

Beer Braised Beef with Cheesy Polenta

Beef Bourguignon is traditionally a French dish, cooked with wine. But when you substitute beer, it becomes something very special, and one of my favorite Autumn meals.

The beef is served over a bed of creamy polenta, which can include any type of cheese you wish to use. I love sharp flavored cheeses like Parmesan or Gorgonzola, but go nuts and make it your own.

This will serve 4-6 people, but it makes great leftovers.

Ingredients for the braised beef:

- 16 ounces of dark beer (Stout, Porter, English strong ale)
- 1 cup of beef broth or bouillon
- 2 pounds of beef, cubed (stew meat, sirloin, shoulder)
- 1 large onion, sliced thin
- 2 carrots, peeled and chunked
- 2 teaspoons of flour
- 1 garlic clove
- 2 bay leaves
- 3 springs of thyme
- 3 sprigs of parsley
- salt and pepper to taste
- olive oil

Ingredients for the cheesy polenta:

- 1 3/4 cups of polenta or cornmeal
- 1 cup of crumbled Gorgonzola, shredded parmesan, or whatever cheese you wish
- 5 to 6 cups of chicken broth
- 1/2 cup of heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
- salt to taste

Cube the beef into 2 inch chunks, then season it with salt and pepper. Heat a dutch oven over high heat, add 1/4 cup of olive oil, and start browning the meat in batches - don't overcrowd the pot. When the beef is browned, move to a plate and continue browning the rest. When all the meat is finished, lower the heat to medium, stir in the onions, and cook until the onions are browned (10 minutes or so). Make sure you scrape up all the good burnt bits and pieces from the beef - that's great stuff and will add character to your sauce. Add the flour and cook for another 3 minutes. Then, toss in the beer and bring it to a boil.

Toss the meat back into the pot, along with the carrots, garlic, bay leaves, parsley, and thyme. Add the beef stock, and bring it all back to a boil. Then, season with salt and pepper (not too much, you can season more later), take the heat to low, cover and allow it to simmer for about 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Remove the bay leaves before serving.

When that's done, have a beer and let's make the polenta - it's easy and quick. In a saucepan, bring 5 cups of the chicken stock to a boil. Add the polenta or cornmeal a little at a time, whisking while you add it so it doesn't lump on you. Bring it back up to a boil, then turn the heat to low. Cover and let it simmer for 10 minutes. Stir it at least once every minute. If you see it getting too thick, add more chicken broth. It should have a semi-thick consistency, not too runny. After 10 minutes, take it off of the heat, add the cream, thyme and the cheese and stir it well until the cheese is melted. Salt it to taste.

Serve this in bowls (pasta bowls work great). Lay down a bed of polenta, then top with 6 to 8 chunks of beef, a few carrots, then a few spoonfuls of the sauce to cover it all.