

Rabbit Pie

Even the friend who didn't think she would like rabbit accepted my lunch invitation when she saw the rabbit pie I had just taken out of the oven.

And the cats, who had spent most of the morning in their favourite 'hot spots above the radiators', ventured down to the kitchen to see if the delicious aroma meant food for them too.

I purchased the rabbit from our family butcher Richard Golsby, who supplies only wild rabbits caught locally.

Look up rabbit pie in most cookery books and you will find instructions to place the rabbit joints into the pie dish just as they are. Because rabbit bones are sharp little things that lurk amongst the meat, the method I adopt when cooking this dish calls for the rabbit to be cooked first, so the meat can be pulled off the bones easily before placing it in the pie dish.

Yes this takes a few moments to complete, but if this job has been undertaken with care, it stops people choking on their meal.

To serve 4-6 people you will need:

- One rabbit cut into joints
- 8oz (225g) piece of streaky bacon - diced
- 2 medium onions - chopped small
- 4oz (100g) mushrooms
- One cooking apple - peeled and sliced thin
- ¾pt (425 ml) chicken stock or water
- ½ pt (275ml) dry cider
- 1 bay leaf
- Bunch of fresh herbs to include parsley, marjoram and thyme
- 8 oz (225g) shortcrust pastry
- 1 beaten egg to wash pastry
- Salt and freshly ground black peppercorns to season.

Method:

- Turn the oven to 200°C / 400°F or gas mark 6.
- Wash the rabbit joints and place in large cooking pot, along with chopped onion, bay leaf and the fresh herbs that have been tied into a bunch with string.
- Add the cider and stock to a casserole dish with a lid and bring to the boil.
- Once boiling, season, and place it in the oven for about an hour or until the rabbit is so tender it is falling off the bone.
- Remove from the oven, strain off the liquid and retain. The bay leaf, chopped onions and the herbs can be thrown out.

- When the rabbit begins to cool, carefully pull the meat off the bone and place it into a large pie dish. This is a job that has to be done carefully as the bones really are sharp and sometimes easily overlooked if you work too quickly.
- Add the diced bacon to the dish, and tuck in the mushrooms and apple slices between the meat.
- Adjust the seasoning of the retained cooking liquid and pour into the dish.
- Roll out the pastry and place over the dish, trimming the edges and adding decoration if you wish.
- Brush the pastry top with the egg wash and bake in the oven for about half an hour or until the pastry has turned a delicious golden brown.