

Hungarian goulash

Serves: 6

Preparation time: 1¼ hours

Cooking time: 2 hours

Ingredients:

200g (7oz) smoked bacon/ham/pork shank/combination, in 1½" cubes

dash olive oil

1kg (2¼ lbs) well-marbled pork shoulder, in 1½" cubes

3 medium onions, sliced thinly

6 garlic cloves, minced

5 tbsps 'sweet' (mild) Hungarian paprika

½-1 tsp hot Hungarian paprika or cayenne

1 large carrot, diced

1 fennel bulb, diced

3 large red bell peppers, seeded and diced

1 tsp caraway or fennel seeds

1 tsp dried marjoram or oregano

2 bay leaves

zest peeled from one lemon (in one piece, with pith sliced off)

2 tbsps tomato paste

1 bottle dry white wine, eg Riesling

240ml (1 cup) sour cream

chopped parsley/dill/fennel fronds to garnish

salt and pepper



Method:

1. Liberally season meat with salt and pepper.
2. In a large, heavy casserole fry smoked bacon/ham/shank in its own fat, if fatty, or in a little olive oil if needed, until slightly browned. Remove from casserole to a plate using a slotted spoon, leaving fat in the pot.
3. Brown remaining meat, in batches, on all sides, over a high heat. Do not over-crowd pot, so as not to stew the meat. Fill gaps with new pieces of meat as you remove done ones, so as not to let the pot get too empty and burn. Remove last pieces of meat from casserole to the plate.

4. Immediately add onions and a good pinch of salt to pot and reduce heat to medium. Stir with a wooden spoon, scraping up the brown meaty residue from bottom of pot. There should be enough meat fat to sauté the onions.
5. When onions are soft add garlic and sauté for another minute. Add sweet paprika and hot paprika/cayenne and sauté another minute. Add carrot, fennel, red peppers, caraway/fennel seeds, marjoram/oregano, bay leaves, lemon peel and a generous amount of black pepper and salt. Stir to combine. Return meat to pan.
6. Pour a glass of wine for yourself and empty rest of bottle into casserole. Add enough water to barely cover meat. Stir, cover and bring to a boil.
7. Reduce heat to low and simmer gently, partially covered, for two hours. Stir goulash occasionally to check not sticking and add water if gets too dry.
8. After two hours meat should be very tender. Remove lemon peel. If sauce is still too liquid, remove meat, increase heat and boil to reduce sauce until thick. Return meat to pot, taste and adjust seasoning if needed.
9. Stir in sour cream or serve it separately as a garnish. Serve goulash with spätzle, pasta, dumplings, polenta or boiled potatoes, garnished with parsley/dill/fennel fronds.

This recipe is an adaptation of one by Bruce Aidells, a formidable Bay Area sausage-maker and cookbook writer who knows more than a thing or two about meat. He came into school to demonstrate cutting up a pig, which we then cooked in various ways, trotters and all.

One of the changes I made to his recipe is the use of a whole bottle of wine rather than a combination of a little beer or wine and stock. This was purely for practical reasons – I’m more likely to have wine in the house than stock – and works beautifully. Hungarians are very proud of their wine-making tradition, so it also seems appropriate. I also added the fennel and lemon.

Many goulash recipes out there call for beef instead of pork, which I simply can’t understand – the porkiness seems essential to me. Like all good stews, this one tastes even better the next day, and freezes well.

Goulash notes:

- The name comes from ‘gulyás’, Hungarian for herdsman, and originally referred to their process of cooking tough cuts of meat in a cauldron suspended over an outdoor fire for hours and hours, then leaving the meat to dry in the sun for later use. This developed into a soupy stew, which was popularised in the 19th century when Hungarians highlighted aspects of their culture to assert their national identity and independence from the Austrian Habsburg dynasty. ‘Gulyás’ has always referred to something closer to a soup than a stew. This recipe is really for ‘pörkölt’ – a braise.
- Debates rage over what makes a goulash a true goulash. Beef or pork? Tomatoes or none? Beer, wine or stock? Red or green bell peppers? Sauerkraut, potatoes or neither? Sour cream? It seems to depend on

where exactly in Central or Eastern Europe your great-grandmother lived. I've given up trying to be authentic and have used what tastes good to me.

- Even paprika, Hungary's most famous export, isn't an uncontested ingredient in the traditional goulash. Peppers are of course not indigenous to the region. Paprika is believed to have come from the Americas via Portuguese traders, who sold it to the Turks, who introduced it across their empire around the 17th century. By 1900 it had become the dominant seasoning used in Hungarian kitchens. Today, Hungary produces around 10,000 tonnes of the stuff each year (made from a staggering 60,000 tonnes of fresh peppers), and exports over half of it. It's sold in at least 8 different varieties, ranging from sweet and mild (bright red in colour) to super-hot (paler, and closer to brownish orange than red).

Sources:

Real Flavours, Glynn Christian, 2005

European Union Food and Environmental Standards: A Polanyian Self-Protection of Society?, Zsuzsa Gille, University of Illinois, 2004 or later

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