

## BEEF AND BEER STEW

Makes 6 servings

This is my take on the Flemish dish beef carbonnade, a slowly braised stew characterized by an abundance of onions, a little bacon and a base of dark beer (Belgian ale, if you can find it). As with anything that's cooked for a long time, the magic is the way the ingredients meld over time. Here you start with slowly caramelized onions that only become sweeter in the oven. A look at the ingredients and the knowledge that the onions are caramelized can't but lead you to think that the dish will be sweet, but the sweetness is offset by the beer, the herbs and spices (the allspice is a wonder) and the mix of vinegar and grainy mustard. It's a terrific cold-weather dish. Traditionally it would be served over broad noodles; I suggest you follow tradition.

4 allspice berries or ½ teaspoon ground allspice

2 cloves or a pinch of ground cloves

¼ cup (34 grams) all-purpose flour

Fine sea salt and freshly ground pepper

2½ pounds (about 1 kg) chuck or other stew beef, cut into 2-inch cubes and patted dry

About 3 tablespoons canola or other neutral oil

6 slices thick-cut bacon, cut crosswise into 1-inch pieces

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

4 medium onions, thinly sliced, rinsed and patted dry

4 garlic cloves, germ removed (see sidebar) and finely chopped

One 12-ounce (360-ml) bottle Belgian ale, such as Chimay, or other dark ale or beer

1½ cups (360 ml) beef broth

2½ tablespoons brown sugar

2 tablespoons cider vinegar

1 tablespoon grainy mustard (preferably French)

1 tablespoon tomato paste

4 sprigs fresh thyme

3 bay leaves

Wide noodles, for serving

¼ cup (about 10 grams) chopped fresh parsley, dill, chives, tarragon or mixed herbs, for serving

### WORKING AHEAD

You can make the stew up to 3 days in advance and refrigerate it.

Put the whole allspice and cloves, if using, in a tea ball (or a paper tea bag) or tie them in a bundle using cheesecloth; set aside.

Put the flour in a large bowl, season with salt and pepper and drop in the beef; toss it around to coat.

Warm 2 tablespoons of the oil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add as many beef cubes as you can (shaking off the excess flour as you do) without crowding the pot — the beef will steam, not brown, if the pot is too full. Cook, seasoning the meat once more with salt and pepper and turning to brown on all sides. As the meat is browned, transfer the pieces to another bowl. Add more oil as needed to finish browning the meat. Hold on to any leftover flour.

If the oil has burned, wipe out the pot, leaving whatever solids have stuck to the bottom. Toss the bacon into the pot and cook, stirring, until it's browned. Spoon out the pieces and put them in the bowl with the beef.

Add the butter, onions and garlic to the pot and cook over medium to medium-low heat, stirring occasionally, until the onions are caramel-colored; adjust the heat as needed. Be patient — this will take at least 20 minutes, perhaps longer. Season with salt and pepper.

While the onions are caramelizing, center a rack in the oven and preheat it to 300 degrees F. If you had leftover flour, stir it into the onions, along with the ground spices, if you're using them, and cook for a minute or two, until the flour is browned. Add ½ cup of the ale and cook, stirring and picking up whatever solids remain on the bottom of the pot. The mixture will thicken and the ale will almost evaporate.

Return the meat and bacon to the pot, along with whatever juices accumulated in the bowl. Pour in the remaining ale and add the broth, brown sugar, vinegar, mustard, tomato paste, thyme, bay leaves and the whole allspice and cloves, if you're using them. Give everything a good stir and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Taste for salt and pepper, then cover the pot with foil and its lid. Slide it into the oven.

Cook the stew for 2½ to 3 hours, until the meat is tender enough to cut with a spoon. Remove the packet of whole spices, if you used it, and the bay leaves and thyme sprigs. (Once cooled, the stew can be wrapped well and refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen for up to 2 months.) You can serve this on plates, of course, but I think it's easiest and most enjoyable to eat if you put it into bowls or shallow soup plates. Spoon the stew over the noodles, sprinkle with the herbs and serve.