

Beef Stew & Dumplings

I cooked this one in the oven, but I often add everything except the flour to the slow cooker at the start of the day and leave on low until tea time, then mix a tablespoon of cornflour (cornstarch) with a small amount of water, then add to the hot stew and stir to thicken.

500g approx diced stewing beef (braising steak)
1 small swede (or turnip), diced
2 parsnip, chopped
3 carrots, chopped
1 white onion, finely chopped
1 ltr beef stock
3 bay leaves
1-2 heaped tbsp plain (all-purpose) flour (depending on how thick you like the gravy to be)
small amount of oil

For the dumplings

150g plain (all-purpose) flour
75g vegetable or beef suet (you can just use more plain flour if you can't get suet)
Pinch salt
Teaspoon of dried mixed herbs, or fresh/dried herbs of your choice - optional

Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/350°F/gas 4 (or you can cook on the hob instead).

Put a large casserole pan onto a medium heat, and add your prepared vegetables with a splash of oil. Fry for 10 minutes, then add the meat and flour, giving everything a good stir. Add the stock and season with salt and pepper, adding the bay leaves.

Put on the lid, and place in the oven (or continue to cook on the hob at a low simmer) for 3 hours in total. After 2 hours, remove the lid and taste in case it needs more seasoning. Keep the lid off for half an hour (if you're not making the dumplings, just remove the lid for the final half an hour of cooking).

Make the dumplings by mixing the suet and flour together with a pinch of salt, then adding just a splash of water, enough to help bind it into a pliable dough. Divide the dough into 8 pieces and form each into a ball. Place the dumplings on top of the stew and press to half submerge them. Put the lid back on and continue to cook for half an hour. You can make any quantity you like of these, just keep the ratio of double the flour to the amount of suet by weight, and you can also add herbs to them for added flavour. Remove the bay leaves before serving.