BEST Beef Stew Recipe

Last weekend, I promised you this BEST Beef Stew recipe, so here it is! As Monday is a holiday, I hope that you'll find time to make it this weekend. It is so rich and delicious.

These recipes can also easily be cut in half if you don't have a big crowd, as I did last weekend for just the two of us and we finished the last of our leftovers for lunch today. Yummy.

It really is better to make it a day or two before you plan on serving it, for this allows you to degrease it and let the flavors meld together and the whole thing becomes even richer.

The basis for these recipes, comes from Lee Bailey's cookbook, *Long Weekends,* but I have made many changes, particularly in the BEST Beef Stew recipe. Omit the ancho chilis if you don't like a bit of spice. I think the mashed potato recipe is brilliant with the addition of the cauliflower. It makes them lighter and even more delicious. If you think the title of stew is too plebeian, call it a braise or even beef bourguignon. Enjoy!!

BEST BEEF STEW RECIPE – serves 8

4 pounds boneless rump pot roast or chuck pot roast, cut into 1 x 2-inch chunks
2 cups hearty red wine
½ lb. pancetta, cut into ¼” dice
2 tbs. olive oil
2 large onions, thinly sliced
7 carrots, scraped and sliced ¼” thick
¼ cup unsalted butter
¼ cup all-purpose flour
3 cups chicken or veal stock
3 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 tbs. tomato paste
2 small dried ancho chilis
1½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. black pepper
1 lb. white mushrooms, sautéed – see recipe below

Place the beef in a crockery bowl, add the wine, cover, and marinate, refrigerated, for 3 hours.

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Boil some water. Place dried ancho chilis in a bowl and cover with ½ – ¾ cup of water and let sit to soften for 20 minutes.

Place olive oil in a Dutch oven and add pancetta. Sauté until golden on medium heat. Remove with a slotted spoon.

Drain the meat, reserving the marinade. Dry the meat well and brown it in batches over high heat. Set aside.

Add the onions and carrots to the Dutch oven and sauté until wilted and beginning to brown, about 7 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon.

Meanwhile, take ancho chilis (remove the stem and a few seeds) and ½ cup of the water they were soaking in and puree in a food processor. Set aside.

Pour out any oil that may be in the Dutch oven. Melt butter over medium heat in the Dutch oven and stir in flour. Cook, scraping the bottom of the pan, using a whisk, until the roux turns a dark golden brown. Add the tomato paste and stir for a minute. Stir in the stock. This will foam up, so stand back. Simmer a minute or two, then stir in the garlic, ancho chili puree and salt and pepper. Add the

sautéed vegetables, meat, bacon, and reserved marinade. Bring to a boil quickly on top of the stove. Cover and bake until tender, about 2 hours. Allow to cool, then refrigerate overnight.

Remove the stew from the refrigerator an hour before reheating. Lift off the congealed fat and discard. Reheat in a preheated 325 degree oven, covered, until bubbly, about 45 minutes.

SAUTEED MUSHROOMS

While the stew is reheating, wash your mushrooms quickly and let dry thoroughly on paper towels. Trim ends and quarter. Heat 2 tbs. butter and 1 tbs. of olive oil in a heavy skillet on medium–high to high heat. As soon as the butter foam subsides, add the mushrooms and spread out over the bottom of the pan and do not touch the pan for 3 minutes. Then stir and flip the browned mushrooms over until they start to release the fat they have absorbed and brown some more, about 3 – 4 minutes more. Remove from heat and lift the mushrooms out of the skillet and stir in the finished stew.

If the sauce in your stew has reduced and is a bit too thick, thin it out with an extra cup of hot chicken stock.

MASHED POTATOES AND CAULIFLOWER – adapted from Lee Bailey – serves 8

As Lee Bailey says, you can boil the potatoes for this, but baking is better. Save the skins (sliced into strips), and at a later date butter and salt them and toast them for hors d'oeuvres. You can even grate a little cheese on top too.

2 generous cups cauliflower florets and tender stems
Whole or 2% milk
3 pounds russet potatoes, rubbed with oil and baked
1 large head roasted garlic
6 tablespoons unsalted butter
Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Rub scrubbed clean potatoes with oil, pierce the ends with a fork and bake for 45 – 60 minutes until done. The skin should feel crisp and the flesh beneath it should feel soft. At the same time, take a whole head of garlic and slice in half. Drizzle a little olive oil on the cut ends, salt and pepper and wrap in aluminum foil. Roast the garlic with the potatoes for 40 minutes, until soft and browned a little.

Cover the cauliflower with milk in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil, being careful not to let it cook over (that's why you use a large saucepan for this). Turn back to slow boil and cook until just tender, about 10 minutes.

Scoop out the hot potato flesh into a large, warm bowl. Squeeze the soft garlic pulp into the potatoes, using as much or as little as you like. I use the whole head. Cut butter into pieces and mash in with a hand masher (do not use an electric mixer, as it will make the mixture glutinous). Drain the cauliflower, reserving milk. Mash in with the potatoes, adding about ¾ cup of the cauliflower milk. Add a little more milk if you would like the potatoes creamier. Salt and pepper to taste.

Butter a casserole and scrape the mixture in. Smooth the top and rub with a bit of butter to make a thin film on top. Set aside, covered with a tea towel, until ready to reheat. (This may be done an hour before dinner).

To reheat, put into a preheated 325 degree oven, uncovered, for 20 minutes.

I served this with a baby spinach salad with basil leaves, roasted beets, Pecorino Romano cheese and toasted cashews, drizzled with a sherry vinaigrette. Toasted pine nuts would have been better, but I didn't have any already toasted.

TIP: When toasting nuts for a recipe, always toast extra to have them ready to use on salads or green beans for another dinner. They will keep fine in a sealed plastic container.