

# **STEW!**



**GENEVIEVE TAYLOR**

**100 SPLENDIDLY  
SIMPLE RECIPES**

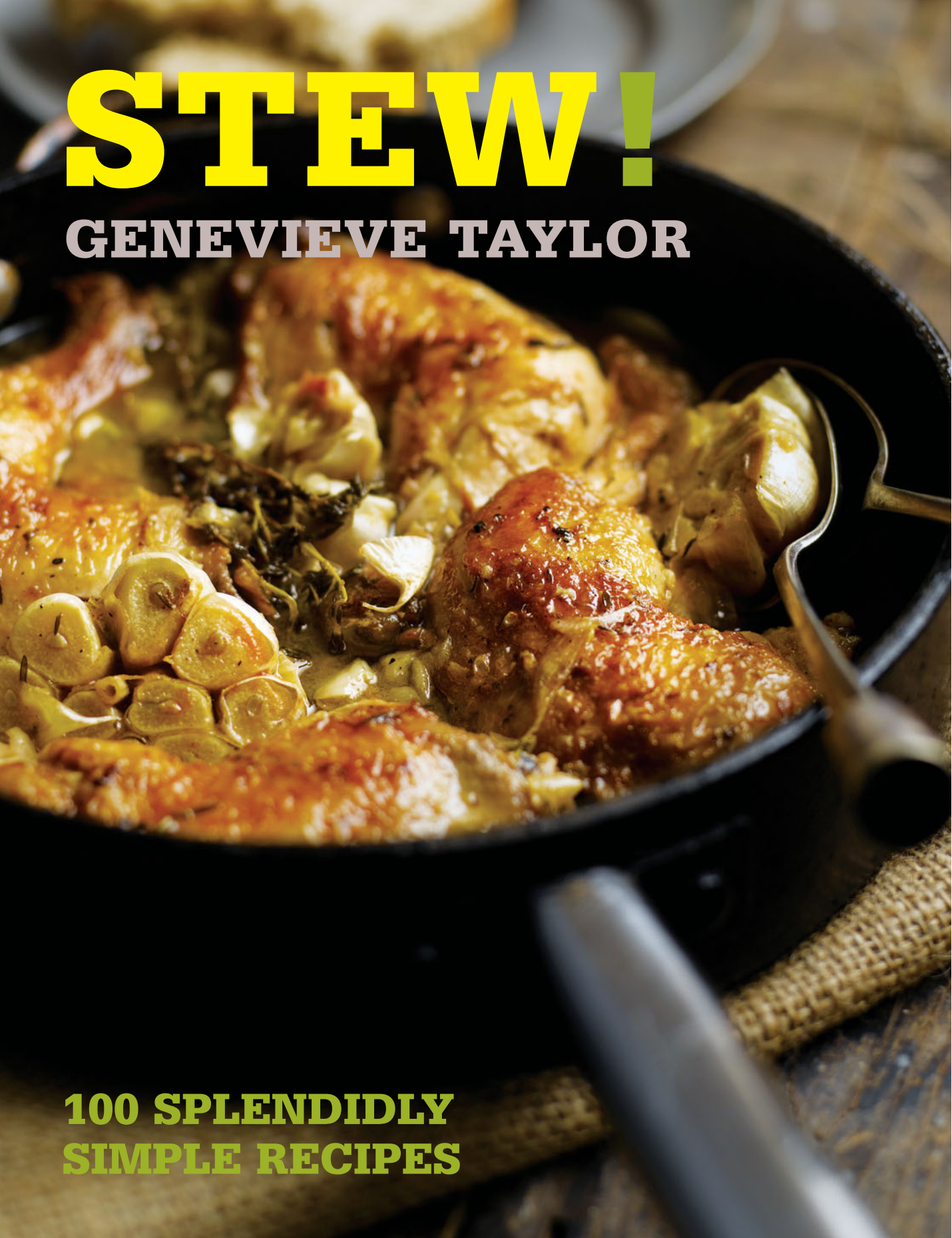
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### **A note about the text**

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### **Thanks**

Writing *Stew!* has been a total pleasure  
and I have enjoyed it immensely.  
I would like to say a huge thank you  
to everyone at Absolute Press for  
honouring me with the job of creating  
all these lovely dishes. Thank you to  
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me to deliver and to Matt Inwood for  
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of encouragement throughout.

