

Classic Beef Wellington

This traditional British dish is the ultimate Christmas centerpiece. Our step-by-step guide—including homemade pâté, crêpes, and puff pastry—will help you master it. **BY SOPHIE GRIGSON**

Beef Tenderloin

The star of the show. This indulgent cut is mild, ultratender, and very juicy, thanks to its good marbling (ribbons of fat that melt during cooking).

Duxelles

A rich paste of mushrooms, shallots, parsley, and butter—a classic flavoring tool of French cuisine—envelopes the seared beef tenderloin.

Crêpes

Thin, savory pancakes are wrapped around the beef to absorb its juices during cooking. They keep the puff pastry crust from getting soggy.



Madeira Sauce

Madeira is a fortified wine that brings great depth to this sauce. Homemade beef broth plays a big part, too, adding hearty meatiness that complements the tenderloin.

Puff Pastry

Crisp, golden, and buttery, a puff pastry crust is the perfect counterpoint to the tender meat, crêpes, and unctuous mushroom and pâté mixture.

Pâté

Smooth, mousse-like pâté is an essential component of beef Wellington, adding fat and flavor without overwhelming the beef.

JF BRITAIN has a holiday culinary showstopper, it's got to be beef Wellington. This triumphant marriage of beef tenderloin, sautéed mushrooms, and rich chicken liver pâté (or truffles and pâté de foie gras if you want to break the bank), rolled first in tender crêpes and then in buttery puff pastry, makes a grand centerpiece. Carved at the table and paired with a classic Madeira sauce, it's a delicious and decadent meal.

The origins of the Wellington are far from clear. One patriotic fancy is that it was created to commemorate the British defeat of the French archenemy, Napoleon, at the battle of Waterloo in 1815, led by the all-conquering Duke of Wellington. Unfortunately, there is little evidence to back this up. The Duke of Wellington was known to have little interest in food, so he probably wouldn't have cared two hoots for any chef's tribute. Imaginative souls have also



1



2

classic beef wellington

You can assemble the Wellington 3 hours ahead (for a timeline, see Test Kitchen, p. 87). Serve it with boiled or roasted baby potatoes and lightly cooked Savoy cabbage.

Serves 8

FOR THE BEEF STOCK

- 4 lb. meaty beef bones, such as ribs or marrow bones
- ¼ cup vegetable or sunflower oil
- 1 large yellow onion, quartered
- 1 large carrot, thickly sliced
- 1 medium leek, thickly sliced
- 1 medium celery stalk, thickly sliced
- 3½ oz. white mushrooms, quartered (1 cup)

- 1 cup dry vermouth or dry white wine
- 2 medium tomatoes, halved
- 10 sprigs fresh thyme
- 5 sprigs fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 3 dried bay leaves

FOR THE DUXELLES

- 1 oz. (2 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 Tbs. vegetable or sunflower oil
- ¼ cup finely chopped shallots
- 1½ cups finely chopped portobello mushrooms (from 4 large caps; remove the stems and gills before chopping, preferably in a food processor)

- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

FOR THE MADEIRA SAUCE

- 1 cup Madeira
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 oz. (2 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, diced

FOR THE CRÊPES

- 2½ oz. (½ cup) unbleached all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 large eggs
- ¾ cup whole milk
- 1 oz. (2 Tbs.) unsalted butter

suggested that the dish was named for its resemblance to the Duke's favored footwear—the Wellington boot. But what self-respecting chef would name his creation after someone's clumpy footwear? More likely, the beef Wellington was an anglicized version of the traditional French *boeuf en croûte* (beef in puff pastry).

Where there's no mystery whatsoever is in the Wellington's long-lasting appeal. It's a gorgeous, classy party dish that blends a wealth of fabulous flavors. The beauty of this recipe is that you can make from scratch as many of the Wellington's components as you like, including homemade beef stock for the Madeira sauce, the chicken liver pâté, and the puff pastry (go to FineCooking.com/extras). So, if you are up for the ultimate dinner party challenge, clear your calendar, roll up your sleeves, and dust off your rolling pin. The Wellington awaits.



