

Kidney pie combats rising meat prices

One benefit of living cheaply is that every day you are presented with an incentive to discover a less expensive way to dine well. One of the highest hurdles in the search for better eating is the ulcer-aggravating height of current meat prices.

The price of simple hamburger has driven many of my friends to vegetarianism; tearing hungrily into an ascetic meal of rice and canned yams, with a salad providing the only cheery note in an otherwise melancholy tableau. I eat with these friends and commiserate with them, but I cannot help but revolt at the idea that eating cheaply must be a grim, belt-tightening experience.

I was treated to a succulent dinner recently, rich with meat, at the home of two friends whose food budget would make a churchmouse feel rich by comparison. Their secret? Steak-and-kidney pie.

In England, one discovers the true magnificence of this dish, based upon a meat that the British delicately refer to as offal. Wherever you find it, in a roadside pub or in a London grill, it is marvelous—the crust may be a trifle spongy, but the dark stew underneath it is tender, rich perfection.

My friends learned to prepare steak-and-kidney pie while living in England a few years ago, and today, with the prices of most meats hovering around the astronomical level, and with the price of kidneys down around 75 cents a lb., it is truly a dish whose time has come.

david ware omelet

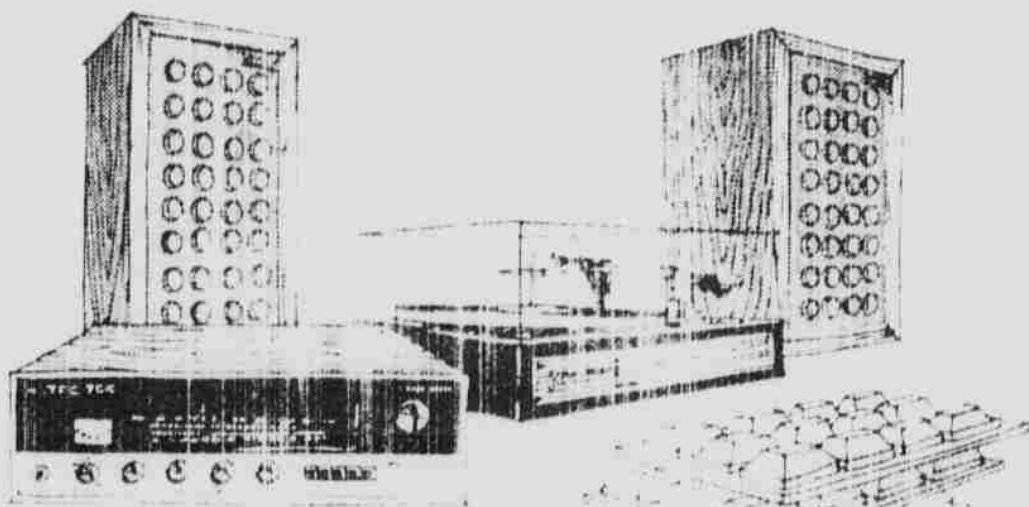
2 lb. lean, boneless beef (buy what's cheapest, a brisket usually being the best value for the money)
 1-1/2 lb. beef kidneys, with membrane, fat, and nerves removed
 1/4 lb. beef suet
 2 onions, coarsely chopped
 1-1/2 cups tinned beef bouillon, undiluted
 2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
 Salt and pepper
 Flaky pastry crust

Cut the beef into uniform 2-in. pieces, trimming away all gristle and fat. Cut the kidneys into slightly larger pieces. Meanwhile, render the suet until it covers the bottom of the pot, and saute the onions in it until golden. Now add the beef and brown the chunks on all sides, stirring all the while; add the kidneys and do the same until they lose their pinkness.

Stir in enough bouillon to cover, then add the sauce and a bit of pepper. Bring to a gentle simmer, cover and cook slowly for at least 1-1/2 hours, or until all the meat is fork-tender. Cool the stew, and taste for seasoning.

Half an hour before serving, arrange it in a suitably-sized casserole, the stew being at room temperature and cover with the flaky pastry crust. Bake at 425 degrees for 15 min., then lower the oven and finish the crust at 375 degrees for 10-15 min.

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