

December Recipe

Venison with Port and Plums Pie

This is a pie for hungry folk. It is very meaty with a great tang from the plums. Decorate the top with pastry flowers and leaves for a spectacular feast.

SERVES 8



1kg (21b 4oz) venison shoulder, leg or neck, cut into 4cm (2in) cubes

FOR THE MARINADE:

½ bottle port
8 juniper berries, crushed
2 bay leaves, crumbled
4 cloves garlic, crushed
½ red onion, sliced
2 tbsp olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE FILLING:

2 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp plain flour
150g (5oz) bacon lardons 1½ red onions, chopped
1 cinnamon stick
5 large unripe (so they are sour) red plums, halved and stoned

FOR THE PASTRY:

100g (3 ½ oz) prepared suet, such as Atora
200g (7oz) self-raising flour 4 tbsp white wine
A large pinch of salt 1 egg, beaten

Mix the meat with the marinade in an airtight container. Leave to infuse for 4 hours or overnight in the fridge. Strain off the marinade and reserve, but throw out the onions and bay leaves.

Now make the filling by heating the oil in a large casserole over a medium to high heat. Coat the meat in flour and fry it in batches until it has just browned on the outside. Once browned, keep the meat to one side. Fry the bacon in the same casserole until it starts to brown, then reduce the heat. Add the onions and continue to fry for 10 minutes or until the onions are soft. Don't forget to stir them now and again, so they don't burn or get stuck to the pan. Pour the marinade into the casserole and mix it in thoroughly, scraping up all the gubbins stuck to the bottom of the pan. Allow it to bubble away for about 5 minutes until it thickens. Throw in the meat, any juice and the cinnamon stick. Simmer gently for 1½ hours. Stir in the plums and allow to cool while you make the pastry.

Preheat the oven to 220°C (425°F/ Gas 7). Make the pastry by mixing the suet, flour, white wine and salt together in a large bowl until you have a soft dough. Add a little more flour if it is sticky or water if it is too dry. Knead the dough for a couple of minutes until it becomes smooth and a little elastic and then set it aside.

Spoon the venison mixture into a pie dish. Roll out the pastry to a size large enough to cover the pie dish. Brush the edges of the pie dish with a little of the beaten egg and cover with the pastry. Trim the edges, putting aside any excess pastry. Press down all around the rim with a fork. Cut shapes out of the extra pastry to decorate the top of the pie, cut a small hole in the top of the pie to let steam escape and brush it again with beaten egg. Place it in the oven and bake for 25 minutes.

I like to serve with pommes dauphinoises, carrots and Savoy cabbage.