

Biscuit-topped chicken potpies

For a grown-up take on this childhood favorite, we dropped the traditional pastry crust in favor of a no-fuss biscuit topping, then added cremini mushrooms and fresh thyme to the filling for a little earthiness.

PREP AND COOK TIME 1 hour, 45 minutes

MAKES 6 or 7 individual potpies

NOTES One standard-size rotisserie chicken supplies just enough meat for the pies. You will need six or seven 8- to 10-oz. ovenproof containers for this recipe.

2½ cups reduced-sodium chicken stock

3 carrots, peeled and finely chopped

2 medium Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and finely chopped

1 stalk celery, finely chopped

4 tbsp. salted butter

1 medium onion, finely chopped

12 small cremini or button mushrooms, finely chopped

1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme

5 tbsp. plus 2 cups flour

1 cup milk

¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

2 tsp. salt

Freshly ground black pepper

2 tsp. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

2½ cups chopped cooked chicken, preferably a mixture of white and dark meat (see Notes)

¼ cup frozen sweet peas

1½ tsp. baking powder

½ tsp. baking soda

5 tbsp. cold unsalted butter, cubed

½ cup grated sharp cheddar cheese

2 tsp. minced fresh sage

1 egg

½ cup plus 2 tbsp. well-shaken buttermilk

Egg wash (1 egg yolk whisked with 1 tbsp. milk)

1. In a medium saucepan over high heat, bring chicken stock to a boil. Add carrots, potatoes, and celery. Lower heat to medium and cook until vegetables are tender, 5 to 7 minutes. Drain vegetables, reserving stock; set both aside separately.

2. In a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan, melt salted butter over medium heat. Add onion and cook until golden, 6 to 8 minutes. Add mushrooms and cook 5 minutes. Add fresh thyme and 5 tbsp. flour and cook 2 minutes. Slowly add milk, whisking constantly, until combined, then add stock and cook, stirring often, until mixture thickens, 8 to 10 minutes. Season

with nutmeg, 1 tsp. salt, and pepper to taste. Add parsley, chicken, cooked vegetables, and peas and divide filling evenly among 6 or 7 ovenproof containers (8 to 10 oz. each), leaving the top ¼ in. unfilled.

3. Preheat oven to 425°. To make biscuit topping, sift remaining 2 cups flour with baking powder, baking soda, and remaining 1 tsp. salt. Using your fingers or a pastry cutter, work in unsalted butter, to form a coarse meal, working quickly to keep the butter from warming up and melting into the dough. Stir in cheese and sage. In a separate bowl, whisk together egg and buttermilk and add to the flour mixture, stirring gently until a shaggy dough forms.

4. Lightly flour a counter, a rolling pin, and your hands. Divide dough into 2 balls. Roll out first ball to a ¼-in. thickness, then use a 2½-in. biscuit cutter to cut into rounds, scraping and rerolling dough as needed. Repeat with second ball.

5. Place 3 rounds of dough on each potpie, overlapping as necessary (any unused rounds can be baked on their own as biscuits). Brush dough with egg wash, put potpies on a cookie sheet lined with aluminum foil, and bake until crust is golden brown and filling is bubbling, 17 to 22 minutes.

PER SERVING 538 CAL., 42% (225 CAL.) FROM FAT; 28 G PROTEIN; 25 G FAT (13 G SAT.); 51 G CARBO (3.5 G FIBER); 1,034 MG SODIUM; 160 MG CHOL.

Lasagna with sausage ragù

Layers of ragù and creamy, nutmeg-scented béchamel are a subtle departure from the familiar cheese-laden lasagna favored by many Americans; our version is actually closer to authentic Italian lasagna. However, we streamlined the ragù by using sweet Italian sausage instead of the traditional beef, pork, and/or veal blend.

PREP AND COOK TIME 3 hours

MAKES 6 to 8 servings

NOTES Imported, commercially produced dried lasagna noodles (the kind you boil first) work well in this recipe, but if you can find fresh noodles at a specialty shop, try those instead. Just boil the noodles a few at a time for 2 minutes, plunge in an ice bath, and dry before assembling.

