

Polish Hunters Stew

By: Mark Cabaj

“Have some more bigos,” my father would say. And before anyone could put their spoon down, he would have swiped their half-done plate and returned it, topped up with more Polish Hunters Stew, a centuries old dish.

Smokey mushrooms, exotic meats and tangy sauerkraut - complemented by dark rye bread and boiled new potatoes - it's a combination tough to beat in the autumn and winter when the Canadian body needs some warming up.

Bigos is quite good, though I think I like it as much for how we made and ate it as for its taste. I come from a big nuclear family (6 kids!), an extraordinarily large extended family and - because we lived in a rural town - we also had a lot of friends. We visited a great deal and we tended to do it in the kitchen over food. Often, company would be sitting around our large counter helping dice up the ingredients for bigos or helping themselves to another plate during conversations about gardens, sports and family.



There are a lot of recipes for bigos. Apparently, every Polish manor house has its own distinct version. I chose this one from a great recipe book called East European Kitchen by Catherine Atkinson. I made it with friends and family sitting around our kitchen counter talking about a Jane Jacobs book.

Ingredients

15 grams (1/4 cup) of dried mushrooms
225 grams (1 cup) stoned prunes
225 grams of boneless pork
225 grams of boneless venison
225 grams of chuck steak
225 grams of kielbasa Sausage
25 grams (1/4 cup) of plain flour
2 onions sliced
45 ml/3 tbsp olive oil

900 grams of sauerkraut (canned or packaged) rinsed
4 tomatoes peeled and chopped
4 cloves
5 cm/2 inches cinnamon stick
1 bay leaf
2.5 ml/1/2 tsp dill seeds
600 ml/ 2 1/2 cups of stock
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Instructions

1. Pour boiling water to completely cover the dried mushrooms and prunes in a bowl. Leave for 30 minutes, then drain well.
2. Cut the pork, venison, chuck steak and kielbasa sausage in 2.5 cm/1 inch cubes, then toss together in the flour. Gently fry the onions in the oil for 10 minutes. Remove.
3. Brown the meat in the pan in several batches, for about 5 minutes, or until well browned; remove and set aside. Add the sherry and simmer for 2-3 minutes, stirring.
4. Return the meat to the pan with the onion, sauerkraut, tomatoes, cloves, cinnamon, bay leaf, dill seeds, mushrooms and prunes. Pour in the stock and season with salt and pepper.
5. Bring the mixture to boil, cover and simmer gently for 2 hours, or until meat is tender. Uncover for the last 20 minutes to let the liquid evaporate, as the stew should be thick. Sprinkle with chopped parsley. Serve immediately with boiled new potatoes, tossed in chopped parsley.

