

An Irish Stew for Celtic MKE

Stews have been on the world culinary trail since the Roman times. Each country and in some cases certain regions produce their own style. In Dublin, the famous coddle has two distinct colours and has caused many a culinary argument depending which side of the river you reside. In France, the cassoulet has many versions, The Belgian Carbonade or the Hungarian Goulash also comes in various forms. In Ireland, the humble Irish stew is no different.

In the 19th century poverty forced the people to cook the basics on hanging pots or Bastible ovens over open fires. Meat and veg from the garden from a steaming a pot brought nourishment and warmth to the family table.

These days Irish stew is made with beef or lamb, but I prefer lamb as it's the traditional meat of the Irish stew. Its flavour against the veg is distinct and quite beautiful. I cook a basic stew, I prefer not to flour the meat as I like a liquid base, I do not add pearl barley, I opt for the humble spud (potato) and not those little, small pebble ones. I like a real spud. Sean O Rourke, a former RTÉ news broadcaster, became a one-man PR machine for my book Beautiful Affair praising my Irish Stew. Every time we met socially or on air he spoke glowingly about the stew. He cooked so much one day he froze it and the poor family lived off it for a few weeks.

This is my preferred stew. I have cooked it this way for many years at home and in restaurants. It never fails.



A few tips

Herbs. I use lots of fresh herbs. During winters I buy those pots from the supermarket or garden centres and they sit in a tray by the window. Much cheaper than buying bags and they keep for weeks once watered. Transfer to the garden or window box in April and you are sorted for the summer. Try to avoid the dry powder stuff.

Support local producers

Meat. Buy meat from the butcher if possible. They know their craft. They love to chat.

Use good veg.

Use good stock. Some of those new liquid stocks now available are much better than the cubes. I often make my own wet stocks and I have also made my own stock cube.

Fresh bread and butter. Now I doubt if I ever ate a stew without a slice of bread smothered in butter. Only sayin.....

McGann's world-famous Irish stew Serves about 4 to 6.

Inspired by a few years working as musician and dogsbody at Mc Gann's pub in Doolin back in the lates 1970's. To my American friends I have often described that time in Doolin as Haight Ashbury in a large field.

I use lamb neck or shoulder pieces and gigot chops. I like to use lamb stock if I have some stored in the freezer, though chicken stock is fine too. Fresh herbs are essential in my kitchen.

Ingredients

Glug of Olive oil

1 large onion peeled and finely chopped.

1kg neck of lamb, chopped into bite-size chunks, lightly salted and set aside.

2 large carrots peeled and chopped.

2 celery sticks peeled and chopped.

1 leek well washed and diced. (optional)

1 parsnip, peeled and chopped 500ml well-seasoned stock (see below)

1 dsp fresh thyme leaves 1 tsp chopped fresh rosemary 1 bay leaf(optional)

2 large potatoes, peeled and chopped into bite-size chunks Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper Extra fresh herbs, finely chopped, for garnish.

OVER TO YOU

1. In a medium-sized pot, heat a little oil and fry the onion gently for about 3 minutes, add the leeks for an extra 2 minutes.

2. Add the lamb pieces and let them get a slight colour, about 6 minutes.

3. Add the carrots, celery and parsnip and mix.

4. Add the stock and herbs and bring to the boil, then lower the heat and simmer for 40 minutes.

5. Add the potatoes and cook for a further 20 minutes. Taste for seasoning. Serve garnished with the chopped herbs.

Optional Bread and real butter

Lamb stock is easy to make yourself. Get a few lamb bones with a little meat on them into a large pot with 2 litres of water, a carrot, some celery, thyme, a bay leaf, an onion and a few black peppercorns. Boil for about 2 hours, stirring every so often, then strain and return to the heat until reduced to about half. When cold, remove the layer of solid fat. You can freeze what you do not need, ready for other recipes later.

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