

December Recipe

Beef, Beer and Mushroom Stew with Cheesy Dumplings

My lovely mum is a fabulous cookery writer and as kids we were her happy guinea pigs. A couple of her books were on British cooking and I have the fondest memories of dumplings with lots of gravy. My version has the addition of baking powder to make them very light and fluffy; if you prefer a more solid dumpling, you can omit it from the recipe.

SERVES 6

**FOR THE STEW:**

600g / 1lb 5oz stewing steak cubed
2 tbsp plain flour seasoned with salt and pepper
2 tbsp olive oil or beef dripping
50g / 2oz butter
1 red onion, peeled and chopped
2 ribs of celery, cleaned, trimmed and chopped
2 carrots, peeled and chopped
350g / 12oz brown mushrooms trimmed, quartered
2 leeks cleaned, trimmed and chopped
1 tsp paprika
500ml / 18fl oz light beer or lager
Freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE DUMPLINGS:

100g / 4oz self-raising flour
50g / 2oz prepared suet
1/4 tsp baking powder
1 tsp mustard powder
75g / 3oz strong Cheddar cheese
1 handful of chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 egg beaten

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F / Gas Mark 4.

Roll the meat in the seasoned flour until coated. Heat the oil or dripping in a large pot with a lid and brown the meat in two batches. Pop the meat in a bowl until needed. Reduce the heat and plop the butter into the pot, throw in all the vegetables, the paprika and a good grind of black pepper and give it a proper stir. Gently fry for about 25 minutes until soft, keeping an eye on them and stirring every few minutes, as you don't want them to burn. Return the meat to the pot. Glug in the beer or lager and enough water to just cover the meat, stir through, pop the lid on the pot and place in the oven for 1 3/4 hours.

Meanwhile, make the dumplings. Mix all the dry ingredients together in a large bowl. Using a fork, briskly mix in the egg and enough water to make a sticky dough but do not over-mix. Form into dumplings the size of walnuts and pop on top of the stew at the end of the cooking time, cover the pot and cook for a further 15 minutes. Serve with a salad on the side if you like, but it is a whole meal on its own.