

ENOUGH. Too many rushed dinner parties and quick meals are taking their toll. This city turns people into performing a version of the gastronomic Olympics every time they eat. Sound preparation; enthusiastic start out of the blocks, a fast burst of energy down the straight, sprint to the finish and collapse exhausted over the line... somewhere near last place.

And then you spend hours washing up too many pots and dishes wondering if the meal took as long to cook and eat as this purgatory drudge.

Fear not frustrated foodies — the remedy is at hand! A Sunday night roast. The real thing.

Spending a whole Sunday afternoon chopping, stuffing, basting and glazing; pottering about the apartment being driven insane from the delicious aroma. Uncorking the good bottle of wine hours before it is necessary and having a few sample sips.

Coming from a country where there are more sheep than people, the natural tendency is to do a large roast lamb. But that would require flying my mother over because her roasts are unrivaled. Instead of serving just baked potatoes, you get that delicious New Zealand root vegetable kumara as well.

I think buying a frozen duck will be a whole lot cheaper.

Roast Duck

2-kg	duck
1 large	onion, quartered
1 tsp	dried marjoram
1 cup	cabbage, shredded
2	onions, finely chopped
1 tsp	dried thyme
1 1/4 cups	white wine
1 tabsp	butter, cubed and softened

For the Stock:

1 each

Duck neck and giblets
onion, carrot, stalk celery, sliced
bay leaf, bouquet garni

Preheat oven to 190° Celsius. Make the stock first. Remove the neck and giblets from duck and place them in a saucepan with 2 cups of cold water, sliced vegetables, bay leaf and bouquet garni. Season with salt and pepper and simmer, covered very gently for one hour skimming the fat from the surface with a slotted spoon.

While the stock is cooking, stuff the duck with onion and marjoram and season with salt and freshly ground pepper. Put the duck on a wire rack in an oven pan that has generous sides so the fat will collect underneath. Bake for 1-1/4 hours.

Blanch the cabbage briefly in a large pot of boiling water and drain, pressing out as much liquid as possible. Collect from the oven pan a tablespoon of fat that has collected and place this in a large pot and cook the chopped onion with thyme and freshly ground black pepper, until softened. Add half the white wine and reduce carefully until syrupy.

Add cabbage and simmer for five minutes.

Bring the duck stock back to the boil and add remaining white wine, reduce this by about half and whisk in the butter to make a rich sauce. Don't let it cool. Place the duck on the bed of cabbage and carve it at the table. Serve each guest with a spoonful of duck sauce.

YOU NEED TO HAVE CLOSE FRIENDS around when the meal is an experiment — very close friends. I remember the night I served Vodka Jello (jelly) to my guests for dessert. (Pour jelly crystals into a bowl, add half the specified amount of boiling water, stir, then top up the rest of the liquid with vodka. Stir well and set for a few hours.)

It packs a punch. I left the room after serving Vodka Jello and when I came back, everybody was still sitting in their chairs, but at a very rakish angle. Happy, but completely sozzled.

Last week came the three-day casserole. One of those hearty French recipes that has been adapted by everybody and was about to be adapted by me. Could I risk it? Would it really be a dish worth spending three nights at home for?

Luckily the dinner guests are all still talking to me and even asking to come over again, so I suppose the answer is yes. The one thing this dish needs is planning. You don't spontaneously whip up a Daube de Boeuf. If dinner is on Friday night, then get started on Wednesday.

Daube de Boeuf

1 kg	beef, cut into 2-inch cubes
2 medium	onions (1 studded with 2 cloves)
4 cloves	garlic, crushed
2 medium	carrots, sliced
1	bouquet garni
5 tbsp	olive oil
2 tbsp	red wine vinegar
8	coriander seeds
2 tbsp	brandy
1 bottle	red wine (stupendously good)
5 cups	chestnuts, cooked and peeled
1/2 cup	bacon, cut into thin strips
2 tbsp	flour
1 tbsp	black pepper, crushed
1 large piece	orange zest
5 tbsp	parsley
5 cups	cooked noodles

Day 1: Place onions, garlic, beef, carrots, bouquet garni, 2 tablespoons olive oil, vinegar, coriander seeds, pepper, brandy, and wine in a bowl. Stir well and chill in the fridge overnight.

