

# MEAT LOAF with BOURBON SAUCE

Serves 8 to 10.

By Dennis W. Viau; modified from a restaurant recipe.

This recipe started out good enough, but I knew I could make it better. I ramped it up a little, with caramelized onions, nutmeg, and a bourbon reduction sauce. The end result exceeded expectations. For those who hate meat loaf: You might just love one—this one.



## Ingredients:

2 tablespoons pure olive oil for frying

1 large onion; diced

2 stalks celery; diced

3 green onions; diced

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

3 tablespoons chopped fresh flat leaf (Italian) parsley

1½ pounds (680g) ground beef

1½ pounds (680g) ground pork

If you can find ground veal, you can use 1 pound (454g) each of the three meats.

3 cloves garlic; minced or crushed with a garlic press

3 large eggs

1⅓ cups (4 oz./113g) panko or regular bread crumbs

⅔ cup (158ml) milk or half-and-half

2 teaspoons salt

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

2 cups (475ml) stock (chicken or beef), preferably homemade

¼ to ⅓ cup (60 to 80ml) bourbon

6 cloves garlic; whole and peeled

3 to 4 tablespoons butter

## Directions:

Heat the oil in a sauté pan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until caramelized, regularly reducing the heat as the onions cook down. This should take about 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and let cool.

Add the diced celery to the sauté pan and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Let cool.

Finely chop the green onions, thyme, and parsley. Set aside about a teaspoon of each for use in the sauce.

Combine the meats, onion, celery, remaining portions each of the green onion, thyme, and parsley. Add the minced garlic, eggs, and panko with the milk or half-and-half. Season with the salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Mix well with your hands. As the bread crumbs absorb moisture the mixture will stiffen.

Heat your oven to 375°F (190°C). Shape the meat mixture into a loaf and place in an 10x13¾x2¼-inch (25x35x8cm) or equivalent baking pan. A small rack covered with foil can be placed beneath the meat loaf to raise it about any fat that might collect in the bottom of the pan.

Wrap the 6 whole cloves of garlic in baking parchment paper. Fold and staple to make a packet.

Bake the meat loaf 70 to 80 minutes, or to an internal temperature of 150 to 155°F (66 to 68°C). Place the garlic packet in the oven with the meat loaf, but remove after 30 minutes and set aside.

While the loaf is roasting, make the reduction sauce by heating the stock in a sauté pan until it comes to a boil. Mash the roasted garlic and add with the bourbon and butter. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until the liquid is reduced by more than half and has slightly thickened. Finish the sauce by adding the reserved green onion, parsley, and thyme you set aside earlier.

Remove the meat loaf from the oven, tent with foil, and let rest 10 minutes. Slice and plate, garnishing with the reduction sauce. Can be served with mashed potatoes, also garnished with the reduction sauce, and any green vegetable.

## STEP-BY-STEP

1



This is my *mise en place*. I am using panko rather than regular bread crumbs. You can use either in this recipe. Panko is made with only the white of the bread. Most other bread crumbs also use the crust. The ice in the upper left is frozen homemade chicken stock. (The salt cellar, something new in my kitchen, was a gift from a friend.)

2



Dice the onion rather fine.

**3**

The original recipe called for cooking the onions until they are tender, about 5 minutes. I think the flavor of caramelized onions works well with beef; so for this recipe I chose to cook them for 20 to 25 minutes until they are a rich golden brown (see below). Caramelizing onions concentrates the sugar in them, adding a more complex flavor to your recipe.

**4**

While the onions are cooking, dice the celery.



5



Mince the green onion and finely chop the leaves from the flat leaf parsley. Remove the leaves from the stalks of fresh thyme and discard the stalks. Lightly chop the thyme.

6



Returning to the onions: Here they are, a rich golden color. Transfer these to a bowl and let cool.

7



Place the celery in the sauté pan and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Then transfer to a bowl to cool.

8



The green onion, parsley, and thyme need to be divided. Place about a teaspoon of each in a separate bowl. These will be used to finish the reduction sauce later.

