

Silvia's Cucina

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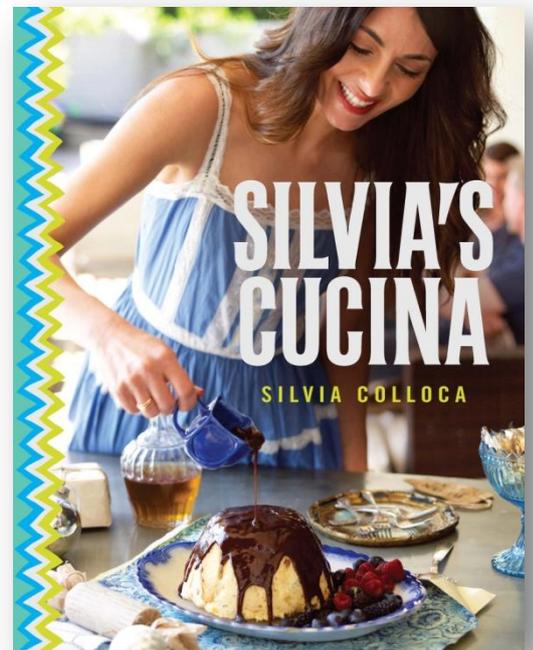
A Feisty Tuscan Stew

FREE RECIPE FROM *SILVIA'S CUCINA* BY SILVIA COLLOCA, IL PEPOSO, A FEISTY TUSCAN STEW, PAGE 153.

Tuscan stews are well known in Italy for their robustness. They are not for the faint hearted, or those of meagre appetite. Offal, game and Flinstonian chunks of beef feature prominently, generously seasoned with black pepper.

My brother Giammarco developed a great appreciation for the Tuscan kitchen when he worked in a restaurant near Florence for a few years. Along with the colourful local dialect and swear words, he also learnt a vast array of traditional dishes. This boisterous beef, black pepper and red wine stew became a particular favourite.

Don't be scared off by the amount of pepper in the recipe. Its piquancy mellows during the slowcooking process, leaving a deeply satisfying heat and heartiness to envelop the succulent, tender meat.



500 g oyster blade steak, cut into large chunks
3–4 tablespoons plain flour
2 tablespoons freshly ground black pepper, plus extra to serve (optional)
100 ml extra virgin olive oil
2 carrots, chopped
2 celery sticks, chopped
2 small brown onions, chopped
2–3 sage leaves, chopped, plus extra leaves to garnish
2 tablespoons tomato paste (puree)
400 ml Chianti (see note)
300 ml hot water
salt flakes
soft polenta (see page 150) or grilled sourdough (see page 12), to serve

SERVES 4

- On a plate or chopping board, dredge the beef pieces in the combined flour and pepper.
- Heat 3–4 tablespoons olive oil in a large heavy-based frying pan or flameproof casserole dish over high heat. Add the beef pieces and cook for 3–4 minutes or until nicely caramelised. Try not to overcrowd the pan otherwise the beef will stew rather than sear – depending on the size of your pan, you may need to cook it in batches. Remove the meat from the pan and set aside in a bowl.
- Heat the remaining oil in the same pan and saute the carrot, celery, onion and chopped sage for 3–4 minutes over medium heat.
- Return the meat to the pan. Add the tomato paste and then the wine and cook over high heat for 3–4 minutes or until the alcohol has evaporated. Pour in the water and season with 2 teaspoons salt. Bring to a simmer, then reduce the heat to low, cover with a lid and cook for 2–3 hours or until the meat is soft and the peppery aroma has permeated your kitchen and your soul.
- When the meat is so soft that a blunt knife goes through it without any effort, turn the heat up and simmer the sauce for 10 minutes or until it has thickened slightly. Taste for salt and adjust accordingly. Dust with extra pepper if liked, scatter a few extra sage leaves over the top and spoon generously over soft polenta or simply serve with thick slices of grilled sourdough.

NOTE

This success of this stew strongly relies on the wine it is cooked in. If Chianti is hard to come by, use a Sangiovese or other lighter-bodied red wine instead. Australia, of course, has an ever-expanding range of superb wines to choose from.

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