Thanks are also due to Mike Cooper  
for his beautiful photographs.  
Between us we tried to create food  
that looks as good as it tastes, and it  
is always a pleasure to work with such  
a creative yet refreshingly faff-free  
photographer.

This book is for my family. A huge  
thank you to Rob, my gorgeous  
husband who manages to stay  
delicious despite being ridiculously  
well fed during the making of this  
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I can say. And finally a special thanks  
to my amazing Mum who let me boss  
my way into her kitchen from a very  
young age. It all started with the  
chocolate crispy cakes and the  
passion for cooking has kept on  
growing ever since.



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**Stews, casseroles, braises, hotpots... these are all terms for essentially the same thing – the age-old method of cooking meat and vegetables gently in some sort of liquid. *Gently* is the key word here. None of the recipes in this book are what you'd call fast food and none are cooked over a high temperature or in a hot oven.**

Cooking at such languorous speed is what gives you the most amazing flavours and textures. What I love most about stewing is that you take just a handful of ingredients and time and patience seem to perform a magic trick in the pot when you are not looking. This is easy-peasy cooking at its most delicious. I admit, for some of the more exotic and fragrant stews the ingredient list is a little longer but the principles are the same. You simply assemble everything in the right order and let the low heat do the work whilst you get on with something else.

The other thing I love about stews is their truly universal appeal. When I told my friends and family I was writing this book their answer was invariably the same 'I absolutely love stews, do you need any help with tasting?'

I hope this book provides you with classic versions of old favourites but also that it opens your eyes to a wealth of new possibilities from all around the world.

**Happy stewing!**

**Genevieve Taylor**  
**Bristol, November 2010**

# BUY

In an ideal world we would all shop at our local butchers, fishmongers and greengrocers on a daily basis to source local, seasonal produce. But, as the mum of two young children, I know from personal experience that the supermarket often wins hands down on convenience. Therefore it was important to me that the majority of the ingredients in this book can be sourced in a one-stop-shop. However, I do have a great butcher and fishmonger that I use regularly, particularly to help to source the slightly more unusual ingredients. Quite often I will stock up on these harder to find things at the butchers or fishmongers and store them in the freezer until I want to use them. That way I can make something delicious with just a quick trip to the supermarket for a few last minute extras.

## Choosing meat

The meat best suited for stewing comes from the more economical cuts, making this way of cooking eminently practical and sensible in cash-strapped times. But that doesn't make for cheap and bland eating. Meat for stewing tends to come from the harder working parts of the animal, like the muscles of the legs and neck, and with the proper treatment these parts yield a far superior taste than the pricier cuts.

There is one piece of advice I hope you will take seriously to heart as it does make a big difference. And that is to always try to buy your meat as a whole piece and cut it up yourself. Meat that is pre-diced potentially comes from all parts of the animal, and for that matter from all different animals. Each individual piece will therefore have different cooking requirements which will be impossible to meet within one pot. If you use a whole piece and prepare it yourself you know you are using the same cut of meat from the same beast and the cubes or slices will cook evenly to give the best results. With that in mind, below is a quick summary of the cuts to look out for when stewing:

**Beef:** shin, chuck steak, stewing steak, braising steak, skirt and oxtail

**Pork:** shoulder steaks, leg steaks and belly pork

**Lamb:** neck fillet, boned shoulder, shin and shank

**Venison:** shoulder, leg and flank

**Chicken and feathered game:** either a whole bird jointed, or legs or thighs

## Choosing fish

Fish stews are another thing – they tend to be more uneconomical than the meat or vegetable varieties, and some can end up being really pricy! I think of fish stews as being a special treat to serve occasionally rather than as a regular family meal. When buying fish, freshness is the key. The eyes and skin should be shiny and bright, and the aroma should be of salty sea rather than overpoweringly fishy.

Often with fish stews the best policy is to choose the fish that look best at the fishmongers on the day you visit rather than to go with a fixed idea of the type of fish you need. Although for some recipes – the smoked fish chowder, for example – you will be asked to buy a specific thing. With smoked fish I tend to go for the undyed variety as I find the dyed versions a little lurid – but the choice is entirely yours.

Fish, in general, freezes well so if there is a special offer on a certain variety it is often a good idea to buy in bulk and freeze in recipe-sized quantities.



