

FLASH IN THE PAN!

## Winter roots mixture rocks

I was on the hunt for the Winter Pebbles, an assortment of turnips, potatoes, carrots, beets, parsnip and winter radishes that some enterprising farmers at the winter market



ARI LEVAUX

sell as a mix. They look like a basket of gleaming jewels. They remind me of Fruity Pebbles, the breakfast of Flintstones.

Storage crops are typically harvested in the fall and kept cool and fresh all winter. Home-steaders would store these tubers in aptly named “root cellars,” along with squash, sides of bacon, apples and whatever else they could squirrel away.

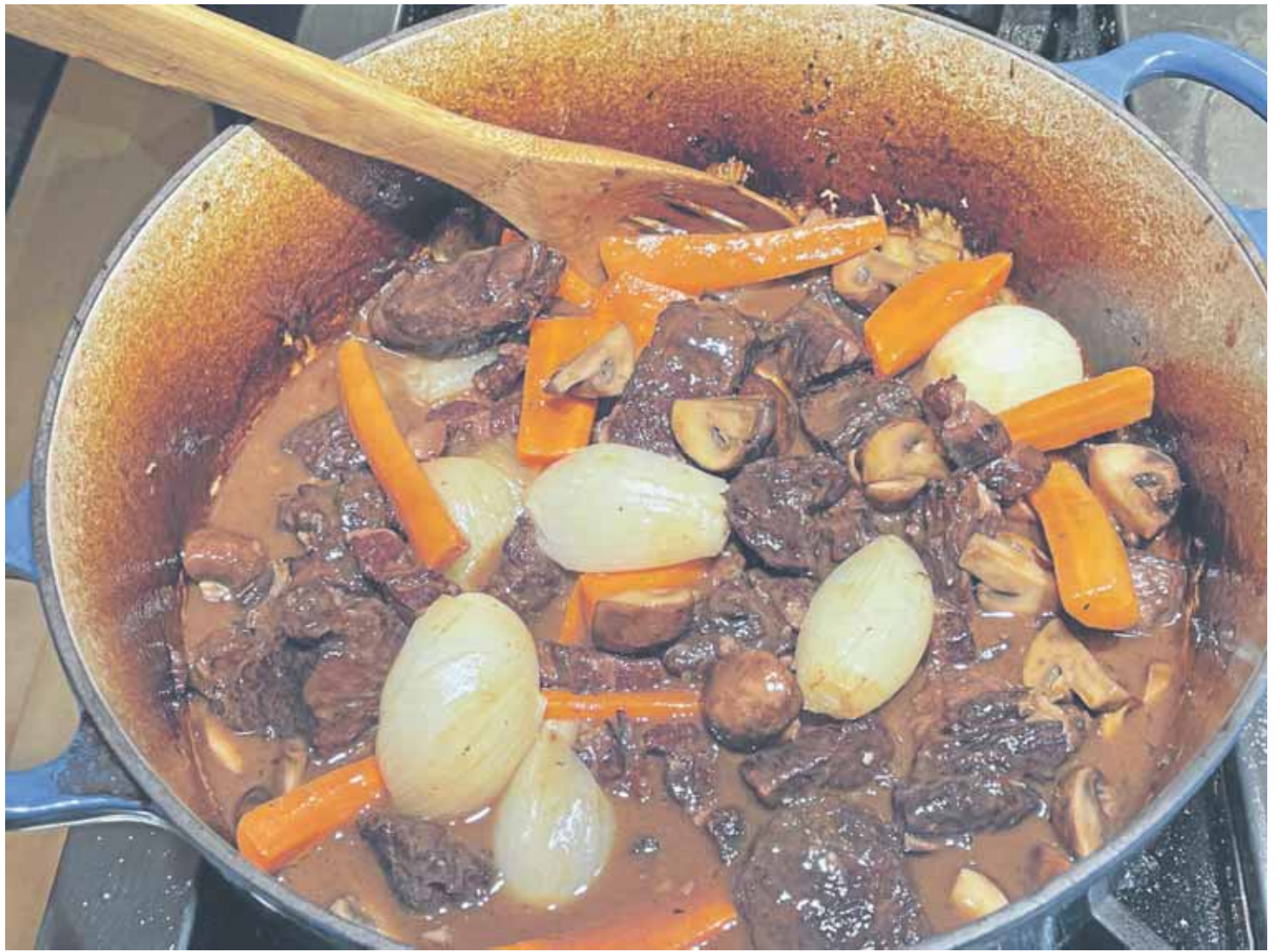
The pandemic has made us contemplate various end-of-the-world scenarios and brought out the inner “prepper” in many people. It sounds fun and romantic, but the diet could get old, and any viable attempt to live off the land would mean coming to terms with turnips, and some of the other harder-to-appreciate roots, including celeriac, rutabaga and Jerusalem artichoke.