About 7 tbsp. butter

1 tbsp. vegetable oil

½ cup each onion, carrots, and celery, cut into ¼-in. dice

1 lb. bulk sweet Italian sausage (or 1 lb. sausage links removed from their casings)

About 1½ tsp. salt

4 cups whole milk

½ cup dry white wine

1 can (28 oz.) whole tomatoes, including juices, finely chopped or crushed with your hands

Freshly ground black pepper

¼ cup flour

¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

12 oz. lasagna noodles (see Notes)

1 cup good-quality grated parmesan

1. In a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan, melt 2 tbsp. butter in oil over medium heat. Add onion and cook until golden, about 5 minutes. Add carrots and celery and cook 5 more minutes. Add sausage and ½ tsp. salt, breaking up meat with a wooden spoon, and cook until meat loses its raw color.

2. Add 1 cup milk and cook over medium heat, stirring, until completely absorbed, 10 to 12 minutes. (The milk will appear quite curdled at this point; don't be alarmed.) Add wine and cook until reduced by half, about 3 minutes. Add tomatoes, bring to a boil, lower heat, and gently simmer, uncovered, 2 hours. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. After the ragù has cooked for 1½ hours, make the béchamel by melting remaining 5 tbsp. butter in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. Add flour and cook, stirring constantly, until it turns light golden brown, about 5 minutes. Slowly drizzle in remaining 3 cups milk, whisking constantly. Bring to a simmer and continue to cook, whisking, until thickened, about 10 minutes. Season with remaining 1 tsp. salt, nutmeg, and pepper to taste.

4. Preheat oven to 375°. Cook lasagna noodles according to package directions, being careful not to overcook. Drain and lay flat on dish towels, making sure the noodles do not overlap. Butter the bottom of a 9- by 13-in. baking dish and coat with about ½ cup of ragù. Add a single layer of noodles (for most brands this is 4 sheets per layer). Spread on ⅓ of the béchamel; top béchamel with ¼ of the remaining ragù, then ¼ of the parmesan. Repeat layering two more times, covering final layer with

remaining ragù and parmesan.

5. Cover lasagna with buttered aluminum foil and bake 20 minutes. Uncover and bake an additional 10 minutes, or until the top browns slightly. Let sit 15 minutes before serving.

PER SERVING 721 CAL., 55% (396 CAL.) FROM FAT; 28 G PROTEIN; 44 G FAT (20 G SAT.); 54 G CARBO (2.7 G FIBER); 1,617 MG SODIUM; 111 MG CHOL.

Beef-ale stew and green onion-buttermilk dumplings

Rich with ale and caramelized onions, this stew provides a thick, hearty base for the fluffy white dumplings that are dropped in at the end of cooking.

PREP AND COOK TIME About 4 hours, 30 minutes

MAKES 6 to 8 servings

4 lbs. beef chuck, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 1½-in. pieces

6 tbsp. plus 2 cups all-purpose flour

3½ tsp. salt

1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

2 tbsp. vegetable oil

2 bottles (12 oz. each) ale

2 large onions, thinly sliced

8 oz. mushrooms, trimmed and quartered

3 large carrots, peeled, halved lengthwise, and cut into 1-in. lengths

½ cup thinly sliced green onions (green part only)

½ tsp. baking soda

4½ tbsp. cold butter, cut into small pieces

About ¾ cup buttermilk

1 egg

1. In a large bowl, toss beef with 3 tbsp. flour, 1 tsp. salt, and pepper. In a large pot over medium-high heat, heat 1 tbsp. vegetable oil. Add enough beef to pot to form a single layer (about 1/3 of beef), being careful not to overcrowd pot. Brown meat on all sides, about 7 minutes total per batch. Transfer to a large bowl and brown remaining beef in 2 batches. If meat or pan juices start to scorch, reduce heat.

2. Add 1 bottle ale to pot, scraping up brown bits with a wooden spoon. Pour ale over reserved beef and return empty pot to medium-high heat.

3. Add remaining tbsp. oil to pot. Add onions and 2 tsp. salt. Cook, stirring often, 2 minutes. Cover pot and reduce heat to low. Cook, stirring occasionally, until onions have a hint of gold color, about

20 minutes. Remove lid, raise heat to medium-high, stir in 3 tbsp. flour, and cook, stirring often, 3 minutes. Add mushrooms, reserved beef and ale, remaining bottle of ale, and carrots. Bring to a boil. Cover and lower heat to a gentle simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, until beef is tender, about 3 hours.