# MEAT COOKBOOK

For me, the cooking of a stew is done in two distinct, but equally important, halves. Firstly, you apply a high heat to sear, caramelise and colour and ultimately to add flavour to the dish. Then you add the liquid – the stock, the wine, the water and reduce the heat to a minimum. It is during this long period of slow cooking that the complex flavours develop and grow.

## **Meat**

When preparing meat, don't be too vigilant about removing all traces of fat and sinew. These elements, whilst a little unsightly when raw, will add bags of flavour to the dish when they break down during the long, slow cooking. The fat also adds body and viscosity to the final sauce, making it taste rich, smooth and unctuous. There is nothing worse than a watery, thin, flavourless stew. And where there is little natural fat, as in some of the vegetarian or fish stews, you will often be asked to add it, usually in the form of generously drizzled extra virgin olive oil at the end. I really feel we shouldn't be afraid of oils and fats when natural and unprocessed, they often taste great. And, used in moderation, they are a powerful tool in the canny cook's box of tricks.

In most of these recipes the meat is seared first. This is a very important step and not to be rushed. The golden rules are to sear in batches, not to overcrowd the pan and also not to stir too often. Heat the oil until its smoking, throw in the meat a few pieces at a time and leave it alone to colour and sear before turning it over. You are looking to brown, even slightly burn, the outside of the meat and that just won't happen if you titivate the pan's contents too frequently!

## **Fish**

Fish in stews is treated in exactly the opposite way as meat. It is most often added at the last minute, so it gently poaches in the intensely flavoured liquor around it. For these stews it is the base, often of onions or other vegetables, that takes the time to cook, whilst the fish just takes a matter of minutes at the end. This means that fish stews in general are a lot quicker to prepare than meat ones.

## **Vegetables**

A special mention must be made here for the vegetables in your stews. There is not a single recipe in this book, even the most carnivorous, that doesn't have at least one vegetable, if not more, at its heart. The one that features most often is the truly humble onion. It lends a wealth of characteristics: sweetness, mild astringency and deep savoury notes and is invaluable to slow cooking. Shallots and leeks offer similar properties. Whilst you will often be called to allow your onions to colour, never caramelise leeks or garlic as they will turn bitter if allowed to colour. The exception to this rule, and of course there are always exceptions in cooking as in life, is in south-east Asian cooking where they do colour their garlic and with great effect. Generally, though, it benefits from being left pale and interesting.

## **Pulses and beans**

I adore pulses and beans and use them at every available opportunity. What's not to like? They are really cheap, very healthy and, cooked in the right way, incredibly tasty. You'll notice that most of the beans and pulses I specify are raw, dried ones. This is because the long, slow cooking in stock means the taste and texture becomes quite exquisite. But by all means substitute ready-cooked tins if that is what you have to hand. You will need to reduce the cooking time and the quantities of liquid accordingly. But I would urge you to use dried ones if you can, the result will be worth it.

# PREPARE

## **Make ahead**

All meat stews genuinely benefit from being made the day before they are eaten, which makes them perfect for prepare-ahead dinners. The flavours mature and develop, making them even more delicious when reheated. There is also the added bonus of being able to skim excess fat off a cold stew before heating it up allowing you to create a healthier dish.

## **Freeze**

Meat stews freeze well and because of the length of time it takes to cook a good meat stew it makes sense in my mind to do an extra batch for the freezer. That way you have the benefit of a little slow-cooked comfort on those week nights when you just can't face the slow cooking but are in desperate need of the comfort.

Stews with pulses and beans also freeze excellently and there is something truly wonderful about finding a bag of deliciously warming beans in the freezer for lunch on a cold winter's day. Fish stews really don't reheat or freeze well, so they are best saved for the days when you have time to both prepare and eat them.

And one really important factor when freezing stews, and I know it sounds dull, but I would urge you to label it properly! I speak from a wealth of personal experience. I have lost count of the number of times I have put a bag or box in the freezer convinced I will remember what it is only to unearth it a couple of months later with no clue to its contents. I recently defrosted a tub of almond frangipane leftover from a Bakewell tart for my children's tea thinking it was mashed potato – enough said!

I tend to freeze food in labelled bags as I find I can pack them neatly into my freezer, but labelled plastic containers are good too. You can freeze stews as individual portions, (if you have a little leftover, for example), or as a complete family-sized meal. In both cases I would not freeze them for longer than 3 months in a deep freeze as the flavour may start to deteriorate after time – and so a date on your bag or box is essential.

