

2beerguys Belgian Beef Stew

courtesy of: Ignace Van Canaghem

Go to your local butcher/mall and get yourself one kilo of prime beef.

When cooking, and especially when cooking Flemish food, never save a buck on prime quality ingredients.

Why buy the better quality when a guy on the street can deliver you five times as much for half the price from the trunk of his car ? You'll taste the difference, believe me.

So, one kilo of prime beef. Have it diced into 1 1/2 or 2 inch cubes. I have my butcher do it, costs nothing, saves me fiddling with knives and the chance of partial dismemberment.

- A stick of butter (200 grams);
- two small onions (not the teensy ones, just regular ones, only not too big - if you're an onion fan, disregard);
 - two laurel leaves;
 - one slice of bread (white or brown, talk to your dietician, write your congressman, look at what the stars have in store for you);
 - mustard;
- brown beer (you like it a lot better already, don't you ? ;-)),preferably Rodenbach, 2 bottles thereof.
 - one soup spoon of baking flower;
 - seasoning : white pepper, nutmeg, sniff of salt
- a wooden spoon (this is an ingredient only when you invited a family of beavers)

In a big pan that you can close with a lid :

- put the butter in the pan together with the finely chopped onions on a slow fire (gasmark 2 tops);
- the butter will melt and assume a nice golden/brown color. The onions will also start to brown slightly.
Make sure to watch this process as you don't want to burn the butter/onion mix.
 - When the butter/onions are sort of brownish, add the meat.
- Turn the meat until all sides are no longer raw but look kind of greyish (the inside is still very much raw but you're not worried about that); we call this process also 'browning' of the meat. It's similar to what you do to the butter and the onions, not cooked but no longer raw;

Point of attention : when you turn the cubes of meat to evenly 'brown' them, make sure you also stir the onions continuously, very important. If you don't do that, the onions will be at the bottom of the pan for the entire duration of the procedure and when you remove the meat you'll see that there's no onions on them and that what were once onions is now a perfectly black residue. Pure carbon. If this happens to you: take it to NASA and have them smear it in the seams of the heat shield tiles of the Space Shuttle. That stuff is 100% fire proof, I guarantee it - I spend many words on it, but it's very important that you stir the food evenly the entire duration of the cooking process.

- add the beer; I use Rodenbach, the regular one. Regular Rodenbach is about 10 proof beer. It will add a GREAT taste to the dish. Some people insist on adding stronger beer but you don't want to do this because stronger beers have residue at the bottom of the bottle and you don't want that to end up in your dish.
Have a stronger beer with the dish instead of dunking it into the pan; the meat is now swimming nicely in lots of liquid. This is a good thing;
- mustard the slice of bread (you tell me how to express : butter the bread when you're using mustard instead of butter)... ok, cover the slice of bread with mustard and put it into the pan;
- put two bayleaves into the pan. They're for adding taste, not for eating (I'm being very cautious not to poison you here, you undoubtedly know this but I have to make sure);
 - add seasoning;



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- stir evenly with the wooden spoon. Wooden spoons are great for this kind of work.

On regular intervals, check how the meat is doing (if you're using a crock pot, don't worry about anything).

Ok, about an hour and fifteen minutes have passed since you started (crock pot user: you can leave it overnight, it'll be great by the time the process is complete). You have checked regularly and stirred the meat nicely. Great job ! Now, the level of the fluid should have come down a bit from the cooking process but it should still be very watery.

Now you're going to bind the sauce.

- put the spoonful of flower into a big enough glass, add water and stir deftly until no more lumps are in evidence.
- pour the mix into the pan. The liquid in the pan will now bond with the flower and you should get a nice brown sauce.

Let it simmer a bit further. Keep stirring that mix religiously, it's never too late to finagle a really great dish.

You will notice that the meat now appears to be fully cooked. Take a little sip from the sauce. Does that stuff taste great or what ? You better believe it.

Turn off the stove.

For the best taste, you should leave the dish in the pan for 24 hours.

Then you heat it back up (on the stove, don't nuke it). If you can't hold back for that long, you won't be disappointed when you whack the triangle and yell "Com'n get it !" and eat it then and there.

Cut potatoes into sticks about a finger long and just as thick (for god's sake peel the potatoes first !!!!!!!). Put them into sunflower oil in a deep pan (or if you have special equipment for that, by all means use that). Boil it twice though. The first time is to scorch the outside, the second time is to bake the whole frie.

You now have fries and "stoverij". Don't use too much mayonnaise, use the sauce. You can add lettuce or whatever green vegetable takes your fancy. I usually suffice with the fries and the stoverij.

If you can get it, have a Rochefort 6 with this dish (maybe they don't have the 6, maybe they only have the 8 or the 10 - anyone is great but the 6 is just right for this occasion). A divine beer with a divine dish.

Cover the pan and let the broth simmer nicely. Always on a slow fire. The entire process takes about one and a half hour when using a regular cooking method. Don't try to race it by adding more heat to the system. You're not launching a missile, take it easy.