3 4



FOR ASSEMBLY

- 3 lb. center-cut beef tenderloin, trimmed, side muscle removed
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tsp. vegetable or sunflower oil
- 2/3 cup chicken liver pâté (store-bought or homemade; recipe on p. 58)
- 1 lb. puff pastry (store-bought or homemade; recipe at FineCooking.com/extras), thawed overnight in the refrigerator if frozen
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 1 tsp. unsalted butter, softened

MAKE THE BEEF STOCK

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F.

Arrange the beef bones in a single layer in a large flameproof roasting pan. Drizzle with 2 Tbs. of the oil and then rub the oil all over the bones. Roast, turning the bones every 20 minutes, until deep brown, about 1 hour **1**.

Put the remaining 2 Tbs. oil and the onion, carrot, leek, celery, and mushrooms in an 8-quart stockpot. Cover and cook over low heat, stirring once or twice, until tender, about 15 minutes. Uncover, raise the heat to medium, and cook until the vegetables are browned in spots, about 3 minutes.

Transfer the bones to the pot with the vegetables, leaving any rendered fat in the pan.

Discard the fat from the pan, and set the pan over medium heat. Add the vermouth and bring to a boil, using a wooden spoon to scrape up any stuck-on bits from the bottom of the pan. Add the liquid to the bones and vegetables. Add about 1 gallon of water, and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Add the tomatoes, thyme, parsley, and bay leaves. Reduce the heat to low and simmer gently, uncovered—the stock should barely bubble—for 6 hours, topping up the water level occasionally to keep the solids covered.

Strain the stock through a fine sieve into a large bowl and cool to room temperature. Chill overnight; then skim off the layer of congealed fat. You'll have about 7 cups of stock. (The stock can be refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen for up to 2 months.)

MAKE THE DUXELLES

Heat the butter and oil in a 10-inch skillet over low heat. Add the shallots and cook, stirring often, until translucent, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the mushrooms, stir well, and raise the heat to medium. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms have cooked down to a thick, almost black mixture, about 15 minutes. Season with a pinch of salt and a few grinds of pepper. Stir in the parsley **2**, then transfer to a small bowl and cool completely. (The duxelles can be refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen for up to 2 months.)

BEGIN THE MADEIRA SAUCE

Bring 6 cups of the stock to a boil in a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat and boil until reduced to 2 cups, 20 to 25 minutes. Add the Madeira and continue boiling until the liquid is again reduced to 2 cups, about 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. (The sauce can be prepared to this point up to 1 day ahead. Finish the sauce just before serving the Wellington.)

MAKE THE CRÊPES

In a large bowl, whisk the flour and salt. Make a well in the center, break in the eggs, and add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the milk. Gently whisk the eggs and milk, gradually incorporating the flour. Slowly whisk in the remaining milk to make a smooth batter. (The batter can be covered and set aside for up to an hour at this point.)

Melt the butter in a 10-inch skillet over medium-low heat. Swirl the pan to coat with the butter; pour the excess butter out into a

small bowl. Whisk 1 Tbs. of the melted butter into the batter. Reserve the rest for greasing the pan between crêpes. Increase the heat to medium high and pour $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the batter into the skillet. Swirl so the batter thinly and evenly coats the base of the pan.

Cook until the crêpe is spotted with brown on the underside **3**, about 1 minute, then flip and cook the other side until lightly browned, 30 seconds to 1 minute more. Repeat with the remaining batter, greasing the pan off the heat as necessary. Transfer the crêpes to a plate, separating them with sheets of parchment, and cool. You'll need 4 crêpes. (The crêpes may be made 1 day ahead. Wrap well and refrigerate.)

ASSEMBLE AND BAKE THE WELLINGTON

Remove the beef from the refrigerator about an hour ahead so it has time to lose its chill.

