



Cottage  
pie  
alla  
Bond\*



# The story

Cottage pie is one of those truly comforting meals that my mum made almost every week.

The golden threads were: a viscous beefy base with a clear hint of tomato and Worcestershire sauce, bright green peas, small diced carrots, and a fluffy duvet of mash, raked with a fork and sprinkled liberally with breadcrumbs and cheese for a crisp topping.

This is my homage to that homely pie, employing a method that maximizes umami every step of the way, including a little tip from Heston Blumenthal about the value of using star anise to boost meaty flavours.

– Brandon

\* A longstanding nickname for Brandon because of his ability to master what he puts his hand to, from carving spoons to mixing a Martini. – Nikki

# The method

The best way to prep this dish is to execute a double-play with the beef cooking off in one pan and the soffritto gently sweating off in another. When they are done, you blend the two together, add some stock, and let it simmer away until it's the gooey consistency of childhood dreams!

# The soffritto

The soffritto will require quite a lot of chopping, so start there. You'll need:

50g butter + one tablespoon olive oil  
two large onions, finely chopped  
two medium carrots, half cut into 8-10mm cubes (use the central part for straight lines), half diced very fine (use the remaining outer rounded edges)  
one large stick of celery, finely diced  
one star anise

NB: the total weight of the soffritto ingredients should be at least 500g.

Set aside the cubed carrots for later. Put the rest of the finely chopped veggies, the butter, oil, and star anise into a pot, set on a medium-low heat and put the lid on. It shouldn't brown, just sizzle gently, and you're looking to sweat it off for about 15 minutes.

Remove the lid and cook off for another 15 minutes before adding:

**two tablespoons of minced garlic**  
**two teaspoons of mixed herbs**

And keep cooking all that off for another 30 minutes. The end result should be a soft, amalgamated soffritto, slightly caramelised and sweetly fragrant.

Now add **one and a half tablespoons of flour**, stir it around to mix it in, cook it off a bit, and then take off the heat.

# The mince

PS. This quantity will happily feed four.

500g beef mince

two tablespoons tomato paste

250ml (one cup) beef stock

Salt and pepper

I normally start this part once the soffritto is sizzling away in its pot.

Season the mince and drop it into a very hot, large iron pan, a bit at a time so it browns immediately. Keep going for about 25 minutes until the moisture in the beef has evaporated and it starts to sear, brown and crackle on the bottom of the pan.

Then add the tomato paste, stir it in and keep cooking for a good five minutes until it develops a distinctly deep, rusty aroma. Deglaze the pan with the beef stock and remove from heat.

# The combo

It's time to bring it all together. Add the deglazed mince mixture to the soffritto in the pot, together with:

250ml (one cup) beef stock

one bay leaf

two tablespoons Worcestershire sauce

the cubed carrots

Salt and pepper to taste

Simmer away on the stovetop letting the carrots cook and the stock reduce to a seriously rich, sticky gravy. You're looking for the moment when there's no liquid left in the bottom of the pot as you stir it around but it's still glossy and moist. That could take up to 45 minutes.

Don't rush it and if you need to add a little bit of water in order to keep going a bit longer so the carrots cook, that's okay, but the quantities given

usually do the job perfectly. Feel free to season as you go. If you like things even more savoury, just add a splash of Worcestershire!

If you get it right, the mince should be tender but still have structure. The final touch is to stir through:

half a cup of frozen peas

The peas will cook together with the dish when it bakes off.

## The mash

Whatever your go-to mash recipe is, go for it. It is, however, worth thinking about your preferred mash-to-mince ratio. We find that with this decidedly umami rich filling, you can get away with almost an equal 'depth' of potato topping to mince, but you may like less or more.

The most useful piece of advice we can share on this point is this: you can always find something to do with left-over mash, so rather make more than you need, not less!

The standard *cook. better.* mash renders an almost perfect quantity of mash to satisfy our 50/50 goal and goes something like this:

one kilogram of boiling potatoes

125ml (a half cup) milk

60g butter

Salt

White pepper

Put the potatoes in a large pot of cold water, bring to the boil, turn down the heat to a simmer and keep going until you can push a skewer through without resistance (about 45 minutes).

Combine the butter and milk in a pot and warm up until the butter melts.



Skin the taters, mash them up (use a ricer if you have one), then return to the pot and put back on the heat for a minute or two, stirring around to let off some steam and dry out the potato.

Then add the milk and butter and stir around briskly. Add the salt and white pepper to your taste and stir.

## The big finish

Heat up your oven to 180°C.

Put the mince into a baking dish (our dedicated cottage pie dish is 24cm x 17cm x 6cm) and smooth over the top to make it even.

Now spoon over the mash as evenly as you can and use a fork as if you were raking a Japanese sand garden, making bold rake marks on the surface. This will ensure that you get some crisp ridges when it bakes off.

Sprinkle the top with a light grating of cheese, mum used cheddar. To up the umami, and since we're Italophiles, we go with Parmigiano, but it's up to you.

And if you really want to maximise the crunchy top, finish off with a dusting of breadcrumbs and a crack of black pepper.

Bake off for 20 minutes. Salivate.



Brandon and Nikki

---

Join us and follow how to cook without recipes at: [supertasters.substack.com](https://supertasters.substack.com)