

Appetite for Knowledge



ARE YOU STEWING?

Stew is a dish of solid food ingredients cooked slowly in liquid in a closed dish or pot. The basic ingredients may be any meat and/or vegetables. It's also a way to retain the maximum nutritional value of the food you cook.

Stewing is suitable for the least tender cuts of meat that become tender and juicy with the slow, moist heat method - simmered, not boiled. This makes stewing popular in low-cost cooking. Less expensive cuts, having a certain amount of marbling create moist, juicy stews, while lean meat may easily become dry.

Choose a heavy-gauge ovenproof pan with a lid, such as a Dutch oven or soup pot that is just large enough to hold all the ingredients. The first step in all stews is to cut the food into uniformly sized pieces. For some recipes, sear the ingredients quickly in fat over high heat and then continue with aromatics; for others, add them along with the stewing liquid.

SEARING

Searing meat is 100% about building flavor. I strongly feel that searing meat is worth the effort.

It results in a huge pay off in the flavor of your finished dish. High temperatures are needed to get a truly caramelized, deep-brown sear on the surface of the meat. Use a stainless steel or a cast iron skillet for this kind of cooking; avoid nonstick skillets. Add a few teaspoons of vegetable oil and set the pan set over high heat. Pat the meat dry to keep it from steaming instead of searing. Do not crowd the pan with the meat. Once you've put the meat in the pan, let it be. After a few minutes, shake the pan. If the meat releases from the pan, it's ready to be flipped to another side.

PROPER COOKING ORDER

Cook the aromatic ingredients. The degree to which the aromatic ingredients such as onions, garlic, carrots, tomatoes, or mushrooms, for instance, are cooked will influence the flavor and color of the finished stew. Sweating the aromatics softens them and releases their flavor into the stew without any additional browning. If the aromatics are cooked until browned, the stew will have a deeper color. If you have browned the main ingredients, remove them from the pot and add the aromatics to the same fat.

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PROPER COOKING TIMES

Be aware of the cooking times needed for ingredients. If the ingredients you want to add are already cooked (beans, pasta, rice, potatoes, vegetables, meats, etc.), add them in the last few minutes of cooking time, just long enough for them to reheat. Other ingredients may need to be added earlier on, as the stew simmers, so they finish cooking at the same time as the main ingredients.

STEWING LIQUID

Once all the ingredients are seared and sautéed, add the stewing liquid. This may be something as simple as water to let the flavors of the ingredients shine through, or a more complex mixture of broth and red wine. Spices and herbs may be added, as well. If they are not edible, wrap them in cheesecloth to make a spice sachet for easy retrieval later. If you are simmering dry beans in the stew, do not add any salt or acidic ingredients like wine or vinegar until the beans are beginning to turn tender. Stews usually call for enough liquid to cover the food completely. You can adjust the level throughout cooking time.

USE LOW HEAT

Low heat is suggested for all stews, never a hard boil. Placing a lid, slightly ajar on the pot traps the escaping steam and allows it to condense and fall back onto the stew. You can also cook stews in a 350°F oven or on low in a slow cooker. Cooking in the oven or slow cooker, rather than on the stove-top, is a reliable way to stew since cooking over a flame can lead to overly rapid cooking and scorching. In either

OLD-FASHIONED BEEF STEW

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 1 pound beef stewing meat, trimmed and cut into inch cubes
- 5 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 cup red wine
- 3-1/2 cups beef broth, homemade or low-sodium canned
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 medium onion, peeled and chopped
- 5 medium carrots, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch rounds
- 2 large baking potatoes, peeled and cut into 3/4-inch cubes
- 2 teaspoons salt

Preparation

1. Combine the flour and pepper in a bowl, add the beef and toss to coat well. Heat 3 teaspoons of the oil in a large pot. Add the beef a few pieces at a time; do not overcrowd. Cook, turning the pieces until beef is browned on all sides, about 5 minutes per batch; add more oil as needed between batches.
2. Remove the beef from the pot and add the vinegar and wine. Cook over medium-high heat, scraping the pan with a wooden spoon to loosen any browned bits. Add the beef, beef broth and bay leaves. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a slow simmer.
3. Cover and cook, skimming broth from time to time, until the beef is tender, about 1 1/2 hours. Add the onions and carrots and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. Add the potatoes and simmer until vegetables are tender, about 30 minutes more. Add broth or water if the stew is dry. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Ladle among 4 bowls and serve.

Source: <https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/4735-old-fashioned-beef-stew>

case, check the stew periodically to maintain a slow and gentle cooking speed to extract as much flavor as possible without drying out the food. Use a spoon or skimmer to degrease the stew, spooning off as much of the floating fat as possible, to give the final sauce a better consistency.

FINAL STEPS

When all the ingredients are tender to the bite, it is time to make final seasoning adjustments. You can add salt and pepper to taste, as well as other options such as a splash of Worcestershire sauce, lemon juice or wine, chopped fresh herbs, or some pesto. Some stews benefit from 24 hours of rest. If time permits, let the stew cool and refrigerate it in a covered container overnight. As a side benefit,

any fat will harden on the surface so you can easily lift it off.

Making a phenomenal stew is effortless, economical, and versatile. A bowl of warm, hearty stew is always a welcome dish on a cold day. It's the ultimate comforting meal and just the perfect base for sneaking in some extra veggies.

Sources:

- Cook's Illustrated, www.cooksillustrated.com
- Food Network, www.foodnetwork.com
- Food52, www.food52.com
- National Cattlemen's Beef Association, www.ncba.org



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