

So-called *variety meats* have suffered a decline in popularity, in part because the old-fashioned kitchen wisdom that used to be passed down by word-of-mouth on how to cook them has died out. But particularly at this cold, dark time of year, the velvety texture and deep flavor of oxtail is very welcome, and we're here to describe how to deal with it.

Simple Oxtail Ragù
Oxtail Stew
Oxtail Minestrone

Mississippi Market's oxtail come from pastured cows and are packed frozen. If you've not used oxtail before, you may feel daunted by *how much* there can be in a single package—the answer: sometimes an entire oxtail! Happily, you'll be using that much in these three succulent recipes. Our oxtail are modestly priced for the exceptional flavor that oxtail stew and soup provide.

A bit about the distinctiveness of oxtail: it consists not only the bones in a cow's tail but the connective tissue between those bones and the meat surrounding them. Cooked slowly, the connective tissue melts into a velvety gelatin that bathes and tenderizes the meat. For deep, memorably beefy flavor, oxtail is almost unmatched.

These three recipes follow a sequence: in the first (**Simple Oxtail Ragù**), you'll be making oxtail stock that can be used in the second (**Oxtail Stew**). Remaining from those two dishes will be incorporated into the third dish (**Oxtail Minestrone**). Please don't be put off by the length of the ingredients list: these are very common inhabitants of your pantry and freezer, and the vegetables called for needn't be fresh to be very satisfying—Sno-Pac, our local brand of frozen veggies, works very well. Serve any of these dishes with our fresh-every-day Rustica or BC³ breads, and you'll have a meal that sticks to your ribs!

Day 1: Simple Oxtail Ragù

*This cozy, easy dish repays you with a thick, wonderful sauce that begs to be eaten over pasta or polenta. Reserve 1 1/2 cups of the stock to use as stock for the next dish, **Oxtail Stew**.*

Ingredients: 5 lbs.oxtail, joints separated
 1/2 c. all-purpose flour
 3 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
 5 Tbsp. butter
 3 red onions, sliced thinly
 2 large cloves garlic, minced
 1 c. cold water
 Red wine
 1 dried bay leaf
 1 tsp. dried oregano
 1/2 tsp. ground fennel
 Sea salt and freshly ground pepper
 4 Muir Glen canned plum tomatoes
 Handful of black, oil-cured olives
 Fresh lemon juice or apple-cider vinegar
 Fresh parsley and basil
 1 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil

- Dry joints very thoroughly and flour them by shaking them in a paper bag with 1/2 c. flour. Set oxtail aside until pan is ready.

- Heat up a large skillet until a bead of water dances across it and evaporates; then add olive oil and butter. Brown the oxtail a few joints at a time until they brown and crisp on both sides. Move them into a Dutch oven or soup pot as you finish browning them. Repeat until all are removed.
- Add a bit more butter or olive oil to the skillet and add the onions. When they have become soft and transparent, add the garlic. *(Don't add the garlic any earlier, or it may burn, which will make the entire dish bitter.)*
- Scrape onion and garlic into Dutch oven; add 1 c. of water and enough red wine to come about 1/3 of the way up the oxtail. Add bay leaf crumbled into several pieces, bring liquid to a boil, skim off any foam, cover and lower the heat to a simmer. Cook for about 3 hours, until the joints are very tender and the stock is tasty or pressure-cook for 30 minutes.
- Remove joints to a bowl and strain the stock. **Reserve 1 1/2 c. of stock for use in the next recipe, along with half of the joints.**
- Take meat off half the joints and add as chopped bits to remaining broth; add oregano, fennel, tomatoes, and olives. Simmer slowly for 30 minutes, then taste; if you need to reduce the sauce further, raise the heat and do so now.
- The ragù may need a bit of acid to brighten its flavor. If it does, add lemon juice, cider vinegar, or a bit of lemon zest. Taste again, and if it suits you, add chopped parsley and basil.
- Serve over pasta or polenta.

Day 2: Oxtail Stew

This makes a magnificent New Year's Day main dish if you follow the tradition of having people in for a meal on the first of January. Like all complex dishes, this one tastes better on the second and subsequent days after you make it. It also freezes well.

Ingredients: 3 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
 2 red onions
 1 large clove of good garlic, like Georgian Fire
 2 sweet carrots
 1 small turnip
 2 cloves
 2–3 lbs. cooked oxtail, joints separated
 1 1/2 c. oxtail stock
 Red wine (Rioja or Chianti—something relatively light)
 1 tsp. fresh thyme
 1 tsp. fresh ginger
 Sea salt
 Freshly ground black pepper
 2 Tbsp. flour kneaded into 2 Tbsp. butter
 Fresh parsley

- Heat up a skillet on medium and then add 3 Tbs. of extra-virgin olive oil. When it begins to shimmer, add onions, thinly sliced, and cook until transparent and soft. Add smashed clove of garlic and cook until you can start to smell the garlic. Remove all of the ingredients to a Dutch oven.
- Slice carrots and turnip into the pot, and add the cloves, joints of oxtail, oxtail stock, and enough red wine to come about 1/3 of the way up the joints of meat. Cook until the carrots and turnips are soft.
- Taste, and then season with chopped fresh thyme, grated fresh ginger, salt, and pepper.
- To thicken the sauce, knead 2 Tbs. of flour into 2 Tbs. of butter and add this, a bit at a time, to the stock, using a whisk to dissolve it into the liquid.
- Serve with small boiled red or yellow potatoes; sprinkle with chopped fresh parsley.

Day 3: Oxtail Minestrone

Perhaps it's optimistic to think that you'll have leftovers for this third dish, but if you do, here's how to turn them into a deeply flavored and memorable soup crammed with healthy vegetables.

Ingredients: 2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
1 slice of bacon, finely chopped
1 large yellow onion, chopped
1 stalk of celery, chopped
2 carrots, chopped
1–2 cloves of garlic, minced
4–5 Muir Glen canned plum tomatoes plus juice
1 c. light red wine (Chianti, Rioja)
1/2 tsp. dried oregano
1–2 dried bay leaves
1 can cannellini beans, rinsed
1 can garbanzo beans, rinsed
Leftover oxtail meat from both or either previous dish
1/2 cup thinly sliced green cabbage
1 c. green beans, fresh or frozen
1/3 c. uncooked pasta (shells, fusilli, orzo)
1–2 zucchini, sliced
1 c. spinach, fresh or frozen
1/4 c. each fresh parsley and basil, roughly chopped
1/2 c. coarsely grated Parmesan
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper
Extra-virgin olive oil

- Heat olive oil on medium, then add finely chopped or sliced bacon or pancetta; cook until the meat starts to brown. Add chopped or sliced onion, celery, carrot and garlic and cook until the vegetables start to smell wonderful. Scrape ingredients into Dutch oven or other heavy stovetop pot.
- Add tomatoes and juice, red wine, dried oregano and bay leaf, beans, oxtail, and cabbage. Pour in enough water to come to just below top of ingredients. Turn heat to simmer, and cook, covered, until cabbage and carrots are soft.
- Add green beans; cook until tender (about 6 minutes). Add pasta and cook until tender, then add zucchini and spinach; cook for 2 minutes.
- Turn off heat, add parsley, basil and Parmesan. Stir and taste; add salt and pepper to taste.
- Serve with a small sprinkling of olive oil over each bowl.