

Oxtail

Wonderfully delicious and comforting. Throughout the BSE scare I used to buy these, as the spinal cord of a cow doesn't extend to its tail – my friends were amazed that I could buy 'waggers' (as we used to call them when we were young).

You will notice this dish has carrots; even I, with my aversion to carrots, concede that you can't cook oxtail without them.

Cook your oxtail the day before you want to eat it. It will be better for the standing, and you will be able to skim off the excess fat. (For however hard you trim them, there always seems to be some.) One oxtail serves either three or two hungry people. When they serve it at the Cholmondeley Arms, they simply physically cannot cook enough to meet the demand.

1 oxtail	4 carrots, chopped
4 dessertspoons flour	4 onions, chopped
cayenne pepper	4 sticks celery, chopped
salt and pepper	sprig of thyme
pinch of mustard powder	½ bottle red wine
1 tablespoon oil or dripping	300ml stock
	dumplings – see page 76

Trim off any surplus fat on the oxtail. Put the flour and the seasonings in a plastic bag, add the oxtail and shake until it is coated.

Heat the fat in a heavy pan and brown the oxtail. Throw in the chopped vegetables and the thyme and pour on the wine and stock. Simmer on top of the stove or in the oven at 150°C/300°F/gas mark 2 for hours. Remove and leave to cool overnight.

Skim the fat, then cook on top of the stove or in the oven at 160°C/325°F/gas mark 3 for a further 1½ hours. Add more stock, if necessary. Add the dumplings 20 minutes before the end of cooking.