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Mary Keane's Listowel Mutton Pies

The way Listowel mutton pies are eaten is unique. The pastry is quite robust because of the small proportion of shortening to flour, but not at all fragile. A big pot of mutton broth is made from the bones with maybe an onion or two added. On race day, the pies are slipped, a couple at a time, into the pot of strained broth. They simmer away and are then served into wide shallow soup bowls with a ladle full of hot broth on top. Serves 8

450g (1lb) mutton or hogget, a mixture of neck, shank and scrag end (buy a bit more to allow for trimming)
salt and ground white pepper

For the Pastry

900g (2lb/4 cups) plain flour
110g (4oz/1 stick) margarine or butter
850ml (1 1⁄2 pints/3 3/4 cups) buttermilk
1⁄2 teaspoon salt
egg wash

For the Mutton Broth

mutton or hogget bones, about 2.5kg (6lb)
3–4 large onions, peeled and quartered
a couple of carrots, celery stalks, parsley stalks, a couple of sprigs of thyme or 2 stock cubes
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Prepare the lamb. Trim off the fat and any gristle or membrane. Cut into tiny pieces, roughly 3mm (1⁄8 in), and put into a shallow bowl. Season well with salt and ground white pepper. Toss to ensure the meat is evenly coated.

Make the pastry. Put the flour and salt into a bowl. Rub in the margarine or butter, add the buttermilk and mix with your hand into a firm dough, similar to (though drier than) the texture of white soda bread. Knead the dough for 30 seconds to 1 minute to firm it up. Divide it into 2 pieces. On a floured board, roll the pastry out as thinly as possible, to about 5mm (1⁄4 in) thick. Using a saucer as a template, cut out 2 circles at a time. Take 1 round and roll it out a little further to thin the pastry to about 2–3mm (1⁄8 in). Put a good half-fistful of seasoned mutton or hogget into the centre. Brush the edge of the pastry with a little buttermilk and cover with another round that has also been rolled to a 2mm (1⁄8 in) thickness. Press the edges together with the tines of a fork, then prick the top several times. Brush the top of the pastry with egg wash.

Preheat the oven to 230ºC/ 450ºF/gas mark 8. Meanwhile, continue to make the remainder of the pies. When the first 4 are ready, cook on a baking tray for 20–30 minutes. Check the pies occasionally and turn the tray if necessary. Continue to make pies until all the pastry and filling is used up. Leave the pies to cool on a wire rack. At this point, they can be kept wrapped for several days or frozen for later use.

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Next, make a simple broth. Put the mutton or hogget bones into a deep saucepan, add the onions, cover with cold water and bring to the boil. Mary adds a couple of stock cubes later, but if you'd rather not she suggested adding a few thickly sliced carrots, a few celery stalks, a sprig or two of thyme and some parsley stalks. Simmer for 1–1 1⁄2 hours, covered.

Strain the stock and taste, add salt and pepper to correct the seasoning. The broth will keep in a fridge for several days or may be frozen. To serve the mutton pies, bring the broth to the boil in a deep saucepan, then drop a couple of meat pies into the broth. Simmer for 20 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon. Transfer each pie into a wide, shallow soup bowl. Pour a ladle of mutton broth on top. Eat with a fork and spoon and extra pepper and salt to taste.

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