Pat the beef dry and season all over with salt



5



6

chicken liver pâté

This pâté is unlike any store-bought pâté you've tried—it's rich but mild, with a dense, ultra-smooth texture. This recipe yields 2 ramekins of pâté; use one for the Wellington and save the other to enjoy with crackers.

Yields 1½ cups

- 4 oz. (½ cup) unsalted butter, melted; more for the ramekins
- 9 oz. chicken livers (about 1 cup)

2 medium shallots, chopped (¼ cup)

1 medium clove garlic, chopped

3 sprigs fresh thyme

2½ Tbs. Madeira

2½ Tbs. brandy

2 large eggs

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper



and pepper. Heat the oil in a 12-inch skillet over high heat until very hot. Sear the beef until it is evenly browned all over (don't worry about the ends), 2 to 3 minutes per side.

Transfer the beef to a baking sheet and cool.

In a medium bowl, mash the pâté and the duxelles with a fork until they form a soft paste.

Lay 4 crêpes on a clean work surface, overlapping them just enough to give you a 13x13-inch roughly square surface. Dot the pâté mixture over the crêpes, then use an offset spatula to spread it evenly across the crêpes' surface **4**.

Place the tenderloin in the center of the crêpes and carefully wrap them around the filet **5**, pressing and molding them into place. Trim off any excess crêpe at the ends.

If using store-bought puff pastry that's packaged as 2 sheets, fuse the sheets together by slightly overlapping them and lightly rolling over the seam until adhered.

On a lightly floured surface, roll out the puff pastry to a 13x16-inch rectangle (for store-bought puff, roll in the direction of the seam).

Transfer the wrapped beef to the center of the pastry and tuck any crêpes that have come loose back into place. Bring the pastry up around the beef, smoothing out any air pockets **6**. Brush some of the beaten egg along the bottom edge of the seam and then press gently to seal **7**; trim off any excess. Seal the pastry similarly at the ends.

Lightly grease a large baking sheet with the butter. Lift the Wellington onto the sheet, seam side down. Refrigerate for at least 15 minutes and up to 3 hours. (If refrigerating longer than 1 hour, let the Wellington sit at room temperature for 1 hour before baking.)

At least 20 minutes before baking, position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 475°F.

Brush the Wellington with the remaining beaten egg. Using a sharp knife, score the surface of the pastry with diagonal lines, being careful not to cut all the way through the pastry **8**. Put the Wellington in the oven and immediately reduce the temperature to 425°F. Roast for 10 minutes, then reduce the heat to 400°F and roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center of the Wellington registers 135°F for medium rare, 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer to a carving board and let the Wellington rest for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, finish the sauce: Heat the sauce in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat. When it begins to simmer, reduce the heat to low and whisk in the butter a few pieces at a time. Do not allow it to boil. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Thickly slice the Wellington and serve it with the sauce.



Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Butter two 8-oz. ramekins.

Inspect the chicken livers; trim and discard any green-yellow patches. Cut each liver in half.

Put the shallots, garlic, thyme, Madeira, and brandy in a small pot and bring to a boil over medium heat. Simmer, checking frequently, until reduced to about 1 Tbs. of liquid, 2 to 3 minutes. Strain and reserve the liquid.

Put the chicken livers in a food processor. Add the eggs, the reserved liquid, ½ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper. Process until smooth, about 30 seconds, gradually pouring in the melted butter while the motor is running. Strain the mixture into the ramekins.

Put the ramekins in a 9x13-inch baking dish and pour in enough hot water to come about 1 inch up the sides of the ramekins. Bake until puffed, golden-brown, and set, 25 to 30 minutes.

Remove the ramekins from the roasting pan and cool completely. If not using immediately, cover tightly with plastic wrap once the pâté is cool, and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

Sophie Grigson is an award-winning British food writer and cookbook author. □



Watch a video on making Beef Wellington and get a recipe for puff pastry at FineCooking.com/extras.