

Beef bourguignon is a warming stew worth the time

During the winter season, I make a meaty stew at least once a month. Stews are rich and comforting. They are meant to be slow-cooked to tenderize tough cuts of meat and to infuse the stew with the essence of the meat and aromatics.

One of my go-to stews is a beef bourguignon, a classic French stew hailing from the wine-rich region of Burgundy. It's a delicious one-pot dinner perfect for a cold night or an apres-ski meal, and it's guaranteed to make your kitchen enticingly fragrant.

There are a few key details to remember when making the stew. Be sure to brown the meat well in the beginning and use a good-quality red wine that you would happily drink. It doesn't have to be a pricey bottle, but it should certainly be quaffable.

Ideally, start the stew a day ahead of serving (or even two). Not only will the flavor improve with time, but it allows the fat to rise to the top when it cools, which is a nifty way to get rid of any extra unctuous fat. After a night in the fridge, all you need to do is lift off the solidified fat from the surface before you reheat the stew, and you will be left with a silky, rich stock.

I take a few liberties in making the classic French recipe, including the addition of a generous splash of cognac or Calvados (apple brandy) to deglaze the pan, and tomato paste to give extra body and fruitiness to the stock. A spoonful of brown sugar is a final addition to round out the flavors of the stew.

Beef Bourguignon

Active time: 1 hour
Total time: 3 1/2 to 4 hours
Yield: Serves 6
Ingredients:
 Extra-virgin olive oil
 2 1/2 to 3 pounds beef chuck, excess fat trimmed, meat cut into 1 1/2- to 2-inch chunks
 Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
 1/2 cup cognac or Calvados
 2 carrots, chopped
 1 yellow onion, chopped
 4 garlic cloves, chopped
 1 (750 ml) bottle full-bodied red wine
 1 cup beef or chicken stock
 4 thyme sprigs
 2 bay leaves
 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
 1 tablespoon brown sugar
 Olive oil
 8 ounces cremini or white mushrooms, ends trimmed, halved or quartered if large
 Kosher salt
 1 to 2 medium carrots, peeled, sliced 1/2-inch thick
 8 ounces pearl onions, peeled (optional)
Steps:
 Heat the oven to 300 degrees. Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large Dutch oven or ovenproof pot with a lid over medium-high heat.



LYNDA BALSLEV FOR TASTEFOOD

Beef Bourguignon makes a delicious one-pot dinner.

Season the beef with salt and pepper. Working in batches, add the beef to the pan, without overcrowding, and brown on all sides, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to a plate and repeat until all the beef is browned.

Add the cognac to the pot and deglaze, stirring up any brown bits. Reduce by half, and then pour the cognac over the reserved beef.

Add 1 tablespoon oil, the carrots, onion and garlic to the pot and saute over medium heat until the vegetables soften without browning, 3 to 4 minutes. Return the beef and cognac to the pot. Add the wine, stock, thyme, bay leaves and tomato paste. The beef should be submerged in the stock. Add more stock or wine if needed.

Bring to a boil, then turn off the heat, cover the pot and transfer to the oven. Cook until the meat is very tender, 2 1/2 to 3 hours, stirring every hour or so.

Place a sieve over a large saucepan. Carefully pour the stew into the sieve and strain the liquid into the saucepan. Separate the chunks of meat from the vegetables and set the meat aside. Press down on the remaining vegetables in the sieve to extract as much juice into the drained liquid as possible and discard the mashed vegetables.

Boil the liquid until the sauce is reduced by about one-third and slightly thickened, about 20 minutes, skimming the fat from the surface. Stir in the sugar and season to taste with salt and pepper. Return the beef to the sauce. (Note: At this point, the stew may be made one to two days in advance. Cool, then cover and refrigerate overnight. One hour before serving, remove from the refrigerator, discard any collected fat from the surface of the stew, and prepare the vegetables.)

Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the mushrooms, lightly season with salt, and saute until light golden, 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a bowl. Add 1 tablespoon oil to the same skillet, then add the carrots and onions and saute until bright in color and crisp-tender, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer to the bowl with the mushrooms.

Add the vegetables to the stew and simmer over medium heat to heat through, 10 to 15 minutes. Ladle the stew into warm bowls and serve.

Lynda Balslev is an award-winning cookbook author, recipe developer, tester and editor. Taste Food is distributed by Andrews McMeel Syndication.

COVID vaccines protect against serious illness

Hello, dear readers, and welcome back to our ongoing conversation about all things coronavirus. We continue to receive a lot of mail on the topic, and we'll keep adding bonus columns so we can keep up.

The question of natural immunity versus the vaccine is an ongoing issue in one reader's family.

"Will the vaccine based on the original strain of coronavirus protect you more than your natural antibodies to newer variants?" he asked. "This is the constant issue in my family, and a proper explanation for the importance of getting vaccinated — even if you still have antibodies — is appreciated."

