maybe about half a teaspoon. (I salt lightly when I cook.) You may need to add some more beef broth—just enough to cover the ingredients in the pot. Cover and simmer for another half hour.

Then add the mushrooms, the potatoes and yams. Now for the seasonings. Add a good grind of black pepper. Then add about a couple of tablespoons of brown sugar, a couple of tablespoons of cider vinegar, about half a teaspoon or so of Worcestershire sauce, and two or three tablespoons of ketchup. Play with the seasonings by adding some more brown sugar, or vinegar, or ketchup, until you get a balance of flavors you like. It shouldn't be too strong, but should have a bit of a sweet/sour and tomato taste to it. Simmer for another half hour, until the potatoes and all your root vegetables are done. Add more salt and pepper if necessary and remove the bay leaf. Turn the heat up and sprinkle in Wondra flour, stirring gently until you get the consistency you want—I don't like it too thick. That's all there is to it.

Serve with some hot bread and a green salad and a good red wine or some fresh apple cider, followed by some apple pie for dessert, served either with a scoop of vanilla ice cream on top or in the old fashioned way, with a slice of good cheddar cheese on top of your pie. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Cook.