When thawing food it is best to leave it overnight in the fridge to thaw gently and thoroughly. If you don't have time to do that then a few hours defrosting at room temperature is perfectly acceptable providing you check it has thawed all the way through before you begin reheating. As an emergency I would also use a microwave to thaw food on the defrost setting, but again you need to ensure it has properly defrosted before you begin to reheat it.

## **And reheat...**

The rules for gentle cooking that you carefully followed when making your stew must also be applied with the same vigilance when reheating. There is no point spending two or three hours cooking the dish only to reheat it for five minutes on high in the microwave. All the hard work of relaxing the meat fibres over a long period of time will be totally and utterly destroyed by the unforgiving blast of the microwaves. You will end up with tough and shrunken pieces of rubbery meat, not the soft and yielding meat you started out with. Not that there is anything intrinsically wrong with reheating in a microwave. Just do it with patience. Use 50–60% of the power rather than 100% and allow it to do its job more slowly. A family-sized dish of stew will take around 15 minutes to reheat on medium power, and stir every now and then to ensure it is reheating evenly. Better still that you reheat your stew in a pan over a very low heat, or in a warm (160°C) oven. It will take longer but you will be well rewarded for lack of haste. It is hard to be specific about reheating times as there are too many factors to take into consideration – for example, the temperature of the food when you start to reheat, whether it was fridge-cold or at room temperature, the depth of the pan or bowl you are reheating it in. All are factors that will change the amount of time the stew takes to reheat. So the best advice I can give is to keep stirring and checking the stew until you are sure it is piping hot throughout. The way I tell if food is really piping hot is to give it a good stir with a metal spoon then touch the tip of the spoon to your lip. If you can only hold it there for a mere second or two it is hot enough to eat safely.

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# **TRADITIONAL AND HEARTY**

**Some dishes are just classics – the ones that have been around for ever and are passed down from generation to generation, with little tweaks and adjustments made here and there. And some stews are utterly nostalgic and the mere smell of them will remind you of home and happiness. These really traditional, hearty recipes are the ones we find ourselves turning to time and time again, and that is the reason you find them here, right at the front of this book.**

# Beef stew with herby dumplings

**When you say stew, this is probably the dish most people they will think of – a proper old-fashioned meat stew with tasty dumplings. Nothing fancy, nothing mucked about with, just good, honest, delicious food to serve to your family. This is great served simply with some buttered green vegetables – savoy cabbage or spring greens would be perfect.**

**Serves 4–6 | Takes 15–20 minutes to make, 2½ hours to cook**

**900g beef shin, cut into 3cm cubes**  
**2–3 tbsp vegetable oil**  
**2 large onions, chopped**  
**2 large carrots, cut into large chunks**  
**1 heaped tbsp flour**  
**500ml beef stock**  
**1 bay leaf**  
**1 tsp dried thyme**  
**2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce**  
**1 level tbsp Marmite**  
**salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**For the dumplings**  
**200g self-raising flour**  
**100g vegetable suet**  
**2 tsp dried mixed herbs**

Preheat the oven to 160°C/gas 3.

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large, flameproof casserole dish until it is smoking hot. Fry the beef, a few pieces at a time, to a really rich dark colour. As each piece of beef is done remove it with a slotted spoon, to a plate and continue until the beef is browned.

Add a little more oil if necessary and fry the onions and carrots until they begin to soften and colour a little at the edges. Return the meat to the pan and add the flour, stirring it thoroughly to soak up the juices.

Pour in the stock, add the bay leaf, thyme, Worcestershire sauce and Marmite and bring everything slowly up to simmering point. Season well and cover with a lid or tight-fitting piece of foil. Transfer to the oven and cook for 2 hours or so by which time the meat should be really soft.

Mix all the dumpling ingredients together in a bowl and season well. Add just enough cold water to form a stiff but elastic dough. Divide the dough into 8–10 even pieces and roll into balls. Set aside on a plate.

When the stew is ready, remove from the oven and gently float the dumplings on the surface. Return the casserole dish to the oven, uncovered, and cook for around 20–25 minutes by which time the dumplings should be crisp on the surface and soft and fluffy inside.

Serve immediately while still bubbling hot.

