

The Shepherd's Cottage Pie

If a shepherd were to make a cottage pie, it might look something like this. Technically, in a proper shepherd's pie, lamb is the star, for obvious reasons. If you use beef, it's a cottage pie. But we like a mix of the two in our meaty confection. As the bluster blows out winter and rushes in the spring, this is the dish you want to have greet you when you come back inside. It's warm. It's comforting. It's perfect.

See Cook's Note for variations.

Ingredients

mash topping

2 pounds Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 2-inch chunks

1 pound parsnips, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks

Salt

4 tablespoons butter

1/2 cup milk

5 tablespoons chopped chives

Freshly ground black pepper

filling

6 ounces sliced pancetta, chopped

1 large onion, diced (about 1½ cups)

4 carrots, peeled and sliced (1/4-inch), wide pieces cut into half moons

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

1 pound ground beef

1 pound ground lamb

2 teaspoons allspice

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

3 tablespoons tomato paste

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

3 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 cup ale, nothing too hoppy

2 cups frozen peas, preferably petite peas

1 cup chopped parsley

special equipment

potato masher

9-by-13-inch baking dish

foil-lined half sheet pan

Directions

for the mash topping

Put the potatoes and parsnips into a medium saucepan. Cover by an inch with cold water, season the water with some salt, and bring to a boil. Simmer until everything is very tender, about 15 minutes. Drain well, and return to pot over the heat and let the vegetables dry out a bit. Remove the pot from heat, add the butter, and mash until smooth. Beat in the milk with a wooden spoon or sturdy rubber spatula, then season with salt and pepper to taste. Stir in the chives.

for the filling

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

While the potatoes and parsnips cook, sweat the pancetta in a large skillet over medium-high heat until most of the fat renders and the meat starts to brown, 8 to 9 minutes. Add the onions and carrots, stirring occasionally until vegetables start getting some color, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic cook another minute. Crumble the lamb and beef into the skillet and stir to combine. Season with allspice, salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally and breaking up clumps of meat, until the meat loses most of its pinkness, about 5 minutes. Drain any excess fat. Stir in the tomato paste and Worcestershire sauce. Sprinkle the flour over the mixture and cook, stirring often, for 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in ale and let simmer until beer has reduced and the mixture is thick and glossy, about 2 minutes. Then add 1½ cups water and let simmer, stirring often, until it thickens, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in the peas and parsley. Adjust seasonings.

to assemble

Spread the filling evenly in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish, then spread the mash topping over the filling. Place dish on a foil-lined baking sheet to catch any drips and bake until the topping is lightly browned, 20 to 25 minutes. Let rest 10 to 15 minutes once removed from the oven, letting the sauce thicken. Serve hot.

Cook's Notes

This is a dish that lends itself to variations and substitutions for maximum personalization. You can use either only lamb, or only beef. You can change the meat to ground turkey or venison, or even buffalo. It's a great way to re-purpose leftovers, with chopped-up roasts, extra stew, leftover mashed potatoes. (Leftover mashed potatoes? Sounds impossible, right? But theoretically, you could use those.) Throw more root vegetables into the stewy mixture. Substitute sweet potatoes for the

potatoes, carrots for the parsnips. Use wine instead of beer, or lose the booze altogether.

total time: 55 minutes

active prep: 25 minutes

serves: 4 to 6

difficulty: medium