

Get Stoked

Wood cookstoves
feed the belly and warm the soul

By MARIALISA CALTA

Photographed by
JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR

FOR MANY WOOD COOKSTOVE OWNERS, the chill of fall means triage: dispersing the piles of junk mail, broken crockery, mystery keys and winter squash that have somehow accumulated on the stovetop during the spring and summer. Once fired up, the stove warms the kitchen and serves as an auxiliary burner to keep soups and stews bubbling, rolls and bread warming.

But some owners actually dare to cook on their stoves. They know its quirks and ticks and can tell by its wood crackles and smells when the oven is hot enough for bread and whether the pot roast is in danger of scorching.

Lucy Marvin is one of these. As a girl, growing up in a French-speaking household in the northern Vermont town of Troy, Marvin remembers her mother cooking rhubarb and applesauce on the old Belanger cookstove kept in the shed. When Lucy and her husband, David, well-known sugarmakers who own Butternut Mountain Farm in Morrisville, moved to their Hyde Park home more than a dozen years ago, it was the imposing black Crawford stove in the kitchen that sealed the deal. While the previous owners had used it as a big ash-tray, Lucy cooked everything from the thin, fruit-filled crepes of her childhood to complete Thanksgiving dinners.

For beginner cookstove cooks, Lucy recommends soups and stews. "Just throw some onions and tomatoes and carrots into a pot and let it cook," she says. On the other hand, she warns, "baking can be tricky. Keeping the temperature at a steady heat takes practice."

Wood cookstoves can offer an antidote to the hectic pace of modern life. Every day can seem like a small victory, every meal like a little feast. Ice? Snow? Wind-chill factor? Cook up something warm and wonderful, and bring it on. ❁

PORK STEW

This recipe started its life as a recipe from television cooking star Rachael Ray. Lucy Marvin added the turnips and some of her family's maple syrup, and modified it for cooking on the top of her wood cookstove.

For the stew:

- 2½ pounds pork (tenderloin or roast), trimmed of fat (silver skin removed, if using tenderloin) and cut into 2-inch cubes
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Flour
- 5 Tablespoons canola or other vegetable oil
- 1 large onion, peeled and chopped
- 3 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 4 stalks celery, trimmed and chopped
- 1 pound turnips or rutabaga, peeled and chopped
- 1¼ cups fresh apple cider
- 2 to 3 Tablespoons maple syrup
- 1 bay leaf
- 4 sprigs thyme, or about ¾ teaspoon dried thyme
- Large pinch ground allspice
- ½ cup dried sweetened cranberries or dried cherries
- 2 to 4 cups chicken stock (depending on how thick you like your stew)
- 2 tart apples, peeled, cored and cut into 2-inch dice

For serving:

- Crusty French or Italian bread, or mashed potatoes
- Cider vinegar, as needed (optional)

Place the pork in a bowl and sprinkle liberally with salt and pepper. Toss with the flour to coat.

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot, heat 3 Tablespoons of the oil. Working in batches if necessary, brown the pork on all sides. Remove from the pan and return to the bowl. Add the remaining 2 Tablespoons oil to the pan, allow it to heat and toss in the onion, carrots, celery and turnip (or rutabaga). Cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables just begin to tenderize, about 5 minutes. Remove from the pan and add to the pork.

Deglaze the pot by adding the cider, cooking and scraping the browned bits from the bottom. Allow the cider to boil and reduce and thicken a bit. Add 2 Tablespoons of the maple syrup, the bay leaf, thyme, allspice, cranberries and 2 cups of chicken stock. Return the vegetables and pork to the pot, along with any accumulated juices. Cover, leaving a small opening for steam to escape, and set at a simmer for an hour or so. Add more stock as needed. (You can make the stew a day ahead up to this point. Cool, cover and refrigerate.)

Skim off any fat from the top of the stew. Taste and add the remaining 1 Tablespoon of maple syrup, if desired. Toss in the apple pieces and stir, and simmer for about 20 minutes. The apples should still be a bit firm when you serve the stew. Retrieve and discard the bay leaf and thyme sprigs (if using).

In the bottom of a bowl, place a slice of bread or a scoop of mashed potatoes, and spoon the stew over all. Finish each bowl with a teaspoon or so of cider vinegar, if desired, to brighten the flavors.

Yield: 6 to 8 servings





BLACK AND BLUEBERRY GRUNT

A traditional New England dessert, made for the woodstove.