Day 2: Preheat oven to 180° Celsius. Bring a pan of water to the boil and drop in the chestnuts which have been carefully slit with a sharp knife. Boil for 30 minutes. Take marinade from fridge and separate the juice, beef and vegetables. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in the pot and brown the meat. Remove, then sauté the bacon until crisp. Remove, stir flour into the pan juices and cook quickly for 2 minutes. Pour in 2 cups of the marinade mixture and stir until it thickens.

Return all ingredients to the pot. Cook, covered for 2 hours. Peel the cooled chestnuts. Remove the clove-studded onion and add the chestnuts and orange. Return to the oven for 1 hour. Leave to cool, then place back in the fridge overnight.

Day 3: Reheat the dish and serve with parsley and noodles.

FOR A LONG TIME I really believed the richness of Russian cuisine could be spelled out in one word — soup. It's not true of course, someone invented Chicken Kiev. And *bliny* and *kotlety*. But I have come to understand why a steaming soup is such a success. It stretches to include extra guests who have turned up unexpectedly for dinner. Add more water, slice more bread, find another kitchen stool. Nothing to it. You started with stew, now you have soup.

Being a great fan of walnuts, this Georgian stew is a perfect way to indulge. Using a food processor to grind them to a fine consistency is best, but crushing them inside a strong plastic bag is also an option.

Most people outside this country will not recognize a bottle of pomegranate juice if they came across it on their supermarket shelves, but as children many people would remember its variation: a tart, foul-tasting juice that your mother made you drink because it was packed full of vitamin C. All very well for growing bones, but it had the side effect of making your mouth pucker for hours on end afterward.

Just a tablespoon will lift this stew considerably. And if you want to be daring, add more. And if too many guests turn up, make this into soup.

Kharko Beef Stew

<i>1/2 kg</i>	stewing beef
<i>5 medium</i>	onions, chopped
<i>5 cloves</i>	garlic
<i>5 tbsp</i>	butter
<i>1 tbsp</i>	flour
<i>2</i>	bay leaves
<i>1/2 tsp</i>	tumeric
<i>1 tsp</i>	paprika
<i>Juice of 2</i>	lemons
<i>1 tbsp</i>	pomegranate juice
<i>1 tsp</i>	coriander seeds, crushed
<i>1/2 cup</i>	walnuts, finely crushed
<i>1 medium tin</i>	tomatoes
<i>1/2 cup</i>	fresh coriander leaves
<i>1/2 cup</i>	fresh parsley
	salt and pepper

In a large pot half filled with water, cook the beef until tender. Expect this to take about 2 hours. Remove the meat and set aside, strain the beef stock. In a saucepan fry the onions and garlic in 3 tablespoons of butter.

Sprinkle over the flour, cook, stirring for one minute. Add 1/2 cup of the beef stock and stir well.

Add the meat, bay leaves, tumeric, paprika, lemon juice, pomegranate juice, crushed coriander seeds and crushed walnuts, cook for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the tomatoes, the coriander and parsley. Stir well, add salt and pepper. Remove from heat and let stand for five minutes so all the flavors combine.

I HAVE A HOUSEGUEST THIS WEEK who keeps late hours. Very late hours. He has taken to coming home after eleven o'clock at night which, I must confess, is way beyond the bubble bath, pajamas and hot chocolate stage for me these days.

Naturally, there has to be something warm and hearty for him when he finally makes it home.

General Rule of Expat Moscow No. 1: "The comfort of houseguests is sacred until they want you to go shopping for matryoshka dolls at Izmailovo stadium on the outskirts of the city, or ask you to arrange tickets to St. Petersburg for the weekend."

After much trial and error — and the Italian Veal dish was definitely in the error category: leathery old boots they turned out to be, drying up in the oven for hours on end — there was only one dish that would suit an "oops-I-seem-to-be-five-hours-later-than-I-promised" guest. Casseroles.

Tonight's dish, still on the stove and it's 11:43 P.M., is one of those happy mistakes that makes cooking so much fun.

It all started with a half finished bottle of French champagne.

