

Classic Beef Stew

So chic! A fashionable cocktail for the fashion set. Junmai is pure rice sake, meaning nothing else is used to produce it except rice, water and a mold that converts starch into fermentable sugars. Because of this, junmai sake typically has a fuller flavor and a higher acidity that plays well with the grapefruit juice and floral flavors of the oh-so-chic St-Germain. An adornment of crisped, caramelized bresaola gives this drink an unexpected sweet-salty touch and makes this pinkish drink the perfect accessory to any fashionable soirée.

The vodka is optional — adding it obviously increases the booziness — but since sake is already high in alcohol, you can skip it for a somewhat tamer drink.

Ingredients

2 carrots, peeled
4 cloves garlic, peeled
1 large celery stalk, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces (about 1/2 cup)
1 large onion, cut into eighths
10 ounces mushrooms, stems trimmed
1½ teaspoons fresh thyme leaves (see Cook's Notes)
3 sprigs flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped (about 3 tablespoons), plus more to garnish
Canola oil
2 pounds beef chuck, cut into 1-inch chunks (see Cook's Notes)
1/2 teaspoon salt, plus more to taste
2 tablespoons diced pancetta (1/4-inch dice)
2 tablespoons tomato paste
3 tablespoons flour
1 cup dry red wine (Cotes du Rhone, or something you like to drink; see Cook's Notes)
4 cups beef stock
1 russet potato, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes (about 1¾ cups)
1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
Freshly ground black pepper

special equipment

food processor, grater (for garlic)

Directions

Cut one of the carrots into 1-inch pieces and place in the bowl of a food processor. Use the side of your knife to smash 3 of the garlic cloves and add them to the bowl, along with celery, onion, 6 mushrooms, thyme and 3 tablespoons parsley. Pulse until a paste forms. Stop and scrape down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula and pulse again. Repeat this step a few times and then process until everything is pureed and smaller than the tip of a pencil.

Place a Dutch oven over medium heat and coat bottom with about 1 tablespoon of oil. Sprinkle 1/2 teaspoon of salt on beef. When the oil is hot, add beef, one piece at a time, making sure the chunks are about an inch apart. (If they're bunched too close together, they'll steam instead of sear. The brown sear adds flavor.) When the pieces have nicely browned on one side, turn them and continue to brown evenly on all sides. Remove browned pieces of beef to a bowl to hold them while searing more.

When all the beef is seared, add a little more oil to the pan if it is dry and then drop in the pancetta. Stir to brown and render fat, 1 to 2 minutes. Add tomato paste and spread in a thin layer until it begins to caramelize and turn rusty red. Stir in the vegetable puree and cook for a minute. Sprinkle the flour on top, mix and cook for a minute. Pour in the wine and stock, and mix well, scraping up any brown bits from the bottom of the pan. Bring to a boil, then add beef with its juices and lower the heat to a simmer. Cover and cook until the beef is fork tender, 1½ to 2 hours, stirring occasionally. Adjust the heat as needed to keep the stew at a slow simmer (low to medium-low).

Slice the remaining carrot into thin rounds and add them and the potatoes to the stew. Cover and simmer until tender, about 20 minutes. Quarter the remaining mushrooms. Heat a medium sauté pan over medium heat and coat the bottom with about a tablespoon of oil. Add the mushrooms and cook until they give up their liquid and it evaporates. When the mushrooms begin to brown, grate the remaining garlic clove over the top and toss until it becomes fragrant. Add the mushrooms to the stew. Remove from heat, stir in balsamic vinegar, taste and add pepper and salt, if desired. Garnish with chopped parsley and serve with crusty bread.

Cook's Notes

About those thyme leaves: no need to pluck them one by one. That would take way too long (and maybe drive you crazy). Instead, try our method to quickly strip the stalks. Using both hands, pinch the top of the stem between thumbs and forefingers. While holding the top with one hand, quickly zip the fingers of your other hand down the length of the stalk. If it doesn't work, turn the stem around and start from the other end. The leaves may get a little crushed, but it's OK because they go into the food processor.

If cutting the beef into 1-inch cubes is just too much trouble, larger pieces will work, too. If you do go bigger, you may want to cut the carrots and potatoes into larger pieces to match. Everything will need to simmer a little longer, so allow extra time. You can also choose other vegetables to add at the end. Try a handful of pretty little pearl onions (frozen are fine) or use parsnips instead of carrots.

For the wine, we chose a Cotes du Rhone, but the most important thing is to use something you like to drink. There will be a lot left in the bottle and it's totally fair to sip while you prep.

total time: 3 hours

active prep: 1 hour

serves: 4-6

difficulty: easy

