

southwestern toad-in-the-hole

Toad-in-the-Hole is one of Britain's most majestic dishes. If you get it right, you'll get savoury sausages snuggled in an architectural display of Yorkshire Pudding. We don't mean to mess with perfection, but we love the earthy quality cornmeal brings to the batter.

Red-Eye Gravy is a campfire classic. After frying up some ham steaks for the cowboys, the cook would deglaze the pan with coffee, making a flavourful gravy. This city-slicker version is a bit more "chef-ey", but we think it makes the best Red-Eye Gravy we've ever had. We thank Louis Osteen for the inspiration.

Serves 4 to 6

100 grams plain flour
30 grams cornmeal (see note)
½ teaspoon salt
5 eggs
330 ml whole milk
1 tablespoon olive or vegetable oil
6 to 8 Texas Ranch or Tennessee Country Sausages
50 grams unsalted butter
3 small shallots, finely chopped
1 small carrot, finely chopped
1 large clove of garlic, minced
2 tablespoons crushed espresso beans
500 ml beef broth
1 sprig of fresh thyme
30g beef dripping or sunflower oil
salt and pepper to taste

Place the flour, cornmeal and salt in a bowl and mix together well. Make a well in the centre, add the eggs and mix until a smooth paste forms. Gradually whisk in the milk and stir until well combined. Put in the refrigerator until good and cold – at least three hours or overnight.

Preheat the oven to 220°C / 425°F / Gas mark 7

Coat the bottom of a skillet with oil and brown the sausages over medium heat. When finished, removed the sausages from the pan and pour away the fat, trying to preserve the juices if there are any. Return the pan to the heat, and add half the butter. When the butter is melted, sauté the shallots, carrot and garlic clove for 3 to five minutes until softened. Add the espresso beans, beef broth and thyme and bring the gravy to a boil. Reduce the heat, and simmer for fifteen minutes, or until reduced by half.

While the gravy is reducing, put the beef dripping in a roasting tin, cast iron pan or casserole and place in the hot oven. Remove the batter from the fridge, and whisk well to recombine. Make sure to re-incorporate any cornmeal that may have sunk to the bottom. When the roasting tin and fat are good and hot, remove from the oven, carefully add the sausages, and then pour in the batter. You should get lots of sputtering fat to be careful! Return to the oven. After five minutes cooking time, turn down the heat to 200°C / 400°F / Gas mark 6. Cook for a further 15 to 20 minutes, or until golden brown.

About five minutes before the toad-in-the-hole is ready, strain the solids from the gravy (you may need a muslin cloth if the espresso beans have been ground too finely) and put in a clean sauce pan. Bring to a boil and reduce to about 250 to 300 ml.

When ready to serve, whisk in the other half of the butter into the gravy, a piece at a time, until glossy. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and put in a gravy boat to be served with the Toad-in-the-hole.