

Veal Marengo

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

These days, it's so easy to call something a classic that it's easy to forget the dishes that, having truly stood the test of time, not only deserve the title, but might even define it. One of those dishes is veal Marengo. Found on menus all over France, it was first made in 1800 by Napoleon Bonaparte's chef in honor of the general's success at the battle of Marengo, fought against the Austrians on Italian soil. Some believe that the dish was created with supplies that were at hand. That seems plausible, since, minus the garnish of mushrooms, baby onions, and boiled and parsleyed potatoes, the ingredients are basic: cubes of veal, tomatoes, onions, and white wine.



This rendition of veal Marengo comes from Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and specifically the notebook of my friend Alice Vasseur, who was a student there when she was just eight years old. And, yes, the kids got to cook with wine.

For the veal

All-purpose flour, for dredging

Salt and freshly ground pepper

1¾ pounds boneless veal shoulder, cut into 2-inch cubes

2 tablespoons flavorless oil (such as grapeseed or canola)

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 medium onion, coarsely chopped

¾ cup drained canned diced tomatoes (or peeled, seeded, and chopped fresh tomatoes)

2 tablespoons tomato paste

¾ cup dry white wine

A bouquet garni: 2 thyme sprigs, 2 parsley sprigs, 1 rosemary sprig, 1 bay leaf, tied together in a piece of cheesecloth

For the vegetables

About 3 tablespoons unsalted butter

12 cipolline or small white boiling onions

Salt and freshly ground pepper

1 cup water

8 white mushrooms, caps only, wiped clean and halved

8 baby potatoes, peeled, or 1 larger potato, peeled and cubed

Chopped fresh parsley, for garnish

Center a rack in the oven and preheat the oven to 325 degrees F. Have a large oven-going skillet with a lid at hand. Cut a parchment paper circle large enough to cover the pan.

Season some flour with salt and pepper. Pat the veal cubes dry between sheets of paper towels and run the veal through the flour, coating all sides and tapping to shake off the excess.

Put the skillet over medium-high heat and add the oil. When it's hot, slip in some of the veal cubes — you don't want to crowd the pan, so you may need to cook the veal in batches. Cook the cubes just until they're brown on all sides, then transfer them to a plate.

Discard whatever oil remains in the pan, return the pan to medium heat, and add the butter. When it melts, toss in the onion, and cook, stirring until they soften, about 5 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes, tomato paste, wine, and bouquet garni. Add the veal and give everything a good stir, stirring up whatever bits may have stuck to the pan, and bring just to a boil. Taste for salt and pepper, cover the pan with the parchment circle (this will keep the liquids from evaporating) and the lid, and put it in the oven.

Cook for 30 minutes, undisturbed.

Meanwhile, make the vegetables: Melt 1 tablespoon of the butter in a small saucepan. Toss in the onions and turn them around in the butter until they're glossy. Season with salt and pepper, then pour in the water and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to a simmer and cook the onions until they are tender enough to be pierced with the tip of a knife, at which point the water should have evaporated. If the onions are cooked and you still have water in the pan, boil it away. Set the glazed onions aside.

Melt 1 tablespoon of the butter in a small skillet over medium heat. Add the mushrooms, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring, until they soften, about 5 minutes. If the pan goes dry, add a bit more butter. Set the mushrooms aside.

Put a pot of salted water on to boil for the potatoes.

Remove the skillet of veal from the oven. To make veal Marengo the traditional way, transfer the veal cubes to a bowl, cover, and keep them warm. Remove and discard the bouquet garni, then strain the sauce; discard the chopped onions. Alternatively, if you don't want to fuss with this step, you can skip it. Return the veal to the pan if you removed it and add the glazed onions and mushrooms. Bring the sauce to a simmer over low heat (you won't have a lot of sauce, but that's fine), cover the pan, and allow the dish to bubble away very gently for 10 minutes or so while you cook the potatoes.

Drop the potatoes into the boiling water and cook until you can pierce them easily with the tip of a knife, about 10 minutes; drain well.

Put the potato pot back over low heat and add 1 tablespoon butter. When the butter has melted, return the potatoes to the pot — be gentle with them now that they're cooked — and turn them around in the butter until they're coated. If necessary, add a little more butter.

Spoon the veal into the center of a heated serving platter or four dinner plates, surround with the boiled potatoes, and finish with a flurry of minced parsley, giving the lion's share of the parsley to the taters.

Serving

While I often arrange individual dinner plates in the kitchen, I like to serve this dish family style, bringing it to the table on a large platter with the veal on one side and the parsleyed potatoes on the other.

Storing

You can make the dish up to a day ahead. Reheat it in a covered skillet over low heat — it's good to do this with a parchment circle in place. However, it's best to boil and butter-glaze the potatoes right before serving.