~~Irish~~ *Ulster* Stew



Here’s my favorite recipe for authentic, traditional Irish stew. As with my recipe for traditional English beef stew, this is made in an electric slow-cooker. If you don't have one, you don't know what you're missing out on (so do yourself a huge favor and get one - you won't regret it)!

Ingredients:

½ pound lamb - shoulder meat works well, but is really fatty; use breast meat if you can find it or leg of lamb which is fairly lean and makes great stew meat, cut into 1-inch cubes (you can ask your butcher to cube it for you)

Salt and ground, black pepper to taste

½ - 1 cup water

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

1 small bay leaf

1 small carrot, peeled and cut into ½“ slices

1 - 2 medium potatoes, peeled and cut into eighths (or a 15-ounce can whole, new potatoes)

1 small onion (about 2 ounces), finely diced or thinly sliced

2½ ounces frozen peas

1½ teaspoons cornstarch ("corn flour" to the Brits) to thicken stew (optional)

Preparation:

Wash the meat. Trim as much of the fat off the cubed lamb pieces with a pair of kitchen sheers as you can, then season it well with salt and pepper. In alternating layers, place the meat, carrots, onions and potatoes in a small (2-quart) slow-cooker (that is, lay down a layer of the cubed lamb, then place a layer of carrots over the lamb, then a layer of onion over the carrots, then a layer of potatoes over the onion - repeat until all used up). Add the remaining ingredients, except the peas and cornstarch, and sprinkle more salt and pepper over the top, to taste. Pour in the water (enough to just cover all the contents of the pot).

Cover and cook on high one hour, then turn to the low setting and cook 10 to 12 hours (or on high setting for an additional 4 to 6 hours, if you don't want to have to get up at 6:00 a.m. to start this recipe - if you choose the high setting like this, be sure to monitor the level of liquid in the cooker because you may need to add another cup or two of water around the last hour of cooking, depending on how much remains at that point).

Add the peas, then give it all a good stir during the last 2 hours of cooking (last 1 hour if cooking on the high setting). Truly authentic Irish stew is never subjected to thickening agents like flour or cornstarch. But if you'd like to thicken the stew up a bit (in the Anglo-American tradition), add the cornstarch to 3 tablespoons cold water in a small bowl; mix it smooth, then add the mixture to the simmering stew and stir gently until thickened. Stir the stew again well and don't forget to take out the bay leaf (if it remains intact) before serving. Serve with beer bread or Irish soda bread and a nice pint of Irish stout!

Notes:

The ingredients for this recipe must be kept very simple in order to keep it authentic. After all, it's a simple, rustic dish with no "pizzazz" originally. Traditionally made with only mutton neck-bone meat, potatoes, onions and water, the addition of carrots and peas came quite later in history. By adding the exotic bay leaf, the authenticity is certainly diminished, but the flavor is enhanced over the old, original way of doing this by using nothing but salt and pepper (or just salt, were pepper to be unavailable at any given time) to season the stew. By adding the Worcestershire sauce, the dish is lent an additional note of flavor and a unique, British character - hence the name which reflects six of the nine counties of Ulster Province which were not absorbed into the Republic of Ireland in 1921 and which still remain a part of Great Britain today.

St. Patrick (373 – 493). An Englishman who became the patron saint of all Ireland!