

Pörkölt

after Felicity Cloake (The Guardian)

If you order a gulyás in Hungary, you'll get a hearty bowl of soup, so if you're after the richly flavoured, brick-red stew known elsewhere as a goulash, go for a pörkölt instead. Linguistic confusion aside, in truth, the two dishes share much the same flavour profile – onions, peppers, paprika and meat – and are equally good at warming up a winter's evening, whether you're in Budapest or Belfast.

Though most often seen with beef (shin is probably the most authentic), this stew may be made with venison, lamb, carp, offal or chicken thighs. Here, I've used pork shoulder, but you can substitute any of the above, but steer clear of anything that's too lean and adjust the cooking time accordingly. (Note that if the meat does not have a generous coating of fat, you'll need less of it: 600-800g, cut into chunks). Though you can make this dish with ordinary supermarket paprika (not the hot or smoked sort), from disappointing experience I'd advise getting the fruitier, redder Hungarian stuff that can be found in eastern European shops and online.

The recipe halves or doubles well, though with doubled quantities use 750ml water rather than 800ml.

Prep 15 min

Cook 3 hr

Serves 4

Ingredients

1kg pork shoulder (see above)	2 tbsp lard, dripping, goose or duck fat
4 tbsp sweet Hungarian paprika (see above)	1 tsp caraway seeds (optional)
2 tbsp flour, or cornflour	1 tbsp tomato purée
1 tsp salt	Juice of 1 lemon
2 onions	150ml soured cream (optional)
1 large green pepper	1 small bunch chives (optional)

Method

- Heat the oven to 160°C (140°C fan)/325°F/gas 3. Peel and thickly slice the onions, and cut the pepper into chunky rounds, removing the pith and seeds as you go. Though green pepper is a key element (and if you can find the pointed pale green peppers favoured in Hungary, all the better), if you're not a fan, you can swap in the red sort.
- Mix the paprika, flour and salt into a bowl, and coat the meat (cut into smallish bite-sized portions) with the mix.
- Melt the lard or a substitute fat in a heavy-based casserole on a medium-high heat. If you don't have a suitable lidded pot that can go on the hob, too, use a frying pan for this step, then transfer the contents to an oven dish later.

- Brown the meat in batches, setting any excess spiced flour aside for now and being careful not to overcrowd the pan, until golden and crusted on all sides, then transfer to a bowl and repeat with the remaining meat. Turn down the heat, add a little more fat and the onions to the pot, then cook, stirring, until slightly softened. Add the caraway, if using.
- Add 400ml water to the leftover flour and spice mixture (thus ensuring that you have a consistent starch/liquid mix, no matter how much has clung to the meat), and pour this onto the onions, adding the tomato purée into the mix, and cook for a couple of minutes, stirring to scrape off any flour and meaty bits stuck to the bottom of the pan. Return the meat to the pan along with any of its resting juices.
- Bring the liquid to a simmer. If you've been using a frying pan and are transferring it to an ovenproof casserole dish, do so at this point. Cover and put in the oven for about two hours, or until the meat is very tender — begin checking at 90 minutes, and move on to the next step once it's ready.
- Stir in the lemon juice and green pepper (sliced thinly — if you must have chunky pepper, add it with the caraway at step 4, but you really don't want it to be mushy), then return the pot to the oven for another 20-30 minutes, uncovered unless the gravy is already well reduced. Check the seasoning, and adjust if necessary. If your meat is very fatty, you may want to pass the sauce through a gravy separator or, if making ahead, chill and lift off the solid fat before reheating.
- Serve the stew with soured cream and chopped chives on the side, for people to help themselves. Pörkölt is good with lightly crushed buttered boiled potatoes, or dumplings, or buttered egg noodles. It also reheats and freezes well.