

Bobotie

A South African traditional dish

History

Bobotie is one of the very few dishes that is truly South African, and a mix of our wide ethnic diversity. If you were to ask me what my family grew up eating, since I have mostly British heritage, I would say roast beef, roast potatoes, Yorkshire pudding and trifle. My Indian friend mostly ate curries and samosas, my Afrikaans friend would invite me over for a braai (BBQ) and grill the biggest lamb chops and boerewors (our SA kind of brats, but made in a long, un-cut circle of sausage). Our African locals would enjoy chicken's feet, pap (a kind of maize meal) and chakalaka (a spicy tomato bean relish), etc. But most will have some version of bobotie in their recipe books, passed down from grandma. It's also known to have been a dish some would make using leftover roast beef from Sunday and ground up to make bobotie. So – if you asked a South African what their favorite national dish is – well, it's complicated, and probably depends on your heritage!

Here is a description of the dish, and how it came to our sunny shores, written by Reuben Riffel, a local SA chef :

I almost feel uncomfortable describing bobotie as a type of meat loaf because it's so much more than that. A Cape Town specialty and one of South Africa's best-known dishes, it generally consists of spiced meat—normally beef, sometimes lamb—mixed with chutney and tamarind paste and milk-soaked bread, poured into a dish, topped with a custard of egg and milk, and baked until it's golden on top. The dish's origins go back to the mid-17th century, when the first Malay slaves were brought to the Cape of Good Hope, and with them, their cooking. At the same time Dutch colonizers brought a taste for sweet things—hence the golden raisins mixed in with the meat; Indian immigrants, who began arriving in the late 19th century, contributed warming curry spices, giving rise to the classically Cape Malay balancing act between sour, spicy, sweet, and savory flavors that makes bobotie so satisfying. Often almonds are part of the recipe, and even bananas, but there are limits to what you can do and still call it bobotie. I believe the traditional way is the best way.

Recipe

The bobotie can be pre-prepared and stored (covered with clingwrap) in the refrigerator or freezer until needed. Add the topping just before it goes into the oven, otherwise it will be absorbed by the meat mixture and not form a golden crust on top when baked.

1 T vegetable oil
1 ½ lb ground beef/lamb
2 cloves garlic, crushed

1 T butter
2 small or 1 large onion, chopped
1 cup grated apple or carrot

Spices :

2 t curry powder (or more, to taste)	1 t coriander
½ t ginger	½ t dried mixed herbs
1 t turmeric	½ t cinnamon
1 t sugar	pinch cayenne pepper

Seasonings :

1-1 ½ t salt	¼ t pepper
1 T wine vinegar or lemon juice	2 slices bread, soaked in water, lightly squeezed and mashed with a fork
2 bay or lemon leaves	

Topping :

1 cup sour cream or ½ plain whole yoghurt, ½ sour cream (not non-fat)
 ½ t salt and good grind of pepper
 2 eggs

Stir-fry ground beef/lamb in oil and butter until loose and crumbly.

Add chopped onion and stir-fry until limp and glazed.

Add garlic, grated apple/carrot and spices.

Continue cooking very briefly to develop flavours.

Season with salt, pepper and wine vinegar or lemon juice to taste.

Add softened, mashed bread. Taste for salt and spices. You can add more curry if desired.

Spread mixture into ovenproof dish. Tuck the bay leaves into mixture.

Beat together all the ingredients for topping with a fork.

Pour topping over bobotie and immediately bake, uncovered at 375 deg F for 35 mins, until custard topping is firm and golden brown.

Serve with yellow rice, chutney, sliced bananas and sambals.

SAMBALS (condiments associated with Malay or Indonesian cooking)

Yellow Rice

1 ½ cups long grain rice (or basmati) 2 ½ cups water (per directions on rice package)
 1 t salt 2 t turmeric
 2 sticks cinnamon (opt) ½ cup seedless raisins (opt)
 2 T honey or golden syrup (SA brand called Lions at HyVee or World Market)
 2 T butter

Boil rice in water with salt and turmeric until done.

In the last 5 mins or so, add cinnamon and raisins.

When done, fork honey and butter through (to taste)

Tomato/Onion sambal Chop 1-2 tomatoes

Add finely chopped onion (approx. ¼ of a small one – to taste)

Optional : I like to add approx. 1 cup chopped cucumber or green pepper

Season with salt, pepper, approx. 1-2 tsp sugar and 1-2 T vinegar – to taste

Peach sambal

1 can peaches, drained and chopped

¼ cup fresh mint, chopped

¼ - 1/3 cup whipping cream

Sliced Bananas

Chutney South African “Mrs Ball’s Chutney” (World Market), or a chutney of your choice.