

# Stewing up an easy, complete wintertime meal

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With all the pleasant weather we have had in the past few days, you may wonder why I would write about stews in this week's column. Well, they are wonderful complete meals that don't have to be reserved for cold winter nights. Besides, winter may make an appearance again.

Stews, which are relatively inexpensive, can also be good for getting rid of extra vegetables in your refrigerator. Stews, or ragouts, are usually of two kinds, either white or brown. White stews, known as carbonnades, ragouts, or goulash, are made with dark meat such as beef and pork. All of these vary with the different vegetables and spices which go into the recipe.

But no matter what kind of stew you decide to make, there are basic steps and rules which add to the flavor and overall quality of a good stew. First and foremost, stewing must be a slow and gentle process. The stew should never be boiled, as this will toughen the meat and allow for too much reduction of the gravy. Stews should be simmered on low to medium low heat over a long period of time, usually two to three hours. The second rule is browning the meat in oil. The reason for this is fairly simple. Browning the meat seals in the juices and prevents the meat from drying out. You should never brown too many pieces at once and the meat should be browned well on all sides. Another important point: whenever possible, do not use a fork to handle the meat. The fork pierces the meat and allows the juices to run. I find that the best utensils are either tongs or two spoons. One should also remember when browning the meat to do just that: brown it only on the outside. Since the meat will be simmered for a long period of time, there is no need to worry about it being undercooked.

Once you have browned the meat and removed it as it is done, it is time to cook the vegetables. Depending on the vegetables being used in the recipe, some will be browned first and others will be added later. The vegetables which need to be browned first should be cooked on a slightly lower heat and just until they begin to color. Next, add the seasonings and liquid. Your stew is on the way to becoming a delightful dinner.

Stews are excellent dishes for entertaining, and because of the long cooking process, once they're on the stove and simmering you don't have to worry about them until they're done. This will leave you plenty of time to prepare any side dishes or salads that you might want to serve with your meal. Egg noodles, rice and potatoes are always tasty accompaniments, and your recipe will usually recommend one which is best suited for the stew.

Most cookbooks contain many wonderful recipes for stews now that they've become popular. I hope you will try my favorite recipe for Hungarian Beef Goulash. I recommend serving it with noodles or boiled new potatoes.

**Hungarian Beef Goulash — Serves 3-4**  
1½ lbs. chuck or flank steak cubed  
2 large onions

2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
1 tablespoon paprika (Hungarian is the best)  
1 tablespoon flour  
1½ tablespoons tomato puree  
1-1¼ pints beef stock  
1 red pepper  
2 large tomatoes  
a clove of garlic  
a bouquet garni (a sprig of thyme, a bay leaf, and a few parsley stalks)  
salt and pepper to taste

2-3 tablespoons sour cream for garnish  
Chopped parsley for garnish

Cut the meat into fairly large cubes. Slice the onions. Chop and crush the garlic. Heat the oil in a good heavy stewpot or deep casserole. Brown the meat and remove. Lower the heat and add the onions. Fry for a few minutes and add the paprika, cook for one minute, then add your

flour. Stir well, add the tomato puree, garlic and stock. Stir until boiling. Replace the meat and add the bouquet garni. (These can be bought in little packets or you can tie the sprigs with a string.) Add salt and pepper to taste, lower the heat and simmer covered for about two hours. In the meantime, dice the red pepper and blanch in boiling water. Remove and rinse the pepper well in cold water. Quarter your tomatoes

and remove the core and seeds. Slice them and when the meat is tender, add the pepper and tomato. Simmer for a few minutes.

The stew is now ready. You can either turn it out into a clean dish and top with the sour cream and chopped parsley or just serve it in the casserole you fixed it in. The noodles can be served on the side or you can serve the stew over the noodles. Just serve the potatoes on the side. Enjoy!

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