

# WELSH SHEPHERD'S PIE

Serves 6

By Dennis W. Viau; modified from a fan's (Michael) recipe.

Shepherd's pie isn't fancy food. This meat and potato pie supposedly originated out of a need to make economical use of the leftovers from the "Sunday roast." The original recipe used 2 pounds of potatoes and 1 pound of lamb. As you can appreciate, the predominant flavor was mashed potatoes. I changed the proportions and added fresh chopped vegetables to make this a more nutritious and appetizing meal. Think of it as comfort food.



## Ingredients:

2 pounds (900g) lean lamb, diced or ground (minced)  
1 medium onion  
3 stalks celery  
3 carrots  
4 cups (950ml) beef stock or broth (this recipe makes a lot of gravy)  
¼ teaspoon ground rosemary  
1½ pounds (680g) potatoes  
2 tablespoons butter  
¼ cup (60ml) milk  
About ⅓ to ½ cup (1⅓ to 2½ oz. / 47 to 70g) of cooked flour for thickening (see Step 10 below)  
Salt and pepper to taste

## Directions:

If using whole lamb meat, cut it into small dice, similar to the size of diced carrots, or grind it in a food processor or food grinder. Coarsely chop one carrot, one stalk of celery, and half the onion, reserving the rest of the vegetables for a later step. Place the meat and chopped vegetables in a deep roasting pan, add the stock, rosemary, and pepper (and salt if desired). Cover and bake in a 275°F (135°C) oven for two hours.

While the meat is cooking, peel and chop the potatoes. Boil until tender. Mash with the butter, milk, salt, and pepper. Cover and set aside.

If you don't have cooked flour, prepare it while the meat is cooking. Place about half a cup of all-purpose flour in a stainless steel skillet over medium heat. Whisk the flour as it cooks and changes color to a light golden hue. Remove from the heat and continue whisking while the pan cools (otherwise it will scorch on the bottom). Remove from the pan and set aside. You can store the unused portion of cooked flour in a jar in the cupboard for making gravy or roux.

When the meat has cooked 2 hours, strain through a colander or strainer to capture the stock. Pour half the stock in a skillet over medium heat. Use the other half to make a mixture of cooked flour and stock, working in small portions, mixing the flour in thoroughly to prevent lumping. Add the flour-stock mixture to the skillet, whisking constantly, and bring the gravy to a boil to thicken. Continue with the stock and flour until you get a light gravy, adjusting the flour as necessary. The amount of flour varies with the amount it is cooked. The more it is cooked, the less liquid it will thicken.

Pick through the cooked meat to remove the cooked vegetables and discard. If they were coarsely chopped in large pieces they should be easy to pick out. Dice the remaining carrots, celery, and onion. Mix with the meat and place in the bottom of a casserole dish. Stir in about ½ cup (120ml) of gravy and

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even the top. Cover with a layer of mashed potatoes. You can decorate the top with a fork or fluff it to make small peaks. Reserve the remaining gravy for serving at the table.

Bake the Shepherd's Pie in a 400°F (205°C) oven 30 to 45 minutes until the potatoes are lightly browned.

Serve with gravy on the side.

## STEP-BY-STEP

1



Although shepherd's pie originally came from a need to economically use the leftovers from the traditional "Sunday roast," I am using fresh ingredients. The jar near the pepper mill contains my cooked flour. I always have cooked flour in my cupboard because it is useful for making roux and for thickening liquids. Where many home cooks go wrong is that they make gravy using raw flour, which gives the gravy an uncooked flavor. Use cooked flour instead. The beef stock is not homemade. The lamb is cubed in a small dice. This meat was soft frozen, making it easier to dice.

2



Coarse chop on carrot, one stalk of celery, and half an onion so that they'll be easier to pick out after the meat has cooked. These vegetables will be "cooked out" after two hours in the oven. Fresh vegetables will improve the flavor and appearance of the final pie.

3



Add the stock, rosemary, fresh ground pepper and give the mixture a stir. I don't add salt because there is salt in the beef stock. Cover and slow cook in a 275°F (135°C) oven for two hours.

