

Mushroom Stew with Beef Chunks

(Reprinted from Mark Bittman's *The Food Matters Cookbook: 500 Revolutionary Recipes For Better Living*)

Makes: 4 servings Time: 1 1/2 hours, largely unattended

It doesn't take much beef to flavor a stew, especially when you've got fresh and dried mushrooms for added depth and oomph. And this stew is low maintenance- just put on a lid and leave it alone. If you're looking to make this vegetarian, omit the meat and add more mushrooms- the flavor will be amazing.

1 ounce (about 1 cup) dried porcini mushrooms
3 cups boiling water
1 tablespoon olive oil
8 ounces beef chuck or round, trimmed and cut into 1-inch cubes
1 pound fresh shiitake, cremini, portobello, or button mushrooms, stemmed if necessary and roughly chopped
2 leeks, trimmed, well rinsed, and chopped
3 carrots or parsnips, chopped
2 tablespoons minced garlic
salt and black pepper
1/2 cup red wine
3 cups mushroom or beef stock, or water
2 sprigs fresh thyme or rosemary, or a pinch of each dried
1 bay leaf
1 small celery root (peeled) or 2 celery stalks, chopped
1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley or chives, for garnish

1. Put the dried porcinis in a bowl and cover with the boiling water. Soak until soft, 20 to 30 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, put the oil in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. When it's hot, add the beef and brown it on one side before stirring it. Cook until deeply browned on all sides, 5 to 10 minutes total, removing pieces as they are done.
3. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons of the fat from the pan. By now the porcinis should be soft. Lift the mushrooms out of the water, leaving behind the soaking liquid and sediment. Roughly chop the porcinis and reserve the liquid. Add the chopped porcinis to the pan along with the fresh mushrooms, leeks, carrots, and garlic. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables begin to brown, 10 to 15 minutes. Add the red wine and cook, stirring to loosen the bits of vegetable that have stuck to the bottom of the pan, for about a minute.
4. Add the stock, the reserved porcini soaking liquid (careful to leave any grit in the bottom of the bowl), and the beef along with the herb and bay leaf. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat so that the soup bubbles gently. Cover and cook undisturbed for 30 minutes. Stir in the celery root, cover, and continue cooking until the meat and vegetables are tender, another 20 to 30 minutes. Add more liquid if the mixture seems too dry.
5. Remove the herb sprigs and bay leaf, taste, and adjust the seasoning. Garnish with the parsley and serve immediately (or cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days.)