



Oven Lamb Stew with New Potatoes and Herbs

Spring is the best time to appreciate the change of season with fresh dishes like this lamb

Ingredients 2 lbs. lamb stew meat, cut into 1-inch pieces 2 T. butter 3/4 cup onion, finely chopped 1 T. garlic, minced 2 tsp. fresh rosemary, minced 1/2 cup flour 1 1/2 tsp. salt 1 tsp. coarsely ground black pepper 10 to 12 baby, new red potatoes no larger than 2 inches in diameter, scrubbed, but not peeled (or 6 to 8 B-sized red potatoes, cut into 1 1/2-inch chunks) 2 medium tomatoes, chopped 1 cup carrots, diced 2 bay leaves 4 cups beef or chicken stock 1/2 cup dry red wine 1 1/2 cups fresh or frozen green peas 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped 3 T. chives, minced

Preparation

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.

In a heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat, melt butter. Add lamb stew meat and sauté until pieces begin to brown. Add onion, garlic and rosemary, and sauté for another 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from heat, drain any excess fat and allow to cool slightly.

Put flour, salt and pepper into a large, plastic food-storage bag and shake until combined. Add lamb mixture and shake until pieces are well-coated.

In a large (3-quart or larger), ovenproof casserole, combine lamb pieces, potatoes, tomatoes, carrots and bay leaves. Pour stock and red wine over lamb and vegetables. Cover and place in oven. Bake for 2.5 to 3 hours, stirring twice. Add peas and parsley, and cook an additional 45 minutes. Check potatoes for doneness; they should be very tender. Add additional salt and pepper if needed, stir in chives, and serve hot. Serves 5 to 8.

Top About 20 years ago, as a college freshman, I had to memorize the first 40 lines of Geoffrey Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, Old English pronunciation and all.

I struggled at first, but practice brought out the words' full flavor; invariably, a soft, spring day will bring to my mind those simple-but-stirring opening lines, sketching in vivid detail the sights, sounds and smells of springtime in the country.

Translated into modern English, the lines speak of "April's sweet showers" that have "pierced the drought of March to the root," of "Zephyrus [the west wind], who with his sweet breath / has inspired in every grove and forest / the tender branches" and of "small birds making melody."

Soft, soaking rains, warm breezes, green growth and the songs of happy, busy birds: Isn't that still, 600 years later, the essence of spring?

Spring is a delight for all our senses, including taste ... and besides, all that fresh air and outside work gives us an extra appetite. Pair the Marinated Asparagus and Confetti Spread on a piece of your favorite bread for that first outdoor lunch in a sunny spot, and savor the Lamb Stew in the still-cool evenings. Then get to bed early—the sun is rising earlier every day!

More Main Dishes