

## **Mulled Venison Stew and Pink Onion Pickle**

Serves 6

1 dried chipotle chilli (or a tbsp of chipotle chilli paste)  
200ml boiling water (if using the dried chilli)  
1 kg venison shoulder or beef shin, cut into 2-3cm chunks  
4 tbsps plain flour  
1.5 tbsps olive oil  
100g smoked pancetta lardons or streaky bacon, chopped into lardons  
1 onion, finely chopped  
2 celery sticks, strings removed and finely chopped  
1 large carrot, finely chopped  
1 bay leaf  
2 sprigs of thyme  
2 tbsps chopped flat leaf parsley, plus an extra large handful for garnish  
1 cinnamon stick  
A nice pinch of cumin seeds  
1 star anise  
1 tbsp tomato puree  
400ml full bodied, spicy red wine such as Malbec  
Grated zest and juice of ½ an orange  
300ml chicken or beef stock  
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

### **For the pink pickled onions**

1 small red onion, thinly sliced  
3 black peppercorns  
1 clove  
1 tsp caster sugar  
½ tsp salt  
4 tbsp cider vinegar

1. Put the dried chilli in a bowl with the boiling water and leave to soak for at least 20 minutes. Drain, keeping the soaking liquor, and roughly chop the chilli. Dry the venison chunks with kitchen paper, season the flour with salt and pepper, then toss the meat into the flour and coat all over.

2. Heat the oil in a large ovenproof casserole dish over a medium-high heat, add the pancetta/lardons and fry for 4-5 minutes, until they are lightly coloured, starting to caramelize and some fat has been rendered out. Transfer the lardons to a bowl with a slotted spoon and set aside, removing any burned bits from the pan. Now, working in batches, brown the venison in the fat in the pan for a few minutes on each side, patiently turning the meat so it has a good colour all over. Add the browned meat to the pancetta.
3. Slide the vegetables and bay leaf into the pancetta fat along with the chopped chilli, herbs and spices. Cook over a low-medium heat for 10-15 minutes, adding a little extra oil if necessary, then stir in the tomato puree. Cook out for a minute or two, then pour over the red wine and orange juice and zest and turn up the heat, scraping the pan to release any tasty gubbinsy bits stuck to the bottom.
4. Preheat the oven to 180 celsius fan/gas mark 6.
5. Return the venison and pancetta to the casserole dish, pour over the chilli soaking liquor and stock and stir, bringing to the boil. Cover with a lid or foil and roast in the oven for 1 and a half to two hours, until meat is meltingly tender and the sauce is thick and rich. Taste for seasoning, and adjust accordingly.
6. While the venison is cooking, make the pink pickled onions. Place the sliced onion in a heatproof bowl, cover with boiling water and leave for a minute or two. Drain off the water, then add the spices, sugar, salt and cider vinegar and stir to combine. When you're ready to serve, drain on some kitchen paper, to get rid of some of the brine.
7. Serve the venison with the pink pickled onions and some parsley to garnish. I love it on piles of mash, cut through with sour cream.