4



Place a sieve or strainer over a large bowl or saucepan. You'll be capturing more than 4 cups of liquid. So use a large catch container. I'm using the bottom of an old pressure cooker than I now use as a large saucepan.



5



Pour the meat mixture into the strainer and let it drain. Either wait until the meat is cool enough to handle or use chop sticks to remove the large chunks of cooked vegetables. These vegetables have served their purpose—flavoring the stock—so they can be discarded. Fresh vegetables will make a better pie.

6



Peel and cut up the potatoes. Boil until tender, about 10 to 15 minutes. Drain. (You can save the potato water for use in bread making. I do.)

7



Mash the potatoes. If you work potatoes too much they become gummy. For light and fluffy mashed potatoes, work them as little as necessary. I prefer to use a potato ricer rather than a masher.

8



I use a rubber spatula to mix in the milk, butter, salt, and pepper, working in a turn-and-fold method that works the potatoes gently. They stay fluffy.



Dice the remaining two carrots and two stalks of celery. Dice about half the remaining onion. (Come to think of it, I could have put  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the onion in the pot with the lamb when I cooked it.)

10



You will end up with more than 4 cups of stock after cooking the lamb. This makes a lot of gravy. I like having extra gravy at the table because some people love to pour gravy over their potatoes. Serve this dish with biscuits and you'll have gravy for them too. I work with a small bowl, mixing portions of stock and cooked flour, whisking it together until smooth, then whisking the mixture into the stock that's in the skillet. The stock will need to boil for thickening. For these 4+ cups of stock I ended up using 18 level teaspoons of cooked flour to thicken the gravy. The amount can vary because the more you cook the flour in advance, the less moisture it will absorb. See the Note at the end.



11



Here is my thickened gravy after using 18 level teaspoons of cooked flour. Don't worry about the film on top, caused by the fat. This can go into the pie. For gravy to be placed on the table, skim off this film.

12



Mix the meat and chopped vegetables in a baking dish. Add some gravy to moisten it, but don't use too much. About half a cup (250ml) should be enough. You don't want these ingredients swimming in gravy (see below).

**13**

Spoon the mashed potatoes on top and gently press them into a flat layer. Don't press down too hard because this will push the meat mixture up.

**14**

Use a large fork, such as a salad fork, to decorate the top surface. Or you can gently fluff the potatoes into small peaks. This will look good when browned in the oven. Bake in a 400°F (205°C) oven for 30 to 45 minutes to heat thoroughly and to brown the potatoes a little.



15



Here is what happens when you use too much gravy. The gravy bubbles up, making a mess of your pie, your dish, and your oven.

## Conclusion

Originating out of a need to make use of leftovers, Shepherd's Pie isn't a fancy dish, but made with a little extra attention it can be turned into a meal that you can be proud to serve to family and friends. I made this for friends and they asked for seconds—always a good sign.

There is some dispute surrounding the name. The argument goes like this: Shepherd's pie is made with lamb not beef because shepherds herd sheep, not cattle. Shepherd's pie made with beef is cottage pie, not shepherd's pie. Although this distinction does exist, it came into usage only recently. Go back a few decades and both shepherd's pie and cottage pie could be made with either meat.

## Note

### How to Cook Flour in Advance:

Place a skillet over medium-high heat and pour in about half a cup of dry all-purpose flour. Bread flour has less thickening power. Cake flour has more. There should be no fat or liquid in the skillet.

Whisk constantly as the flour cooks. After a few minutes it should be cooked. Before it starts to change color, remove the pan from the heat and continue whisking for several minutes as the bottom of the pan cools (otherwise the hot bottom will scorch the flour). This makes a light cooked flour that can be used for making a white roux or for thickening chicken gravy.

For a darker cooked flour, continue cooking over the heat, whisking constantly and watching it change color. You can cook it as dark as you like. A light golden color can be used to make a blond roux. Darker flour can be used for brown roux (used for making espagnole sauce or brown sauce). Be aware that the more you brown the flour, the less it will thicken a sauce.

One precaution: Watch your smoke detectors. Browning flour, especially as you work toward a darker color, generates a lot of smoke. Run your fans.