

BRAISED PORK AND PRUNES WITH SLOW-COOKED RED CABBAGE

A low cost easy winter casserole which virtually cooks itself and fills the house with warm spicy aromas – so welcoming on cold and windy days!

3 1/2kg / 7lb piece of boned and rolled shoulder of pork – trimmed of all rind and excess fat
16 x no-soak stoned prunes
4 or 5 stems of fresh marjoram
a little olive oil
freshly ground salt and black pepper
1 red cabbage
1 large onion – peeled and finely chopped
3 cloves garlic – peeled and finely chopped
3 dessert apples – peeled, cored and diced small – (I like to use aromatic ones which will hold their shape during cooking)
4 tbsp olive oil
3 tbsp. amontillado sherry
3 tbsp red wine vinegar
3 level tbsp. brown sugar
grated fresh nutmeg
2 cinnamon sticks broken into several pieces to release the flavour
600ml / 1 pt pork stock to moisten during cooking

Pre-heat oven to 200C, gas mark 6

You will need a very large deep casserole dish with a lid into which the pork will fit comfortably

Using an apple corer or thin sharp knife, cut a cylinder of pork away right through the centre of the joint. Stuff this with the prunes and leaves from the marjoram. Season the joint. Heat a cast pan or griddle. Add a smear of oil and sear the pork on all sides. Trim outer leaves of cabbage. Cut in half and remove middle core with a sharp knife. Finely slice the cabbage.

Heat a large pan, add the oil and then the onion and garlic. Cook until soft. Add the apple and cabbage and stir to coat. Add sherry and wine vinegar and boil to drive off the acidity. Reduce heat and add the sugar to dissolve it in the liquor. Season and add the nutmeg and cinnamon. Turn into the casserole dish. Sit the pork on top and then pour over a quarter of the hot stock

Cook in the hot oven for about 1/2 hour and then reduce the heat to 160, gas mark 3 putting the lid on the casserole, and cook gently for a further 2 1/2 hours approximately, topping up with stock as necessary. The red cabbage needs to be moist but not runny and wet. The pork will take up the flavours of the spices and the cabbage will absorb the pork juices to give a wonderful amalgamation of flavours.

When the pork is meltingly tender, remove and serve sliced with the red cabbage. Mashed potatoes and fried apple rings would be perfect to serve with it.