Beef Casserole

Brown the speck first, then let the beef take colour in the same pot. The browned bits on the base give the red wine gravy its depth.



SERVES 4 / SNUG 2–3 LITRE LIDDED CASSEROLE

Prep 15 min · Cook 1¾–2½ hr

Ingredients

600 g beef topside, cut into 2–3 cm cubes

60 g speck or smoked bacon, cut into short strips

15 ml neutral oil, plus a little extra if needed

1 small onion (about 75 g), sliced, and 1 large carrot (about 120 g), diced

25 g plain flour and 2 garlic cloves, crushed

120 ml dry red wine and 250 ml salt-reduced beef stock, plus extra if needed

1 bay leaf, 1 sprig thyme and 2 parsley stalks, tied together

Salt, black pepper and 1 tablespoon chopped parsley

At the stove and oven

1. Brown

Fry the speck, then brown the peppered beef in small batches. Lift both onto a plate.

2. Make the gravy

Soften the onion and carrot. Stir in flour and garlic, then add wine and stock, scraping up the browned bits.

3. Braise

Return the beef and speck, add the herbs and cover. Cook slowly until the meat gives way to a fork.

KOOK'S SECRET

Brown the beef in a single layer with a little room between the cubes. That first sizzle gives you the flavour you'll scrape up with the wine.

Beef Casserole

The full method

01 **Brown the meat**

Heat the oven to 160°C conventional (140°C fan). Pat the beef dry and season with pepper. Heat the oil in the casserole. Fry the speck until its edges colour and lift it out. Brown the beef over medium-high heat in two or three batches, then lift onto the same plate.

02 **Build the gravy**

Lower the heat. Soften the onion and carrot for 4–5 minutes, adding a little oil if the pot is dry. Stir in the flour for 2 minutes, then the garlic for 30 seconds. Gradually stir in the wine and stock, scraping the browned bits from the base. Bring to a simmer.

03 **Braise gently**

Return the beef, speck and resting juices to the pot. Add the herb bundle. The gravy should come about three-quarters of the way up the meat. Add a splash of stock if needed. Cover and bake for 1½–2 hours. Start checking at 90 minutes and allow longer if the beef still feels firm.

04 **Finish and serve**

When a fork slides easily into the beef, remove the herb bundle. Skim any excess fat. If the gravy is thin, lift out the meat and simmer the gravy for a few minutes. Return the beef, taste for salt and pepper, then scatter over the parsley.

FROM MARK'S KITCHEN

Taste for salt after the braise. The speck lends its own seasoning as it cooks, and the gravy concentrates in the pot.