

B E E F

Beef Stroganoff

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I think that at this point in history Americans probably are more familiar with good beef Stroganoff than the Russians because it's the quality of the beef that makes this dish excel. Although it seems like a culinary crime to cut up a filet mignon, the results are spectacular. You can also use filet mignon tips, which are cheaper and almost just as good—but nothing less. This recipe is what real beef Stroganoff should be—indulgent and restrained at once. Try using wild mushrooms, such as boletes or portabello, for an even nobler taste.

2 pounds filet mignon or filet mignon

tips, cut into thin strips

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

3/4 cup finely chopped onion

1 pound small fresh white mushrooms,

caps only, wiped clean and halved

2 1/4 teaspoons all-purpose flour

1/3 cup Beef Stock (see Index) or

canned broth

1/3 cup heavy or whipping cream

1/2 cup sour cream

2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill

1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh

parsley

Salt and freshly ground black

pepper, to taste

1 Heat a large, heavy skillet, preferably cast iron, over high heat. Add the meat, a few pieces at a time, and quickly sear on all sides, stirring all the time with a

wooden spoon, 3 to 4 minutes. If the meat throws off too much liquid, drain it off and set aside. Remove the meat from the skillet and set aside.

2 Melt the butter in a medium-size skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Increase the heat to medium-high, then add the mushrooms and sauté, stirring frequently, until they are deeply colored, about 20 minutes. Turn the heat down to medium-low. Sprinkle in the flour and cook, stirring, for 1 minute.

3 Stir in the stock, heavy cream, sour

cream, mustard, and the meat juices, if any. Simmer over low heat until the sauce thickens, about 5 minutes; do not allow to boil.

4 Return the meat to the skillet, stir to coat with the sauce, and heat for 1 minute. Stir in the dill, parsley, salt, and pepper, and serve at once.

Serves 4 to 6



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It is not at all clear how this famous beef dish got the name Stroganoff, and if one of the members of the Stroganoff dynasty did give the dish his name, it isn't clear which one. The most outstanding gourmands in that family were Pavel Stroganoff, who lived in the late nineteenth century, and Alexander Stroganoff, who lived at the time of Catherine the Great.

Although the dish was most likely named after Pavel, it was Alexander who was notorious for his lavish feasts.



He fashioned his famous dinners after the Romans. The guests would recline comfortably at marble tables, wearing wreaths made of hothouse flowers, and be served by young boys in Roman tunics. Alexander's food was luxuriously restrained, an historical source informs us. The appetizer consisted just of caviar with a few rare vegetables and fruit, followed by a dish made of herring's cheeks (one plate required more than a thousand herrings). The lips of salmon, poached bear paws, and, perhaps, a roast wildcat followed. Then came cuckoo birds sautéed in butter and honey, halibut liver, and oys-

ters, wild game, and "just a few figs."

Besides the feasts, however, Alexander Stroganoff was a great patron of the arts without whose generosity Russia's passage into true enlightenment would have been difficult. He was an intimate friend with the greatest figures of the Russian eighteenth century, and not only financially endowed, but oversaw the construction of the monumental Kazan Cathedral, one of the best examples of St. Petersburg architecture.

