

Stuart's mean beef stew

Serves 6

2½ lbs (1.125 kg) stewing steak
¾ pint (450ml) lager, ale or stout
1 bay leaf
1½ oz (40g) butter
1 tbsp olive oil
2 large onions , chipped
2 large cloves garlic finely chopped
1½ tbsp tomato puree
1½ tbsp flour
salt and black pepper

Garnish (optional)

2 large slices dry brown bread
2-3tbsp Dijon mustard
a few sprigs watercress

Pre-heat the oven to 300F/150C/gas mark 6. Cut the meat into pieces and put in a casserole, pouring the beer over it. Add the bay leaf, bring to the boil, cover and cook in the oven. For tender steak like chuck, allow a couple of hours. For cheaper cuts allow 3½ - 4 hours.

(If you want to do the garnish, then start about half an hour before the end. Cut the bread into triangles and dry out in the bottom of the oven until crisp.)

When you reckon the meat is ready, heat the butter and oil in a deep frying pan and cook the onions slowly until light golden, adding the garlic halfway through. Then stir in the tomato puree, then the flour and cook for two minutes, stirring.

Transfer the casserole to the top of the stove, and drop in the onion butter mixture by degrees, stirring until each addition is amalgamated. Simmer over low heat for 4 minutes to cook the flour, stirring now and then. If it seems too thick, thin down with a little boiling water or stock. Add salt and pepper to taste.

To serve

Tip into a serving dish. Spread the pieces of bread generously with Dijon mustard and lay on top of the stew, with a small bunch of watercress tucked into the centre. Serve with boiled potatoes and a lettuce and watercress salad, or seasonal vegetables

Yum.