4. About 40 minutes before serving, make dumplings: In a medium bowl, stir together remaining 2 cups flour, green onions, remaining 3/4 tsp. salt, and baking soda. Using a pastry blender or your fingers, work cold butter into flour mixture until it resembles cornmeal with some pea-size pieces. In another bowl, whisk together buttermilk and egg. Gently fold wet ingredients into dry, mixing until a very shaggy dough forms. If more liquid is needed, add additional buttermilk 1 tbsp. at a time. Gently form dough into 12 equal balls and drop into stew. Cover pot and cook 20 to 30 minutes, or until dumplings are fluffy and cooked through. Let sit 15 minutes before serving; stew will thicken as it cools.

PER SERVING 732 CAL., 39% (288 CAL.) FROM FAT; 58 G PROTEIN; 32 G FAT (13 G SAT.); 50 G CARBO (4.2 G FIBER); 1,675 MG SODIUM; 220 MG CHOL.

Porcini mushroom meat loaf with mushroom gravy

If free-form meat loaf is new to you, here's why we prefer it to the baked-in-a-bread-pan kind: It produces delicious pan drippings that then become the base for a quick, mushroom-rich gravy. Visit www.sunset.com/mashedpotato for a great mashed-potato recipe to go alongside.

PREP AND COOK TIME 2 hours

MAKES 6 to 8 servings

NOTES Look for dried porcini mushrooms in gourmet and Italian markets. We recommend buying veal from markets that guarantee humane farming practices; if you prefer not to eat veal, use 1½ lbs. each of ground beef and ground pork instead.

1½ oz. dried porcini mushrooms (see Notes)

1 cup milk

1½ cups small bread cubes (from 2 slices of hearty bread, crusts removed)

1 lb. each ground beef, veal, and pork (see Notes)

½ cup each chopped shallots and flat-leaf parsley

2 eggs

1½ tsp. salt

1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

1 medium carrot, finely chopped

1 stalk celery, finely chopped

1¾ cups chicken stock

1 cup white wine

6 tbsp. butter

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Put mushrooms in a small bowl and pour 2 cups simmering water over them. Stir and let mushrooms sit 15 minutes. In another small bowl, pour milk over bread cubes. Squeeze bread with your fingers to soften completely.

2. Break the meats into small chunks, then toss together in a large bowl. Add shallots, parsley, eggs, salt, and pepper.

3. Use a slotted spoon to remove mushrooms from water; reserve liquid. Chop mushrooms fine and add about three-quarters to meat mixture; set remaining mushrooms aside. Gently squeeze bread to remove excess milk and add it to meat mixture; discard milk. Using your hands, gently mix bread, meat, and seasonings until blended. Form mixture into a ball, transfer to a large, heavy-bottomed metal roasting pan, and pat into a rounded loaf.

4. Sprinkle carrot, celery, and remaining mushrooms in bottom of pan. Pour in ¾ cup each of mushroom soaking liquid (strain out any sediment, if necessary) and chicken stock. Bake until outside of loaf is browned and interior measures 180° on a meat thermometer, about 90 minutes.

5. Transfer meat loaf to a platter. Set roasting pan over 2 stovetop burners on high heat. Pour in wine and use a wooden spoon to loosen vegetables and browned bits. Add remaining mushroom liquid and chicken stock and simmer until liquid is reduced by half. Reduce heat to medium and whisk in butter; sauce will thicken slightly. Transfer sauce (with vegetable bits) to a gravy boat and serve alongside meat loaf.

PER SERVING 654 CAL., 66% (432 CAL.) FROM FAT; 41 G PROTEIN; 48 G FAT (21 G SAT.); 12 G CARBO (2.3 G FIBER); 963 MG SODIUM; 247 MG CHOL.

Ultimate mac 'n' cheese

Why "ultimate"? Because the sauce is creamy, not grainy; it's flavored with shallots, gruyère, and white wine, like fondue; and it's topped with crunchy sourdough bread crumbs.

