

Hungarian Goulash

Hungarian Goulash (gulyas in Hungarian) is a simple peasant dish eaten in high-class restaurants, local taverns, at street carts and in homes around Hungary, Austria and Eastern Europe. Popular across Europe and North America, it has become so universal it has had a tendency to be adulterated, so much so that this simple little stew is often unrecognisable as goulash. It is a soup and it is also a stew, which can be confusing when ordering it in Europe. Originally shepherds stewed chunks of meat with lots of onions and slowly cooked it down until the meat dried out. They were then able to travel with this dried cooked meat and reconstitute it with water as needed; either as a soup or a heartier meat stew. The cooking principal has not changed in centuries; the meat is slowly stewed with onions in minimal water so that the onions melt into the meat juices to form a lovely gravy. No flour is added for thickening. No wine or vegetables are added. A very little tomato paste can be used to lift the palate but this is optional and if used should never result in an obvious tomato gravy like a Bolognese sauce. Apart from meat, onions and lard, the flavourings are of sweet paprika and caraway seeds, which give the dish its wonderful heady aroma and great colour. The quality of the paprika is of paramount importance – it needs to be sweet and a vibrant red colour, not bitter and brownish with cupboard age.

Lard is the traditional fat used in goulash. You can of course opt for a vegetable oil instead if you have health concerns but to put it in perspective, unless you use lard on a daily basis and always favour pork belly dishes at restaurants, this bit of lard for one dish is not going to kill you. I have opted for beef cheeks in my goulash as they stew down to melting tenderness and have a rich flavour but oyster blade is another great cut to use. Veal and pork are sometimes used but make sure you use gelatinous cuts that will stew well and not

be dry. I suggest veal shins, shoulder or pork neck.

Ingredients

serves 4



- 4 large onions, sliced
- 2 tbs pork or duck fat
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tbs tomato paste (optional)
- 600 g beef cheeks, cut into large pieces
- 2 heaped tbs sweet paprika
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 tbs red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp caraway seeds, slightly bruised in a mortar and pestle
- warm water

Melt the pork fat in a heavy casserole dish. Cook the onions in the melted fat with the salt until very soft and a rich brown colour. You can speed up the process at the start by covering the dish with a lid but once the onions are softened keep the lid off and the heat on low to slowly brown the onions. Add the tomato paste and stir with the onions until it darkens. Add the beef cheeks and cook until they lose their raw colour and start to brown. Take the dish off the heat and add the paprika, stirring it well to amalgamate it with the

pork fat. (Don't add the paprika over the heat as it can burn easily and become bitter.) Add the garlic, caraway seeds and vinegar and enough warm water from the kettle to barely cover the meat. Simmer very gently or place in the oven (150°C) for 3 hours. Stir the meat after each hour and check liquid levels.

Serve with short pasta, bread dumplings (knödel) or gnocchi. Sauerkraut as a salad along with pickled hot chillies make good accompaniments.

Variations: Add peeled and diced potato and/or sauerkraut to the pot towards the end of cooking.