It's true that having had COVID-19 offers some natural protection; however, this fades over time. Research also shows that it may not be as effective as the vaccine against reinfection. The vaccines offer protection against serious illness both to the original virus and to emerging variants. Because it's possible to become reinfected, and because COVID-19 can have serious and lingering health effects, the most robust source of protection is to get vaccinated and to stay current on boosters. This keeps your level of protection as high as possible. It's also important to continue to wear a good mask in public places.

A reader from California wondered if being vaccinated makes someone less contagious if they develop COVID-19.

"My understanding is that full vaccination protects the vaccinated individual from developing serious medical consequences of catching COVID-19," she wrote. "However, if that vaccinated person develops a breakthrough infection, aren't they just as potentially contagious to others than as if they had not been vaccinated at all?"

You've asked an intriguing question that has yet to be fully resolved. There is some evidence that when

ASK THE DOCTORS



EVE GLAZIER



ELIZABETH KO

people who are fully vaccinated become ill with COVID-19, they have a lower overall viral load, which they shed for a shorter period of time. This would make them less contagious. However,

this continues to be a topic of debate. We'll continue to update on the issue as new data becomes available.

We'll close with thoughts from a reader in Illinois who finds herself exhausted by the ongoing divide over the coronavirus vaccines: "The media fills us with the good and bad of the vaccines, the pro- and the anti-vaccine positions, and we're left not knowing what to believe," she wrote. "It causes us to become skeptical. Wouldn't it be a simple decision to just ask your personal physician and act on his or her recommendation? After all, they are familiar with a person's health issues."

You have echoed the frustrations of many of our readers, and we suspect they'll be glad to see they're not alone. Yes, we agree that anyone who remains unsure about any aspect of the vaccines should talk to their health care provider. This person understands COVID-19, has a good grasp of your health and your health history, and has your best interests at heart. We have recommended this many times in our columns, and we add our voices to yours: If you're unsure about getting the vaccine or a booster, please talk to your family doctor.

Eve Glazier, M.D., MBA, and Elizabeth Ko, M.D., are internists and assistant professors of medicine at UCLA Health.

Popular herb throughout the ages, dill packs flavor

I like California's SMARTER COVID advice: Shots, Masks, Awareness, Readiness, Testing, Education, Rx. And I add going forward: eat healthy, work toward a healthy weight and be physically active.



KATHY KOLASA

The seeds are considered a spice and used as a flavoring agent, along with garlic, salt and red pepper flakes, in

the pickling of cucumbers with vinegar to make pickles. Some people like a large dill pickle as a snack because it has only 24 calories. It's the leaves of the dill weed that are an herb and they have been used for centuries throughout Europe and Asia.

Dill weed refers to the leaf and stem of the same plant and is sometimes referred to as leaf dill.

Dill, with its sweet, fresh, grassy flavor, is in the same family as parsley and celery. Because dill has such a unique taste, a little bit goes a long way in preparing food. Add it in the last few minutes of cooking because it loses



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its flavor with heat. However, the opposite is true for the dill seed, which develops more aroma and flavor when cooked for longer periods of time.

The feathery texture of dill leaves looks beautiful as a garnish and is excellent on cold soups featuring beets, cucumbers or yogurt. Dill weed pairs well with all types of

seafood, zucchini, summer squash, asparagus and spinach. It is also good with spreads, sour cream, cream cheese and lamb.

Ancient Egyptians used dill weed to ward off witches and as an aphrodisiac. In first-century Rome, dill weed was considered a symbol of good luck; to the Greeks, dill signified wealth. Botani-

cally known as *Anethum graveolens*, the word dill comes from the old Norse word "Dylla," meaning to soothe or to lull. Dill was mentioned in writings in Egyptian medical texts as early as 3000 B.C. and it is also mentioned in the Bible.

In traditional herbal medicine, dill is used for the management and prevention of digestive disease, breathing problems, motivation of lactation, reduction of cholesterol and glucose. It also has reportedly demonstrated anticancer, antimicrobial, anti-gastric and anti-inflammatory properties and as an antioxidant. Alas, we couldn't find evidence that dill gives any therapeutic benefit to humans, so enjoy it for its flavor and fragrance.

Dried dill weed and dill seed are found in the spice section of the grocery store. Fresh dill is found in the produce section. The dill plant is an annual herb that is in season in spring

and early summer and is often grown in greenhouses, so it is available year-round.

When planted in the garden, dill grows best in temperate climates with full sun in well-drained slightly acidic soil. Once home, store fresh dill weed loosely wrapped in plastic in the refrigerator and use within 1-2 days as it tends to wilt and get mushy shortly after it's been picked.

Dill freezes well but loses flavor if you dry it at home. Dill ice cubes made by pulsing dill leaves in a food processor, adding water to make a paste and freezing in an ice cube tray can be added to soups or stews for a burst of fresh dill flavor.

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