PREP AND COOK TIME 50 minutes

MAKES 6 servings

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2 medium Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and finely chopped

1 stalk celery, finely chopped

4 tbsp. salted butter

1 medium onion, finely chopped

12 small cremini or button mushrooms, finely chopped

1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme

5 tbsp. plus 2 cups flour

1 cup milk

¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

2 tsp. salt

Freshly ground black pepper

2 tsp. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

2½ cups chopped cooked chicken, preferably a mixture of white and dark meat (see Notes)

¼ cup frozen sweet peas

1½ tsp. baking powder

½ tsp. baking soda

5 tbsp. cold unsalted butter, cubed

½ cup grated sharp cheddar cheese

2 tsp. minced fresh sage

1 egg

½ cup plus 2 tbsp. well-shaken buttermilk

Egg wash (1 egg yolk whisked with 1 tbsp. milk)

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2. In a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan, melt salted butter over medium heat. Add onion and cook until golden, 6 to 8 minutes. Add mushrooms and cook 5 minutes. Add fresh thyme and 5 tbsp. flour and cook 2 minutes. Slowly add milk, whisking constantly, until combined, then add stock and cook, stirring often, until mixture thickens, 8 to 10 minutes. Season

with nutmeg, 1 tsp. salt, and pepper to taste. Add parsley, chicken, cooked vegetables, and peas and divide filling evenly among 6 or 7 ovenproof containers (8 to 10 oz. each), leaving the top ¼ in. unfilled.

3. Preheat oven to 425°. To make biscuit topping, sift remaining 2 cups flour with baking powder, baking soda, and remaining 1 tsp. salt. Using your fingers or a pastry cutter, work in unsalted butter to form a coarse meal, working quickly to keep the butter from warming up and melting into the dough. Stir in cheese and sage. In a separate bowl, whisk together egg and buttermilk and add to the flour mixture, stirring gently until a shaggy dough forms.

4. Lightly flour a counter, a rolling pin, and your hands. Divide dough into 2 balls. Roll out first ball to a ¼-in. thickness, then use a 2½-in. biscuit cutter to cut into rounds, scraping and rerolling dough as needed. Repeat with second ball.

5. Place 3 rounds of dough on each potpie, overlapping as necessary (any unused rounds can be baked on their own as biscuits). Brush dough with egg wash, put potpies on a cookie sheet lined with aluminum foil, and bake until crust is golden brown and filling is bubbling, 17 to 22 minutes.

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1 tbsp. vegetable oil

½ cup each onion, carrots, and celery, cut into ¼-in. dice

1 lb. bulk sweet Italian sausage (or 1 lb. sausage links removed from their casings)

About 1½ tsp. salt

4 cups whole milk

½ cup dry white wine

1 can (28 oz.) whole tomatoes, including juices, finely chopped or crushed with your hands

Freshly ground black pepper

¼ cup flour

¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

12 oz. lasagna noodles (see Notes)

1 cup good-quality grated parmesan

1. In a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan, melt 2 tbsp. butter in oil over medium heat. Add onion and cook until golden, about 5 minutes. Add carrots and celery and cook 5 more minutes. Add sausage and ½ tsp. salt, breaking up meat with a wooden spoon, and cook until meat loses its raw color.

2. Add 1 cup milk and cook over medium heat, stirring, until completely absorbed, 10 to 12 minutes. (The milk will appear quite curdled at this point; don't be alarmed.) Add wine and cook until reduced by half, about 3 minutes. Add tomatoes, bring to a boil, lower heat, and gently simmer, uncovered, 2 hours. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. After the ragù has cooked for 1½ hours, make the béchamel by melting remaining 5 tbsp. butter in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. Add flour and cook, stirring constantly, until it turns light golden brown, about 5 minutes. Slowly drizzle in remaining 3 cups milk, whisking constantly. Bring to a simmer and continue to cook, whisking, until thickened, about 10 minutes. Season with remaining 1 tsp. salt, nutmeg, and pepper to taste.

4. Preheat oven to 375°. Cook lasagna noodles according to package directions, being careful not to overcook. Drain and lay flat on dish towels, making sure the noodles do not overlap. Butter the bottom of a 9- by 13-in. baking dish and coat with about ½ cup of ragù. Add a single layer of noodles (for most brands this is 4 sheets per layer). Spread on ⅓ of the béchamel; top béchamel with ¼ of the remaining ragù, then ¼ of the parmesan. Repeat layering two more times, covering final layer with