

# The Best Beef Stew

Serves 6.

Make this stew days in advance for the best results-start on day one and serve on day four.

or

4 lb. **pot roast or chuck steak**-2 1/2 to 3 inches thick  
3 lb. trimmed **stew meat**

1 tbl. **salt**  
1 tsp. crushed **black peppercorns**

or

2 sprigs **fresh thyme**  
1/2 tsp. **dried thyme**

3 cups thinly sliced **onions**  
1 1/2 cups thinly sliced **carrots**  
several peeled, crushed **garlic clove**-large  
1/4 cup **olive oil or vegetable oil**  
3 tbl. **red wine vinegar**  
1 tbl. **oil**  
4 chopped, fresh **plum tomatoes**  
2 **bay leaves**  
1/4 cup **water**  
1 cup **beef stock**-strong  
**red wine**-Chianti or Zinfandel

**OPTIONAL:**

**all purpose flour**  
**beef stock**  
**potatoes**  
 2 dozen braised **onions-small**  
 2 cups braised, cut **carrots**  
**fresh sweet peas**  
 fresh **green beans**  
 sautéed **mushrooms**

Day one: remove all surrounding fat from beef with a boning knife, then cut the meat into pieces according to its natural muscle separations, trimming as you go. Cut the pieces into 1 1/2-inch chunks. Toss meat into an enameled or stainless casserole with salt blended with peppercorns and thyme. Add onions, carrots, garlic and oil. Toss thoroughly, then toss again with red wine vinegar. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Day two: Dry the beef chunks thoroughly on paper towels. In a medium frying pan, cook the marinade vegetables and any accumulated liquid over moderate heat until the onions are translucent. Meanwhile, set a frying pan over moderately high heat and add 1 tbs. oil. Add the beef in batches and cook until the chunks are well browned all over. Return the meat to the casserole and strew the cooked marinade vegetables on top, along with tomatoes and bay leaves. Discard the fat from the pan in which the meat was browned. Deglaze the pan by pouring in the water and simmering it for a moment. With a wooden spoon, scrape all the brown bits from the bottom of the pan into the liquid and pour over the beef. Pour in beef stock and enough red wine to almost submerge the ingredients. Cover and refrigerate.

Day three: Bring the stew to a simmer on top of the stove, then set it, covered, in a 300° oven so that it barely bubbles. You can stop the cooking at any point and continue the following day. It will take about 2 1/2 hours for the meat to become fork-tender. Let the stew cool, then cover it and refrigerate overnight.

Day four: Using a spoon, skim all the solidified fat from the surface. Reheat the stew, then strain the hot cooking liquid into a large nonreactive saucepan, pressing on the cooked vegetables. Taste the sauce for strength and seasoning, and boil down if it seems weak. If it seems too liquid, thicken it with a slurry: for each cup of sauce, blend 1 tbs. flour in a bowl with 1 1/2 tbs. cold beef stock. Whisk dribbles of hot sauce onto the slurry, then whisk the slurry mixture into the sauce. Simmer for several minutes, then pour the hot sauce over the warm stew. Simmer for several minutes before serving. If desired, add potatoes, braised onions and carrots, fresh peas and green beans and sautéed mushrooms and simmer until the potatoes are done.