**Freeze the stew, but not the dumplings, for up to 3 months. Defrost in the fridge overnight before reheating thoroughly in the oven at 180°C/gas 4. Make the dumplings as in the method above and add when the stew is bubbling hot, then proceed as per the recipe above.**





## Coq au vin

**This lovely French classic has stood the test of time with no surprise – it's rich, delicious and truly simple to make. I like to serve this with crusty French bread.**

**Serves 4–6 | Takes 15 minutes to make, 1½ hours to cook**

**1 tbsp olive oil**  
**1 x 1.8–2kg chicken, jointed into 6 pieces**  
**200g smoked streaky bacon, diced**  
**12 shallots, peeled and left whole**  
**250g chestnut mushrooms, quartered**  
**2 cloves garlic, crushed**  
**2 bay leaves**  
**2 sprigs of fresh thyme**  
**1 x 750ml bottle red wine**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**1 tbsp plain flour**  
**1 tbsp softened butter**  
**handful of fresh flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped, to garnish**  
**crusty french bread, to serve**

Heat the oil in a deep, heavy-based frying pan (with a lid) that will fit the chicken in a single layer. Fry the chicken pieces on both sides until they are nicely golden. You may need to do this in a couple of batches. Once the chicken has browned remove it to a plate and set aside. Add the diced bacon and shallots to the pan and fry until they begin to get a little colour, then add the garlic and fry for a further minute.

Return the chicken to the pan, along with the mushrooms and herbs and season with a little salt and freshly ground black pepper. Pour over the wine and bring slowly up to a gentle simmer. Cover and cook very gently for about 1½ hours or until the chicken is tender and beginning to fall off the bone.

Combine the flour and butter to form a smooth paste (a *beurre manié*).

Carefully remove the chicken to a plate and set aside whilst you thicken the sauce. Add the *beurre manié* to the pan and stir constantly until it melts. Turn up the heat to a rapid boil and cook for 5 minutes. Reduce the temperature and simmer steadily until the sauce is glossy and thick enough to coat the chicken.

Serve the chicken with the sauce poured over and a generous scattering of flat-leaf parsley. A great mound of buttery mashed potato would be the perfect accompaniment.

**Freeze for up to 3 months. Defrost overnight in the fridge before reheating thoroughly.**

# BEF

## Boeuf bourguignon

**This '60s and '70s dinner party classic is making a well deserved comeback! Marinating the beef overnight helps to give it an extra intense flavour, but, if you are really short of time, skip this step, or just leave it to marinate for as long as possible. This is delicious served with mashed root vegetables – I like a combination of parsnip and swede mashed with plenty of butter. But celeriac or mashed carrot would be great too.**

**Serves 4–6 | Takes 20 minutes to make, plus marinating 2½ hours to cook**

**1kg beef skirt, cut into 3–4cm cubes**  
**1 x 750ml bottle red wine**  
**3 cloves garlic, crushed**  
**3 sprigs of fresh thyme**  
**2 tbsp olive oil**  
**10 shallots, peeled and left whole**  
**500g chestnut mushrooms, quartered**  
**200g smoked pancetta, cubed**  
**1 heaped tbsp plain flour**  
**salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**mashed root vegetables, to serve**

In a large non-metallic bowl, mix the beef with the red wine, garlic, thyme and a seasoning of salt and freshly ground black pepper. Leave to marinate in the fridge for as long as possible, overnight if you have time.

When you are ready to begin cooking the bourguignon, preheat the oven to 160°C/gas 3.

Remove the beef from the marinade, using a slotted spoon, reserving the marinade. Pat the beef dry on kitchen paper. Heat the oil in a large, flameproof casserole until smoking hot. Fry the beef, a few pieces at a time, until each piece gets a wonderful golden crust on the outside, transfer each piece to a plate as it is browned.

Turn the heat down a little and fry the shallots with the mushrooms and pancetta until they are beginning to soften and colour slightly. Sprinkle the flour into the casserole and return the beef to the pan along with the reserved marinade. Give everything a really good stir and bring up to a gentle simmer.

Cover with a lid and cook in the oven for 2½ hours, after which time the beef should fall apart when teased lightly with a fork. If the sauce is looking a little thin towards the end of cooking time, remove the lid to allow it to thicken slowly. If you have removed the lid you will need to stir it a few times to ensure the beef gets evenly cooked.

Taste to check the seasoning and serve piping hot with plenty of mashed vegetables.

**Freeze for up to 3 months. Defrost overnight in the fridge before reheating thoroughly.**



