

Pork and Pumpkin Stew

Chock-full of tender pork and pumpkin and seasoned with a medley of fragrant spices, this warming stew is perfect for an autumn supper with friends.

Preheat an oven to 325°F.

Season the pork with salt and black pepper. In a 3½-quart Dutch oven over medium-high heat, warm 2 Tbs. of the olive oil. Working in batches, brown the pork on all sides, 8 to 10 minutes per batch. Transfer to a plate.

Reduce the heat to medium and warm the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, 6 to 8 minutes. Add the garlic, ginger, demi-glace, tomato paste, cinnamon, coriander, nutmeg, cloves and red pepper flakes. Cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the vinegar, applesauce, tomatoes with their juices, pumpkin, sage, stock and pork. Bring to a boil and season with salt and pepper. Transfer the pot to the oven and cook until the pork is fork-tender, 2 to 2½ hours.

Skim the fat off the sauce. Serve the stew over mashed potatoes and pass sautéed broccoli rabe alongside. Serves 6.

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Ingredients for Pork and Pumpkin Stew

2 lb. boneless pork shoulder, cut into 1-inch cubes

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

3 Tbs. olive oil

1 yellow onion, diced

1½ tsp. minced garlic

1 tsp. minced fresh ginger

2 tsp. chicken demi-glace

2 tsp. tomato paste

¾ tsp. ground cinnamon

¼ tsp. ground coriander

⅛ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

⅛ tsp. ground cloves

¼ tsp. red pepper flakes

1½ Tbs. cider vinegar

3 Tbs. applesauce

9 oz. canned diced tomatoes with juices

1 lb. peeled and diced (¾-inch dice) pumpkin or winter squash, such as kabocha

2 tsp. chopped fresh sage

4 tsp. chicken stock concentrate mixed with 2 cups water, or 2 cups chicken stock

Mashed potatoes for serving

Sautéed broccoli rabe for serving

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Common Thickeners

Stews depend on numerous ingredients and techniques for the alchemy that turns a thin liquid into a velvety substance to enrobe the ingredients. Common thickeners for stews include:

- Butter

- Heavy and double cream

- Egg yolks

- Flour

- Beurre manié (paste made of equal parts flour and butter)

- Roux (mixture made of flour and fat that is cooked)

- Tomato paste

- Vegetable puree

- Starch

- Mustard

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Technique Class: Bring Back the Stew

What Is a Stew?

A stew is made by simmering pieces of meat, fish and/or vegetables slowly in liquid, typically stock and wine flavored with aromatics. Usually thicker and more substantial than a soup, a stew is commonly served as a main course. It is similar to a braise, although stews generally use more liquid and the food is cut into smaller pieces.

Delicious and versatile, these comforting one-pot meals are among the basic dishes found in almost every cuisine, from the meat or seafood stews of France to the clay pots of Asia. The meat for stews is often browned to add flavor to the liquid, which gradually thickens as the meat cooks. Some dishes, such as fish stews and *blanquette de veau* (white veal stew), are made without browning.

Stews are economical as they are generally made with foods that require long cooking to become meltingly tender, such as root vegetables and tougher cuts of meat. They also have the advantage of usually tasting better the day after they are made. Refrigerating a stew overnight allows the flavors of the various ingredients to deepen.

When making stews, keep these tips in mind:

- In choosing cuts of meat for stewing, look for flavor, rather than tenderness. The long cooking will break down any tough connective tissues and fibers. Although boneless meat is commonly used, meat on the bone is also an option; the bones will enrich the stew and can be removed after cooking. Beef round or chuck makes the best stewing beef, while lamb shoulder or shank is often used for lamb stews. Chicken thighs and duck legs are good choices for poultry.
- When browning the meat and vegetables, follow the rules for searing: Dry the food first on paper towels, add it to hot oil without crowding, and don't stir too often. This will allow the meat to brown and to create browned bits on the pan bottom, which will flavor the sauce.
- An enameled cast-iron Dutch oven or covered casserole is a perfect vessel for stewing as it allows you to brown, cook, store, reheat and serve the stew in the same pot. Alternately, prepare richly flavored stews in an electric slow cooker.
- The liquid in a stew should cover or almost cover the pieces of food.
- Stews may be cooked on the stovetop, but medium-low oven heat allows for more even cooking and for a lower temperature, ensuring more tender results.
- Add quicker-cooking foods, such as potatoes and peas, when the meat is tender, and cook them until tender, usually 10 to 20 minutes. If making the stew a day ahead, add these ingredients the next day when reheating it.
- To make a stew 1 day ahead, let it cool to room temperature, then refrigerate. The next day, lift off any congealed fat and slowly reheat the stew.