It had lost its fizz, but couldn't be thrown out (I've been living here too long to throw anything away without agonizing about it first). And I had some pork tenderloin and good mushrooms. Surely that combination could produce a tasty morsel for dinner.

The mushrooms I confess I brought back dried from Paris, but the local variety will do. I hope. Too many Brothers Grimm fairy tales about woodcutters and the entire family expiring over a pot of wild mushroom soup has made me a bit of a neophobe in the mushroom department.

Turning to the *Larousse Gastronomique*, I looked up champagne and lunged at the first recipe I saw. Truffles with Champagne. They have got to be kidding. It's not quite your typical Moscow dish, but with a bit of fiddling it has become something wondrous. This dish will serve two.

Pork Casserole

<i>1 cup</i>	pork tenderloin
<i>1/2 cup</i>	thick bacon, sliced
<i>2 tabsp</i>	butter
<i>2 medium</i>	carrots, thinly sliced
<i>2 medium</i>	onions, thinly sliced
<i>1/2 cup</i>	mushrooms
<i>2 tabsp</i>	parsley
<i>2 tsp</i>	thyme
<i>1</i>	bay leaf
<i>2 cloves</i>	garlic, sliced
<i>1 tsp each</i>	salt and pepper
<i>1 tsp</i>	nutmeg, grated
<i>1/2 bottle</i>	French champagne

Coarsely dice the bacon and pork tenderloin. Cook in butter in a saucepan. Add finely sliced carrots and onions, mushrooms, sprigs of parsley, thyme, a bay leaf, 2 cloves of garlic; salt, pepper and a teaspoon of grated nutmeg.

Cook for about ten minutes, carefully add the champagne, bring the dish to the boil (watch those bubbles) reduce it and simmer, covered for about half an hour. Simply keep on simmering that casserole. As the hours pass, the bacon will be mouthwateringly soft, the pork succulent and the vegetables will melt in your mouth. And what wine to serve with this dish? Champagne, of course.

DURING THE CURRENT SCORCHING hot spell of weather, there can be nothing better than throwing food in the picnic basket, and driving out en masse to someone's dacha for a day of volleyball, frisbee and food.

If the heatwave keeps up (and this is a rare thing for Moscow) then a cold meat salad may be preferable to standing over the barbecue cooking hamburgers or *shashlik*.

You do need to start in the night before, though, to let the marinade overwhelm the meat and make it a memorable dish. But that beats having to get up early on Saturday morning and make a mad dash to the supermarket.

Pork Salad

<i>1/2 kg</i>	pork tenderloin
<i>5</i>	red peppers, sliced into thin strips
<i>1/2 cup</i>	parsley or coriander as garnish
<i>5 cloves</i>	garlic, sliced
<i>4 tbsp</i>	oyster sauce
<i>4 tbsp</i>	soy sauce
<i>4 tbsp</i>	sherry
<i>5 small</i>	chilies, crushed
<i>1 heaped tsp</i>	sugar

Cook the pork in a little oil or butter. Leave to cool. Combine all the marinade ingredients and the sliced peppers into the container you will be using to transport the meat. When the meat has cooled, slice thinly and toss in the marinade. Cover and refrigerate.

Every time you open the fridge, give the container a shake to ensure it is well coated. To display, use a large platter; place the meat in a circular fan and arrange the peppers in long thin strips across it. Pour all the juices over the top and add fresh coriander or flat leaf parsley as a garnish.

THE TIMING COULDN'T BE BETTER — New Year's resolutions. And I don't mean "This year I'm going to cook." Let's get serious, This year is going to be different.

In case you missed it, in 1991 snow peas were all the rage, 1992 had foodies pouring all sorts of clever oils on large plates and sopping them up with home-cooked bread. And that was before the real meal came.

What can we expect for 1993? Here in sunny Moscow our great culinary event will probably be tomatoes and cucumbers in a salad. Again. Or leather cleverly masquerading as *shashlik*; or perhaps a playful amount of fresh coriander over every dish you care to mention.

Or maybe it will be the year we all experiment and have fun with our food. I'm all for the last option. And in keeping with the spirit, here is the last dish of the year — or possibly the first for 1993 by the time you get around to purchasing the main ingredient.

