



FLOYD ON SPAIN

## Beef Stew with Garlic and Prunes

*Guiso de Carne de Vaca con Ajos y Ciruelas*

My assistant Anne and I, shattered, stopped for lunch in a dusty, unkempt village on a busy main road that was overshadowed by a cathedral or perhaps a monastery on the top of the hill behind. We had just had the most exhilarating drive over the Spanish Pyrenees, skipping across the roof of the world in an open-topped car. Massive vistas, empty roads, terrifying bends, precipitous descents, the sun high in the big blue sky. Anyway, I was wrecked as I had been doing all the driving since I didn't trust Anne on the bends because she drives faster than me. So we fell into this restaurant absolutely starving. And this was the brilliant meal we had, a rather English beef stew of garlic and prunes, which was served with a rice salad.

Serves 4-6

*2 tablespoons olive oil*  
*900g (2lb) stewing beef, cubed – with some fat on the meat*  
*At least 6 cloves of garlic, peeled and roughly chopped*  
*1 onion, chopped*  
*½ teaspoon cornflour*  
*1 wineglass dry white wine*  
*175g (6oz) tomatoes, skinned and chopped*  
*3 whole cloves*  
*1 large bay leaf*  
*1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme*  
*1 teaspoon chopped fresh oregano*  
*1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley*  
*3 large potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks*  
*225g (8oz) prunes, stoned*  
*Salt*  
*Freshly ground black pepper*

Heat the oil in a large cooking pot. Chuck in the meat and brown it, keeping the heat on high, then turn it down and add the garlic and onion. Cook for about 4-5 minutes, until they soften.

Mix the cornflour with the wine and add to the meat, stirring well

until it thickens slightly. Add all the other ingredients apart from the potatoes and prunes. Simmer, with the lid on, for about  $1\frac{3}{4}$  hours, until the meat is tender (but not falling apart).

While it is cooking, and when it suits you, parboil the potatoes for 10 minutes. In a separate pan, simmer the prunes in a little water for about 10–12 minutes to swell them up.

When the meat is almost ready, pop in the potatoes and cook for 10 more minutes. Finally, you add the drained prunes and cook just long enough to heat them through. This way the prunes keep their distinctive flavour and don't get swallowed up by the stew. Season to taste.