Ingredients for Vindaloo-Spiced Chicken Thighs with Coconut-Tomato Stew

8 boneless, skinless chicken thighs

1 tsp. plus 2 Tbs. curry vindaloo

1 tsp. plus 1 Tbs. kosher salt

2 yellow onions, diced (about 2 cups)

1 large tomato, diced (about 1½ cups)

4 garlic cloves

1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger

¼ cup vegetable oil

1½ lb. russet potatoes, peeled and cut into large dice (about 2 cups)

1 Tbs. tomato paste

¼ cup Champagne vinegar

1 Tbs. firmly packed light brown sugar

1 Tbs. honey

Juice of 3 limes

1 cinnamon stick

1 cup coconut milk

Steamed basmati rice for serving

¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves

Vindaloo-Spiced Chicken Thighs with Coconut-Tomato Stew

Curry vindaloo, a mildly hot seasoning blend, adds layers of complex flavor to this chicken dish, created for us by Chef Michael Voltaggio. For ease of preparation, the ingredients are browned and then slow-cooked in a single vessel, the Cuisinart multicooker.

Place the chicken thighs in a bowl and season with the 1 tsp. curry vindaloo and the 1 tsp. salt. Fold each thigh in half and skewer 4 thighs onto each of two 10-inch bamboo skewers; make sure the folded sides are uniform and face the same direction.

Preheat a Cuisinart multicooker on the brown/sauté setting to 375°F according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

Put the onions, tomato, garlic and ginger in a bowl. Using an immersion blender fitted with the mincing blade, blend until a chunky paste forms. Set aside.

Warm the oil in the multicooker. Add the chicken skewers, folded side down, and brown for 4 minutes per side. Transfer to a plate.

Add the potatoes to the multicooker and cook, stirring occasionally, until they are starting to brown, about 5 minutes. Add the tomato paste, the 2 Tbs. curry vindaloo and the onion mixture. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture begins to caramelize slightly, about 2 minutes. Stir in the vinegar, brown sugar, honey, lime juice, cinnamon stick, coconut milk and the 1 Tbs. salt.

Place the chicken skewers lengthwise in the multicooker. Cover and set the multicooker on the slow-cook high setting for 1 hour. Using tongs, remove the chicken skewers from the multicooker and place 2 thighs on each of 4 plates. Spoon the sauce and potatoes on and around the chicken and serve immediately with steamed rice. Garnish with cilantro leaves. Serves 4.

Recipe by Chef Michael Voltaggio.

20-Minute Beef Stew

Beef chuck is a good choice for stew meat. From the muscular shoulder section, this tough cut becomes tender and succulent when stewed. Here, we speed the process by using a pressure cooker.

In a large bowl, toss the beef with the flour, salt and pepper to coat evenly. Set an electric pressure cooker to “brown” according to the manufacturer’s instructions and warm the olive oil. Add half the beef and brown on all sides, 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a bowl. Repeat with the remaining beef and transfer to the bowl.

Add the wine to the pressure cooker and bring to a simmer, stirring to scrape up the browned bits. Add the beef, onion, garlic, carrots, celery, potatoes, tomato paste, stock and thyme and stir to combine. Cover and cook on “high” for 20 minutes according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

Release the pressure according to the manufacturer’s instructions. If the liquid is too thin, transfer the beef and vegetables to a serving bowl, set the pressure cooker to “brown” and cook until the liquid is reduced to the desired consistency. Pour the liquid over the beef and vegetables and serve immediately. Serves 6.

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Black Bean Stew

Butternut squash is rich in beta-carotene and other protective phytochemicals. Both squash and black beans are good sources of dietary fiber. The nutty taste of the squash is complemented by the caraway seeds and beer used to season this hearty vegetarian stew.

Pick over the beans, discarding any misshapen beans and stones, and rinse well. In a large pot, combine the beans with cold water to cover by 3 inches. Soak for at least 4 hours or up to overnight. Alternatively, for a quick-soak method, bring the beans and water to a rapid simmer (but do not boil), then simmer for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat, cover and let stand for 1 hour.

Drain the beans, place in a large saucepan and add the 4 cups water. Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer gently until the beans are almost tender but still quite firm, about 1 hour.

Add the onion and garlic to the beans, re-cover and continue to cook over low heat until the beans are tender, about 30 minutes more.

Cut the squash in half. Remove and discard the seeds, then peel the flesh. Cut the flesh into 1-inch cubes. Add the squash, bell pepper, oregano, caraway seeds and beer to the pan. Increase the heat to medium and cook, uncovered, until the squash and beans are soft but still hold their shape, about 30 minutes. Stir in the salt and pepper. Ladle the stew into warmed soup bowls and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma, *Essentials of Healthful Cooking*, by Mary Abbott Hess, Dana Jacobi & Marie Simmons (Oxmoor House, 2003).

Ingredients for 20-Minute Beef Stew

3 lb. boneless stewing beef, cut into 1-inch cubes

⅓ cup all-purpose flour

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

3 Tbs. olive oil

1½ cups red wine

1 large yellow onion, finely chopped

2 garlic cloves, crushed

2 carrots, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces

2 celery stalks, cut into ½-inch pieces

½ lb. new potatoes, cut into ½-inch pieces

1 Tbs. tomato paste

1½ cups beef stock

3 fresh thyme sprigs

Ingredients for Black Bean Stew

1 cup dried black beans

4 cups water

1 large yellow onion, chopped

2 garlic cloves, minced

1 small butternut squash, about 1 lb.

1 green bell pepper, seeded and diced

1 tsp. dried oregano

¼ tsp. caraway seeds

½ cup lager beer, at room temperature

½ tsp. kosher salt, plus more, to taste

Freshly ground pepper, to taste