

GUINNESS BEEF STEW

I was never a very big fan of beef stews growing up, but once I started traveling regularly to Ireland and England, my opinion changed significantly! A rich hearty stew with some sort of bread or crust on top on a damp chilly day is like a little slice of heaven! When making this recipe, use Guinness beer if possible. You may not prefer dark beers for drinking, but the dark caramel flavors add a significant amount of depth to the dish. If you can't find Guinness, use another high quality very dark beer. This takes awhile to cook, so start early. Makes approximately 11 Cups of stew.

INGREDIENTS:

3-3 ½ Pound Boneless Beef Chuck, trimmed, and cut into 1-inch pieces (should yield about 2 pounds of meat)

½ Cup Flour

1 ½ teaspoon Salt

¾ teaspoon Pepper

3 Tablespoons Vegetable Oil

1 Large Onion, chopped

3 Cloves Garlic, minced (about 1 ½ teaspoons)

¼ Cup Tomato Paste

2 Cups Beef Stock or Broth

18 oz. Guinness Beer or other dark beer

1 ½ Tablespoon Worcestershire Sauce

½ teaspoon Thyme

2 Cups Carrots, chopped (I like baby carrots cut into halves or thirds)

4 Russet Potato's, peeled and cut into ½ inch cubes (about 1 ½ pounds)

Additional Salt and Pepper to taste

IF NEEDED TO THICKEN STEW 2 Tablespoons Corn Starch whisked into ¼ Cup Water

1 Batch Bread Dough, OR Puff Pastry, thawed, OR Pie Crust

1 Large Egg with 1 Tablespoon Water, beaten

DIRECTIONS:

Trim the beef to remove fat and gristle as desired.

Peel potato's and cut into ½ inch chunks, then chop up carrots and set aside.

Dice the onion and mince the garlic and set aside.

In a small bowl, combine the flour, salt, and pepper. Put the beef cubes in a large bowl, then add the flour mixture, mixing well to coat all sides of the beef. Heat the oil in a heavy oven proof Dutch oven over medium-high heat until just beginning to smoke. Brown the meat in 2 or 3 batches, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes per batch, and transfer to a bowl.

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees.

In the same Dutch oven, add onion and garlic. As it cooks, scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan, and stir until the onion is softened and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add tomato paste and cook while stirring for 1 minute, then add the beef (and any juices from the bowl), broth, beer, Worcestershire sauce, thyme, potato's, and carrots. Bring to a simmer stirring occasionally, then cover and place in oven until the beef is very tender and the sauce is thickened, about 1 ½ hours.

If you haven't made your dough yet, it's time to get started. If using puff pastry, start it thawing, or for pie crust, either make it or thaw it.

When the time is up and the meat is done, give the stew a stir and check the texture. It will thicken slightly as it cools, but if it seems runnier than you would like, whisk together 2 Tablespoons Corn Starch and ¼ Cup of water, then stir briskly into the stew. While you are at it, check the flavor. I have found that I need to add an additional 1 ½ teaspoon Salt and ½ teaspoon Pepper, but do whatever tastes good to YOU!

Cool stew uncovered for at least 30 minutes.

Now, to put it all together.... I will give separate instructions for the different toppings, though I will tell you that my favorite is using bread dough, however, making dough is more work, so choose what is best for you. I also like to use ramekins that are 5-6 inches in diameter, but you can use large deep ovenproof bowls. I have also used a large casserole and it worked just fine!

Bread Dough Topping:

For 6 ramekins or bowls, roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface until it is about ¼ inch thick. Place a ramekin or bowl on the dough to get the size right, and use a very sharp knife or a pizza cutter to cut out 12 rounds.

Place 1 round of dough in the bottom of greased bowl, add about 1 Cup of stew, then place another piece of dough on top. Do not overfill!!! Brush the top of the dough with the beaten egg and allow to rise for 30-45 minutes

As the dough is rising, place a large cookie sheet on the middle rack of the oven and preheat to 350 degrees.

When ready to cook, brush the tops again with the egg, place ramekins or bowls on the preheated cookie sheet and bake for 20-30 minutes, until the tops are golden brown.

For a large casserole, follow the same procedure as above, being careful not to overfill. Discard extra dough. If it's easier for you, or you don't want as much bread, you can skip putting dough on the bottom, and just use dough on the top.

Puff Pastry or Pie Crust:

Place a large cookie sheet on the middle rack of the oven and preheat to 425 degrees.

Roll out the thawed pastry to about 1/8 inch thick. Cut the pastry to the appropriate size, whether you are using bowls or a casserole.

Fill bowl or casserole with stew to about $\frac{3}{4}$ full, then place pastry directly on top of the stew.

Brush pastry with beaten egg then place in oven for 20 minutes or until the top is golden brown. Reduce heat to 400 degrees and continue cooking for another 5 minutes.

If using pie crust and it's getting too brown, cover lightly with aluminum foil to prevent scorching.