

Lamb-Italian Sausage Stew (Slow Cooker)

In our house in Colorado Springs, the kitchen is two steps up from the sunroom, where I often work at the table, but also have a small television. Many days I've left a program on to listen to while I cooked or cleaned up in the kitchen. Sometimes I paid more attention than others. One day, Emeril Lagasse was making a stew with lamb and Italian sausage and beans; that was about all I heard. I didn't remember any other ingredients or the cooking method, but another day, with those three ingredients in mind, I decided to make a lamb stew in the slow cooker and have been making it ever since.

A hearty meal for the family that could cook all day while you're skiing, this stew also could be stretched to feed 10 guests, if served over rice or egg noodles. Cooking it on top of the stove works quite well, but you'll need two or more additional cups of broth or water, since it cooks down.

serves 6-8

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 pounds lamb (boneless leg, shoulder, or stew meat), cut into 1-2-inch pieces

Kosher salt and fresh-ground black pepper

1-pound hot Italian sausage links (4-5 pieces), cut into 1-2-inch pieces

2 medium-large onions, chopped

2 stalks celery, chopped

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 teaspoon each fresh rosemary and thyme, chopped or 1/2 teaspoon each dry

6 cups low-sodium beef broth

1 cup red wine

32-ounce can chopped tomatoes

4 cups cooked white beans

1. In a large bowl, toss lamb with 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add lamb and Italian sausage and cook until well-browned, about 10 minutes.

2. Add onions, celery, garlic, rosemary and thyme. Sprinkle with a pinch each of salt and pepper. Cook 5-7 minutes until vegetables are softened

3. Add meat mixture to a 6-quart slow cooker. Pour in beef broth, wine and tomatoes; stir in drained beans.

4. Cook on low 6-8 hours. Taste and adjust seasonings.

Stovetop directions:

Follow directions above, but cook meat, vegetables, and herbs in an 8-quart pot with a lid. Add broth, tomatoes and wine, along with an additional 2 cups water or broth. Bring to a boil; reduce to a simmer. Cook until lamb is tender, about 1 1/2 hours. Stir in cooked beans and simmer 10-15 minutes. Taste, and adjust seasonings.

Cook's Notes:

You may use 2-3 cans any variety of white beans, drained, or you may cook your own beans. If cooking your own beans, they don't need to be completely done when you add them; they'll cook more with the stew. I like beans cooked in a microwave – they cook through without breaking apart, peeling or becoming mushy. You also can cook them on the stove.

Microwave directions: In a large, microwave-safe bowl, combine 2 cups dry white beans, picked over and rinsed, 4 cups water, 1 large onion, halved and with the skin on, 4 cloves garlic with papers, 3 sprigs fresh rosemary or 1 teaspoon dried and 1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper. Microwave at full-power for about 35 minutes or until tender. Drain beans, remove vegetables and herbs. Season with 1/4 teaspoon salt.

From my 2013 book, SOUPS AND SIDES FOR EVERY SEASON.

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