

Ale Braised Beef Stew

Posted by Ayma Grup, February 2009



Ingredients, Serves 4-6:

for the braise:

1-1/2 lbs. beef shoulder steak, trimmed and cut into 1" - 1-1/2" pieces

salt & freshly ground pepper

vegetable oil

1 large onion peeled and diced (approx. 10 oz.)

1 4" length carrot, quartered lengthwise (approx. 5 oz.)

1 stalk of celery cut into 4" lengths (approx. 2 oz.)

1 Tbsp. tomato paste

2 Tbsp. all purpose flour

1 12oz. bottle of brown ale, such as Newcastle or Smithwicks

1 generous bunch of fresh thyme

2 - 3 bay leaves

for the vegetable garnish:

2 cups yukon gold potatoes, peeled and diced (approx. 3 medium potatoes)

2 cups carrots, peeled and large diced (approx. 10 oz. or 1-1/2 large carrots)

1 cup celery, large diced (approx. 2 stalks)

Procedure:

Step 1 - Braise the meat

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Generously season the meat with salt and pepper. Heat enough oil in a dutch oven or large saucepan to coat the bottom. It should be hot but not smoking.
2. Working in batches so that you don't crowd the pan, brown the meat on all sides. If you crowd the pan, the meat will steam instead of brown. If you leave too much space the oil and brown bits (known as "sucs") stuck on the bottom of the pan will burn.



Seasoning meat



browning meat

3. After removing the last batch of meat from the pan, add a tablespoon of fresh oil, if needed, and cook carrot sticks until they are slightly browned. Lower the heat, then add the onions and celery sticks. Season with a pinch of salt and sweat the vegetables until the onions are soft and not quite translucent.
4. Add the tomato paste and cook for 2-3 minutes, stirring to coat the vegetables.
5. Return the meat to the pan and sprinkle the mixture with flour. Stir everything together and cook for about 2-3 minutes more. This method is referred to as "singer" (pronounced SAN-jay). The flour acts as a thickener, and cooking it before adding the liquid removes any raw flour taste.



Vegetable-tomato paste mixture



Coating meat and vegetables with flour

6. Add enough of the ale to almost cover the meat and vegetables, scraping up the brown bits ("sucs") from the bottom of the pan. Raise the heat to bring the liquid to a simmer. Simmer on low for about 5 minutes to cook off some of the alcohol.



Deglazing with Smithwicks ale

7. Add the thyme and bay leaf and give the pot a stir just to make sure there is nothing sticking to the bottom of the pan. Cover and put it into the oven for 60-90 minutes, checking periodically to make sure the stew is not boiling to rapidly, but maintaining a bare simmer.

Step 2 - Meanwhile prepare the vegetable garnishes.

1. To cook the potatoes, put the diced potatoes in a saucepan and cover with cold salted water. Make sure to use a good amount of salt, and if you wish, you can add some sliced onions and garlic, and a few sprigs of thyme for additional flavor. Bring the water to a rapid boil, then immediately remove from the heat. Let the potatoes sit in the water until they cool to room temperature. As they cool, they should continue to cook, so DO NOT put them on ice. By the time they cool, they should be cooked through.



blanching potatoes



blanching carrots

2. To blanch the carrots and celery, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. And I mean salted - the water should taste like sea-water. Add the carrots, and cook until al dente. For me after the water returned to a boil, it took about 3 minutes. Remove the carrots from the boiling water, and place them immediately in a bowl of ice water to stop them from cooking further. As a general rule, the amount of time it took the carrots to cook, will be the same as the amount of time it will take for them to cool fully in the ice water. Repeat with the celery. The celery took a little longer,

probably 5-6 minutes after the water came back to a boil. A blanching basket comes in really handy for this, but I don't have a blanching basket at home, so I use a steamer basket. I simply put the steamer basket in the bottom of the pot, dump the carrots in, and when they were done, I use a pair of tongs to grab the handle of the basket and lift everything out.



a steamer basket doubles as a large "spider"



cooked vegetable garnish

Step 3 - Assemble the stew:

1. Once the meat is tender, remove the bundle of herbs, and large chunks of carrot and celery.
2. Transfer the pot to medium heat on the stovetop. Check your potatoes. If they are still underdone, drain them and add them to the stew first and simmer until they are cooked through.
3. Add the cooked carrots and celery and adjust the seasoning. If you are saving the stew for later, simply divide it into portion sized containers and refrigerate. If you are serving the stew right away, simmer until the vegetables are hot, then serve. You will notice that there is not a lot of liquid - just enough to coat all the ingredients and form a puddle at the bottom of the bowl to soak up with a nice crusty piece of sourdough bread.



simmering vegetables briefly with meat