

steak and ale pie

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Steak and Ale Pie

Slow-braised beef in a dark gravy under a pastry lid. It is British pub cooking and the technique is really two separate exercises: a braise that takes three hours, and a pastry that takes twenty minutes. The braise can and should be made the day before.

What makes it work

- **Brown the meat properly, in batches, in a dry-ish pan.** Crowding steams it grey, and grey beef

makes grey gravy. This is where the colour and half the flavour come from.

- **A dark ale, not a bitter one.** Stout or a brown ale. Hoppy beer turns bitter over a three-hour braise and there is no fixing it.
- **The braise must be cold before it goes under pastry**, as with [chicken pot pie](#).
- **Reduce the gravy hard.** It should be thick enough to hold a spoon upright when cold. A loose gravy boils up and lifts the lid off.
- **Shortcrust below, puff above** is the traditional compromise: shortcrust survives contact with gravy, puff makes a better lid. A puff-only lid on a pie dish is the pub standard.
- **Beef shin, chuck or brisket.** Collagen-rich cuts. Anything lean turns to string over three hours.

Ingredients

One 23 cm pie dish. Serves 6.

- 375 g puff pastry for the lid, or a batch of [all-butter pie crust](#)
- 1 kg beef shin or chuck, in 4 cm cubes
- 3 tbsp beef dripping or [olive oil](#)
- 2 onions, sliced
- 2 [carrots](#), thickly sliced
- 250 g mushrooms, halved
- 3 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 500 ml dark ale or stout
- 400 ml beef stock
- 2 tbsp tomato purée
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 2 bay leaves, 3 thyme sprigs
- salt, plenty of black pepper
- 1 [egg](#), beaten, to glaze

Method

Heat the oven to **150 °C / 300 °F**.

Dry the beef and season it. Brown it hard in the dripping, in three batches, setting each aside. Do not rush this.

In the same pot cook the onions and carrots ten minutes, then the mushrooms until their water has gone.

Stir in the flour, cook two minutes, then add the ale and scrape the base clean. Add the stock, tomato purée, Worcestershire sauce, herbs and the beef with its juices.

Bring to a simmer, cover, and braise in the oven **2½ to 3 hours**, until the beef pulls apart with a spoon.

Lift the lid and reduce on the hob until the gravy is thick. Cool completely — overnight is best.

Heat the oven to **200 °C / 400 °F**. Fill the dish, lay the pastry over, seal to the rim, crimp, cut two vents, and glaze.

Bake **30–35 minutes**, until the pastry is deep gold and risen.

Notes

- **A pie funnel** in the centre holds the lid up and vents steam. It is not decorative.
- Steak and kidney is the older version: replace 250 g of the beef with ox kidney, trimmed and soaked in milk for an hour.
- **The braise keeps four days refrigerated** and freezes for three months, which makes this a twenty-minute dinner on a second night.

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