9



Combine all the meatloaf ingredients: Onion, celery, beef, pork, (veal, if you use it), the larger portion of the parsley, thyme, and green onions, minced garlic, eggs, panko, milk (or half-an-half), salt, pepper, and nutmeg.

10



Roll up the 6 cloves of garlic in parchment paper and then fold up the ends. I use a stapler to fasten the top. This little packet will go in the oven with the meat loaf and roast 30 to 40 minutes.



11



Heat the oven to 375°F (190°C).

Shape the meat mixture into a loaf and either place it in a baking pan or on a rack in the pan. Some people like to raise the loaf above any fat that collects in the bottom of the pan. If you use leaner meat, the loaf won't yield much fat. I covered a small rack with foil to help support the loaf. I also poked several holes in the foil to help the fat drain. My loaf did not yield much fat.

The loaf needs to bake to an internal temperature of about 150 to 155°F (66 to 68°C), 70 to 80 minutes.

12



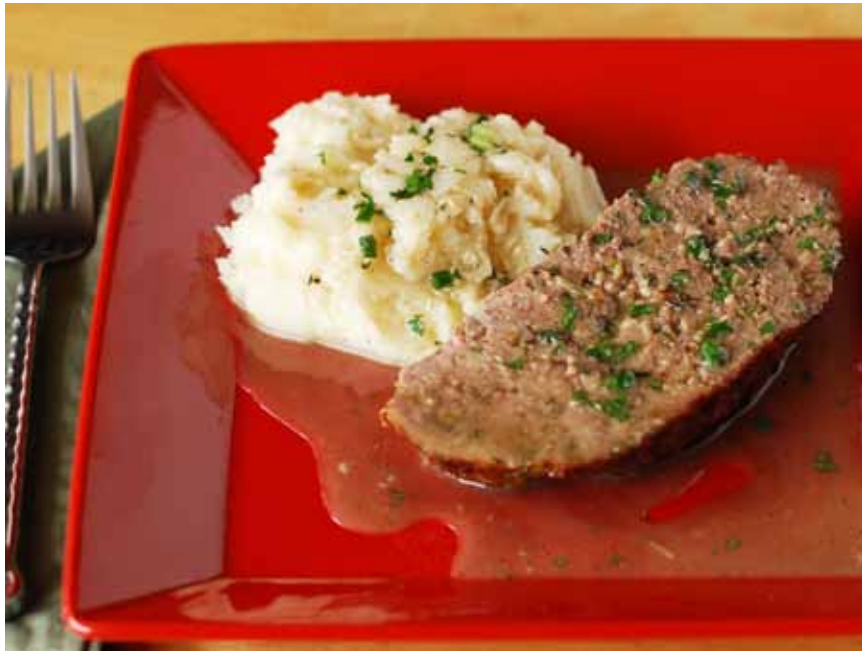
After the loaf has baked for 30 to 40 minutes, remove the garlic packet (use tongs; it's hot) and mash the roasted garlic. Then put the garlic in the sauté pan with the stock, butter, and bourbon. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer to reduce the volume by at least half. It should be only slightly thickened. Then finish the sauce by adding the reserved green onion, parsley, and thyme you set aside earlier. Remove from the heat and set aside. The sauce can be heated before serving the meat loaf.

13



Here is the meat loaf, fresh from the oven. (The original recipe called for a baking time of only 40 to 50 minutes. The internal temperature climbed to only a little above 90°F (32°C) in that time. That is why I prefer to always test with my instant-read digital thermometer when roasting meats.)

14



The flavor of this bourbon reduction sauce is so delicious, I chose to serve the meatloaf with mashed potatoes, as an excuse to use more of the sauce. Slice and plate the meat loaf and garnish with the heated sauce. Green vegetables, such as broccoli or green beans, would go well with the meat loaf, but place them in a separate dish.

## Conclusion

The flavor of this reduction sauce surprised me. When I added the bourbon (my own idea) and tasted the sauce, I began to think it was a bad idea. However, after the sauce reduced, the flavor had a rich, almost woody flavor, that complemented the meat loaf perfectly.