Be daring. Don't be squeamish.

Roast Rabbit.

No, not Roger Rabbit. Roast rabbit. It tastes delicious, it was made famous in the bistros in Paris' quartier lapin (sorry!) and you can now buy them in Moscow. If you can't manage rabbit, a large, plump chicken will taste delicious with this combination of wine and mustard as well.

Roast Rabbit

<i>1.5-kg</i>	rabbit
<i>1 tbsp</i>	vegetable oil
<i>1 tbsp</i>	butter
<i>5 tbsp</i>	grainy Dijon mustard
<i>1 bottle</i>	dry white wine
<i>5 tbsp</i>	crème fraîche
<i>4 tbsp</i>	parsley

Preheat oven to 175° Celsius. Frozen rabbits will defrost overnight in the fridge. You will need to cut the meat into six large pieces — the two front legs, two hind legs and the two halves of the saddle (middle).

In a large flameproof casserole dish melt the butter and the oil. When hot, quickly brown the six pieces of meat. You will need to brown them evenly, so keep turning. Place in a casserole dish. Spread two tablespoons of mustard over all the pieces of rabbit and cook covered in the oven for 20 minutes.

Pour over the bottle of white wine and make sure all the pieces of rabbit are covered. Cook covered, back in the oven for 25 minutes.

Remove the rabbit pieces from the dish and check to see they are cooked (you may need a further 5 minutes). Turn off the oven, wrap the rabbit in aluminum foil and place the pieces on a serving platter that can be heated. Return the meat to the cooler oven.

Next make the sauce. Put the casserole dish with the juices over a high heat, bring to a boil and cook furiously for about 10 minutes. This should reduce your liquid to a thick, soupy consistency. Turn down the heat and add the crème fraîche and the rest of the mustard. Stir thoroughly and cook the sauce carefully for about 3 minutes.

Remove the meat from the oven and arrange the pieces with a generous serving of sauce over each. Garnish with parsley and serve.

EVERYONE HAS 'THEIR' DISH. The one meal which you make without any sneaking reference to recipe books or secret phone calls home to mother. (I had to do that last night because I couldn't remember how many eggs went into the chocolate sherry sponge cake. Luckily it was after midnight and I managed after not too many luckless wrestles with the antiquated telephone exchange to get through. Mum was a little bemused at such an odd request; but she's getting used to it. The answer is two.)

For many years this recipe was my dish. I became so adept at it all I had to remember was to go by the shops and pick up fresh spinach and mozzarella cheese on the way home.

For a while there Moscow defeated me — I was always looking for those two magic ingredients at the *rynoks*, to no avail. Especially in September when spinach season is long gone. Cool nights are here however and this is just the dish to cheer the soul.

Veal Parmigiano

<i>1 large tin</i>	peeled tomatoes
<i>1</i>	onion, chopped
<i>1 clove</i>	garlic, sliced
<i>1 small tin</i>	tomato paste
<i>1/2 cup</i>	dry white wine
<i>4 thin</i>	veal steaks
<i>1 cup</i>	spinach
<i>2 tbsp</i>	butter
<i>2 tbsp</i>	flour (for dusting)
<i>1 tbsp</i>	oil
<i>1 cup</i>	mozzarella cheese, sliced

Preheat your oven to 180° Celsius. If using frozen spinach, boil for a few minutes in a small amount of water. Drain and set aside.

Make the tomato sauce. Onion first, then garlic, tomatoes, paste, wine. Let it simmer away while you make the rest of the dish.

Trim the veal and pound them flat. Dust with a little flour and cook them for three minutes each side in a heavy-based saucepan. When cooked, take the saucepan away from the heat.

If your saucepan can go into the oven, leave the veal in place and continue building up your dish. If not, transfer to a platter that is large enough to accommodate all four slices of veal and has room around the sides for the sauce. Place a generous amount of spinach on top of each piece of veal, then top with thinly sliced cheese. Next, carefully pour the tomato sauce around the veal and place uncovered in the oven for about ten minutes until the cheese melts.

Take the whole platter out to the table to serve. No need for other vegetables as this is a meal in one, although you may want to add a side dish of poppy seed noodles (see page 47).