
Beef Stew (and Pie)

Two servings

Ingredients

one small onion
350g beef (shin to chuck)
1 stock cube
1 tbs plain flour
oil

Equipment

small saucepan or frying pan
small/medium Pyrex casserole/dish
sharp knife
wooden or plastic spatula

Method

The basic recipe here makes a very plain, brown stew (at least, it will be brown if you let the meat and flour brown enough!); but it can be the basis of some good variations.

Any type of casseroiling or stewing beef will do; shin is ideal, but chuck or flank work well. Trim off most of the fat and connective tissue and cut into 2-3cm chunks.

Brown the meat in a pan with 1-2 tablespoons of oil; don't let the oil burn, but you want the meat to have a deep brown colour in places. Put on one side.

Finely chop the onion and soften in 1-2 tablespoons of oil over a low heat; this will take 5-10 minutes. When this is done, season with about 1 teaspoon of salt and a generous amount of black pepper. Add the flour and stir for about one minute to absorb the remaining oil, then add the meat. Deglaze the pan where you browned the meat with a cup of water over high heat, scraping the pan so that the water absorbs all the flavour.

Put into your casserole, and cover with made up stock (made with hot water). Taste the liquid after mixing; make sure there is enough salt. Leave in a medium oven for around 2 hours, until the meat chunks easily split with a spoon.

Variations

Different cuts of meat take different amounts of time: shin might take 2-3 hours, rump steak 45 minutes.

Add cut up carrots, swede or turnip, squash, potatoes or any other vegetables at 30-40 minutes before finish. Large chunks are ideal.

One tablespoon tomato purée adds richness and colour.

You can use this to make other meat stews: chicken is the next one to try; use chicken thighs for best value and flavour, with chicken (rather than beef) stock. Cooking time will be far shorter, 40-60 minutes. Pork, lamb or rabbit all work the same way; with the paler meats use chicken stock or possibly some white sauce (a velouté, which is made with half milk and half stock).

Pie

If you have a small casserole, you can fill it with cooked stew and cover with rolled out pastry. This will take $\frac{1}{3}$ of a standard supermarket block of pastry, which is either 350g or 500g. Only use pastry that has been made with butter; puff or shortcrust are fine, just please don't use filo. Roll out the pastry to the thickness of a £1 coin; you can use a wine or large beer bottle. If it's a warm day, fill the bottle with ice water to make the rolling easier. Dust the bottle and the pastry with flour to stop it sticking. Wet the top of the casserole dish with milk to make it easier for the pastry to stick. I like to crimp the edge with either the back of a fork or just my finger to make a scalloped pattern; cut a slit about 3cm long in the middle to let steam escape. Paint the top surface of the pastry with milk. If you have a spare old egg, you can use a little beaten egg instead of milk.

Bake for 20 minutes in a medium hot oven - until the pastry is cooked to a good golden colour, and if puff has risen well.

You don't need to use a casserole; you can make individual pies in a bowl, or even in a mug.

This will leave you with spare pastry; it only takes 2-3 days to go off, even in a fridge. So either make a bigger batch of stew and more pies, or make cheese straws, or fruit tarts. Roll it out to the same thickness, brush with wash, and spread finely grated cheese. Cut into 2cm strips and twist, then bake in a medium hot oven until done (about 10-15 minutes).

For the fruit tart, roll into a single sheet and make a pattern with slices of any fruit - apples, pears, berries; leave a border of 2-3cm plain pastry around the edges. Dust with 2 or more tablespoons of sugar. If it was shortcrust, turn up the edge. Bake for 20-40 minutes. If you like, spread the pastry with a few tablespoons of custard (ready made supermarket sort) before adding the fruit.