

Olla Podrida

An easy Elizabethan dish for camping

Original Recipe

To Make an Excellent Olla Podrida

"To make an excellent olla podrida, which is the only principal dish of boiled meat which is esteemed in all Spain, you shall take a very large vessel, pot or kettle, and, filling it with water, you shall set it on the fire, and first put in good thick gobbets of well fed beef, and, being ready to boil, scum your pot; when the beef is half boiled, you shall put in potato roots, turnips, and skirrets: also like gobbets of the best mutton, and the best pork; after they have boiled a while, you shall put in the like gobbets of venison, red and fallow, if you have them; then the like gobbets of veal, kid, and lamb; a little space after these, the foreparts of a fat pig, and a crammed pullet; then put in spinach, endive, succory, marigold leaves and flowers, lettuce, violet leaves, strawberry leaves, bugloss, and scallions, all whole and unchoped; then when they have boiled a while, put in a partridge and a chicken chopped in pieces, with quails, rails, black birds, larks, sparrows, and other small birds, all being well tenderley boiled; season up the broth with good store of sugar, cloves, mace, cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg mixed together in a good quantity of verjuice and salt, and so stir up the pot well from the bottom, then dish it upon great chargers, or long Spanish dishes made in the fashion of our English wooden trays, with good store of sippets in the bottom; the cover the meat all over with prunes, raisins, currants, and blanched almonds, boiled in a thing by themselves; then cover the fruit and the whole boiled herbs with slices of oranges and lemons, and lay the roots around about the sides of the dish, and strew good store of sugar over all, and so serve it forth."

The English Housewife, Gervase Markham.

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The Camping Redaction

This interpretation is massively simplified to substantially reduce costs but also to reflect availability of ingredients. Admittedly, the flavours suffer, but even this pared down dish is a flavoursome and popular camp meal. (Particularly when the diners get to the fruity bits that always manage to sink to the bottom of the bowl.) This version is also managed in one pot, with very few utensils, helping make clean-up that much quicker in the gathering dusk after dinner.

Again, all amounts are approximate, so taste the dish as you go and adjust the flavours to suit. In our experience we have never managed to make the same dish twice as the choices of meat (and cuts), vegetables and fruit are often dictated by availability and cost. For example, we frequently use the potatoes and parsnips to substantially bulk out the meat, and we have also successfully substituted onions and spring onions for scallions.

Ingredients:

- Stewing beef
- Mutton
- Chicken
- Pork
- Venison
- White wine
- Potatoes
- Parsnips / Turnips
- Spinach
- Scallions / Leeks
- Prunes
- Currants / Raisins
- Oranges / Lemons
- Sugar
- Cinnamon
- Cloves
- Mace
- Ginger
- Nutmeg
- Salt

Method:

Place the bite sized chunks of beef and/or mutton and/or venison in a large, heavy pot with a splash of wine and cover with water. Bring to the boil. Add chopped potatoes and parsnips when you feels so inclined, followed by the chicken and/or pork once the vegetables are on their way. Add the scallions or spring onions at this point. If you are using mature the spinach leaves, now is the time to add them.

Keep an eye on things, and when the stew looks to be coming together, add the dried fruit (a good handful of each per four diners), spices and thinly sliced citrus fruit. (If you have baby spinach, you might like to add it at this point.) Stir it well and leave to simmer together for 10 or so minutes and taste test.

NOTE: We have found that some types of potato don't suffer prolonged boiling and break down during cooking. If this happens, just give it a good stir and let the potatoes thicken the liquid of the stew. It is still tasty, but can stick to the bottom of the pot if the heat is too high or the pot is not stirred regularly.

Serving:

Place the meat and large vegetable pieces in a large serving bowl then ladle the liquid and sunken fruit bits over them.

This stew goes very well with bread.

Pre-event Preparation.

If you feel so inclined, you can make the basic stew (beef, mutton, venison, potatoes, parsnips, pork and chicken) and freeze it. Then all you need do on the day is defrost the stew, get it boiling and add the remaining vegetables, fruit and spices.