Classic Beef Stew

From the blog For Love of the Table

2 1/2 to 3 lbs. boneless beef short ribs or chuck, cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces
Salt & freshly ground pepper
4 oz. thick-sliced bacon, cut crosswise into 1/2-inch strips
1/2 c. all-purpose flour
2 onions, (about 1 lb.) cut in a 1/2-inch dice
2 large cloves garlic, minced
salt and pepper, to taste
3/4 c. dry red wine
3 to 4 c. beef or chicken stock—if using canned, use low-salt
2 or 3 sprigs thyme
1 lb. carrots, peeled and cut crosswise on a 1/2-inch short diagonal
1 lb. Yukon potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks
8 oz. mushrooms, cleaned and halved (quartered, if large)
1/4 c. minced flat-leaf parsley

The day before you plan to prepare the stew, season the meat generously with salt. I use 3/4 t. of kosher salt per pound of meat (so about 2 t.). Wrap loosely and refrigerate overnight.

To prepare the stew: Render the bacon in a large stew pot or Dutch oven set over medium heat. When the bacon is crisp, remove it along with the fat, reserving each separately.

While the bacon cooks, dredge the beef in the flour, shaking off the excess. Return enough of the bacon fat to the pan to coat the bottom of the pan and increase the heat to medium-high. Brown the beef on all sides—it may be necessary to do this in batches so the pan isn't over-crowded. Add more bacon fat as necessary. Remove all the meat to a platter and add more bacon fat or olive oil to the pan. Add the onions. Regulate the heat as necessary to sweat the onions just until softened and beginning to take on a golden color (about 5 to 10 minutes). Add the garlic and continue to cook for a minute or so. Add the wine and bring to a boil, scraping the bottom of the pan to release the caramelized meat and vegetable juices. Reduce the wine by at least half.

Return the meat to the pan and add enough broth to cover the meat. Add the thyme. Bring to a boil. Cover and transfer to a preheated 300° oven. Bake for 2 hours, checking occasionally to make sure the stew is cooking at a bare simmer. It should not boil hard…but it should maintain an active simmer. Reduce the oven temperature if necessary.

After 2 hours, remove the stew from the oven. If there is a lot of grease pooling on the surface, spoon it off, or blot with a paper towel. Add the potatoes and carrots, season with salt and pepper, cover and return to the oven until the meat and vegetables are fork tender (about 45 minutes to an hour more).

While the stew finishes cooking, sauté the mushrooms in some of the bacon fat (or olive oil or butter) until nicely browned; Season with salt and pepper and set aside.

When the vegetables are tender, carefully stir in the mushrooms and bacon. Taste and correct the seasoning. Remove the thyme sprigs and serve, sprinkled with minced parsley. Serves 6

(Recipe adapted from *The Kansas City Star* November 11, 1992)

***Variation*:**

- Classically, this French-style stew would be finished with glazed pearl onions in addition to the mushrooms and bacon. To prepare the pearl onions, place 8 oz. of peeled pearl onions in a saucepan and cover them with water. Add 1/2 T. of butter, a teaspoon of sugar and a pinch of salt and bring to a simmer. Cover and cook until almost tender. Uncover and increase the heat to high and boil until the liquid is reduced to a glaze; reduce the heat to medium and continue to cook until the glaze turns a golden brown, swirling the pan to coat the onions with the glaze. Scatter the pearl onions over the stew with the mushrooms and bacon. Or, for a more classic presentation, reheat the pearl onions, mushrooms and bacon separately and garnish each bowl of stew individually with them.
- For a more American-style beef stew, omit the red wine, mushrooms and bacon. Brown the meat in vegetable oil. Add a cup of frozen peas to the stew during the last five minutes of cooking.

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