

Shepherd's Pie

Here's a recipe that I made up after looking for a simple dish to cook on a cold, dreary afternoon, when I was really dreading having to go out and put the sheep and dogs up for the night.

I like to make my own mashed potatoes because I think that they taste much better than any instant potatoes, but I think that the instant variety will work fine, if you are pressed for time. You will need 3-4 cups of mashed potatoes.

If you don't have ground lamb, you can use any boneless cut of lamb, minced as fine as you have the time and patience for.

I deliberately left most spices out of this dish, in order to produce a basic result that you can jazz up to your own taste.

This dish serves 2-4 people, depending on how cold it is and how long it takes you to get the sheep into the pen.

Mashed Potatoes

2 medium potatoes (1 to 1-1/2 pounds)

1-1/2 cups water

1 cup chicken stock

2 Tbs butter

1/4 cup milk

1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

1/4 tsp paprika

1. Peel the potatoes and cut them into small dice. The smaller you cut 'em, the faster they cook.
2. Put the diced potatoes into a pot with the water and chicken stock. Bring to a boil.
3. Boil until the water is almost all gone and the potatoes are cooked (about 30 minutes). If you run out of liquid before your potatoes are cooked, add a little more-- it won't hurt anything. If your potatoes are cooked before the liquid is gone, don't worry-- you can't over-cook potatoes by boiling them.
4. Turn the heat down to medium or low. Using a potato masher, an egg beater or a hand mixer, mash the potatoes until they are pretty smooth. The consistency should be pretty stiff by the time you are done. If it isn't, continue to cook them, stirring constantly, until they thicken up.
5. Add the milk and butter and continue to cook the mash on medium heat, stirring frequently, until it is quite thick. Get it as thick as you can without burning it, though having some brown crusty bits on the bottom of the pan is ok.
6. Turn the heat to low and add the Parmesan cheese. Continue to stir until the cheese is well incorporated. Then take the mash off the heat and stir in the paprika.

Pie Filling

10 small mushrooms
3-4 Tbs olive oil
1 medium onion, diced
1 large carrot, diced
1 pound ground lamb
1 cup frozen peas
1 cup lamb stock OR $\frac{3}{4}$ cup Campbell's beef consommé
1 tsp cornstarch
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp black pepper

1. Slice the mushrooms. Heat 2 Tbs of the olive oil in a frying pan on high heat and then add the mushrooms once the oil is hot. Stir the mushrooms around so they each get a bit of oil.
2. Continue to cook the mushrooms, stirring occasionally, until they start to brown (3-5 minutes). Reduce the heat to medium and add the onions and carrots. If everything looks a bit dry at this point, add another tablespoon of olive oil.
3. Continue to cook the carrots and onions on medium heat, stirring occasionally, until they are more or less golden, with some nice brown bits on the edges—this is key to getting the best flavor out of them. Once they achieve this state, dump them on a plate and set them aside.
4. Add another Tbs of olive oil to the same frying pan and sauté the lamb until it is just cooked (almost all pink is gone).
5. Put the lamb into a small oven-proof casserole dish (I use an 8"x3" circular ceramic dish). Add the vegetables and frozen peas and mix well.
6. Put the stock into the frying pan and cook on high heat for a minute, scraping any brown bits off the bottom and sides of the pan. If you have used lamb stock, you may want to add a bit of salt at this point, but do not add salt if you are using canned beef stock—it has lots of salt already in it.
7. Reduce the heat to so that the liquid is just barely boiling. Add the cornstarch and stir well, making sure that there are no lumps left over. I add the cornstarch in two batches to make this easier. Then add the black pepper. If you wish other to add other spices (chile, thyme, rosemary, etc.) this is the time to do so.
8. Continue to stir and cook until the liquid has the consistency of heavy syrup, but is not quite as thick as molasses.
9. Pour the syrup over the lamb and vegetables and mix well.

Cooking the Pie

1 order mashed potatoes
1 order pie filling
1 oven-proof baking dish, about 3 inches deep and 8 around.
1 oven
1 cookie sheet
45 minutes baking time, more or less

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees if you happen to read this before you finish everything else. If, like me, you never remember to pre-heat anything, and don't read instructions until absolutely forced to, set the oven to 375 and add 10 minutes baking time.
2. Put the mashed potatoes on top of the pie filling and even it out so that the filling is completely hidden.
3. Put the dish on a cookie sheet and bake for 30 minutes or so.
4. Check the dish every 5 minutes or so to see if you have a nice bubbly, golden crust formed on top. When you see this, it's done.