For the dumplings:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 Tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 2 Tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- ½ cup buttermilk, plus more as needed

For berries:

- 1 generous pint frozen blueberries
- 1 generous pint frozen blackberries
- ½ cup sugar
- Zest of 1 orange
- ¼ cup freshly squeezed orange juice
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Pinch ground cinnamon
- Pinch freshly ground black pepper (optional)
- 1 Tablespoon cinnamon sugar (optional)

For serving:

- Heavy cream, whipped cream or vanilla ice cream

Prepare the dumplings: In a mixing bowl, stir together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Stir in melted butter. Add enough of the buttermilk to form a soft, sticky dough that is slightly wetter than biscuit dough.

Prepare the berries: In a seasoned cast-iron skillet or other heavy-bottomed pan, place the berries, sugar, orange zest, juices, cinnamon and pepper (if using). Toss gently to combine.

Cover the skillet with lid, or sheet of foil topped with a cookie sheet, and bring to a boil. Lower heat to a steady simmer, uncover, and spoon the dough over the fruit, forming small dumplings with a soup spoon. Sprinkle the dumplings lightly with the cinnamon sugar, if desired. Tightly cover the skillet and steam the mixture over medium-low heat, without opening the lid, until the dumplings set and the surface is dry when touched, usually about 15 minutes. Spoon into bowls, serve with heavy cream poured on top, or with a dollop of whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

Yield: 6 servings

RED CABBAGE BRAISED WITH MAPLE SYRUP

Some still lament the closing of Le Cheval d'Or, a restaurant owned and run by Yves Labbe in Jeffersonville. Chef Labbe baked this dish in the oven, but it lends itself, with slight adaptation, to the stovetop.

- 5 slices thick-cut, maple-cured bacon
- 1 cup minced shallots
- 1 tart apple, peeled, cored and thinly sliced
- 1 pound red cabbage, cored and shredded
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ cup maple syrup
- ¼ cup apple cider, or more, as needed
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Line a plate with paper towels. In a heavy-bottomed pot, fry the bacon until crisp. Drain on the prepared plate. When cool, crumble and set aside.

Pour off all but 1 Tablespoon of bacon fat, add shallots and cook, stirring, until translucent, about 10 minutes. Add remaining ingredients and cover. Cook over lowest possible heat for about 30 minutes, or until cabbage is very soft. If the mixture gets too dry, add a bit more apple cider. Remove the bay leaf, stir in the bacon and serve.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

BRAISED SHORT RIBS

Slow-cooked beef in a luscious red-wine gravy; a true winter feast.

- 2 Tablespoons canola oil
- 2½ pounds bone-in beef short ribs
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup finely chopped shallots
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
- ½ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes, or more to taste
- Leaves from 4 sprigs fresh thyme, or ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- Leaves from 1 sprig rosemary, or about 1 teaspoon dried rosemary leaves
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cup beef broth, or more, as needed
- 1½ cups dry red wine
- 14-ounce can chopped tomatoes, with juice

For serving:

- Mashed potatoes or buttered egg noodles
- Freshly chopped parsley, for garnish

Heat the oil in a large, heavy pot set over medium heat. Season the short ribs with salt and pepper. Working in batches if necessary, brown the short ribs on all sides. Remove ribs from the pan and set on a platter. Add the shallots, carrots, garlic and red pepper flakes to the pot and cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. If using dried thyme, add it now. If using fresh thyme, wrap it, with the rosemary and bay leaf, in a small square of cheesecloth tied with a string. Add it to the pot. (Alternatively, stuff the thyme, rosemary and bay leaf into a tea infuser and submerge in the pot). Add the beef stock, wine and tomatoes (with juice). The liquid should just cover the short ribs; add more stock if needed. Cover and simmer until the meat is tender, about 2 hours. Taste about halfway through the cooking time, and add more hot pepper, or salt and pepper as needed.

Transfer the short ribs to a platter. Cover loosely with aluminum foil. Remove the cheesecloth-wrapped herbs and discard. Skim the fat from the surface of the liquid. Add any juices that have accumulated on the platter with the ribs. Cook the liquid at a low boil about 10 minutes more, until it thickens slightly. Strain into a gravy boat.

Serve the ribs with mashed potatoes or buttered egg noodles, with gravy on the side. Garnish each serving with parsley.

Yield: 4 servings