I had been thinking about Winter Pebbles a lot after they first caught my eye, and had decided to buy some at the next market. Alas, the folks at the Missoula Grain and Vegetable Co. stand had to break the sad news: early that morning, as co-owner Max Smith was transferring the winter pebbles from their burlap sack into their quart cartons, a gentleman made an offer on the entire sack. The offer was accepted, and the pebbles were gone.

What about next week, I asked. “Unfortunately, that’s it for the season,” Max replied. They were now out of turnips and storage radishes for the year, which means the Winter Pebbles could no longer be complete.

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LET’S COOK!



GREG PATENT PHOTOS

French beef stew in its cooking pot, ready to be served with noodles or potatoes.

# Boeuf Bourguignon

## A famous & delicious French beef stew

I don’t each much beef, but each January, like clockwork, an unrelenting need for it invades my being and so, I give in. A few days ago, when this hunger overtook me, I blurted out, “I want beef stew!” I do not know what made my vocal apparatus utter those words. Nevertheless, the die was cast.



GREG PATENT

Off to the market, then back to the kitchen, I peeled, cut,

sautéed and braised my way to Boeuf Bourguignon — French beef stew — and happiness.

Perhaps the most delicious, and famous, of all beef stews,



Braising in wine and broth adds flavor to the meat, onions, mushrooms and carrots.

Julia Child brought this French classic to us for the first time on Feb. 11, 1963, the debut of her groundbreaking TV show, “The French Chef.” The 2009 movie

release of “Julie and Julia” exalted this stew to gastronomic nirvana.

Stews are easy, Julia taught us, once their ingredients are

mingled in the casserole. One big plus stews bring to the table? They’re made with less expensive cuts of meat. These cuts — the round, rump, shoulder (chuck) — the parts of the animal worked the most, and the “toughest,” are the gold standard. And because stews spend hours in the oven undisturbed, the cook is free to attend to other matters.

Long, slow cooking in just enough liquid to cover the meat — wine, stock or even just water — transforms something tough to chew into meltingly tender morsels packed with flavor. The key is in the details. Cut your meat into largish chunks, pat them with towels until they feel thoroughly dry, and brown them on all sides in hot fat to seal in their juices.

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LAST BEST PLATES

# Slurp up happiness at Lucky’s Ramen Noodles

The Lunar New Year, the Year of the Ox, will be celebrated on Feb. 12 in the Chinese and East Asian cultures. In honoring the New Year, serving symbolic foods are believed to bring happiness and good luck.



STELLA FONG

I remember my parents preparing an eight-course meal to welcome new beginnings. With the number “eight” sounding like the word for “prosperity” in Chinese, my father cooked eight different dishes, including my favorite, noodles.

In the West End of Billings, located in Shiloh Commons is Lucky’s Ramen Noodles. How fortuitous to slurp long noodles from a restaurant with the name “Lucky!” Not only for the New Year, but from the symbolism of

longevity from noodles, the spirit of living a long life can also be celebrated on birthdays, and I believe, every day.

Sue Balter-Reitz, who grew up in New York eating at ethnic gems, enthusiastically told me about this place created by restaurant veterans Lucky Keutla and Shawn Moua. The couple opened their eatery in September with Lucky’s Smoothies and Rolled Ice Cream also debuting this spring, next door. With experience from Khanthaly’s Eggrolls when it was located on Grand Avenue and 13th Street, to the more recent Samurai Japanese Steak and Seafood House, and their Oriental food truck, Moua and Keutla opened their new venture even during the most challenging of times. They hired Chef Jeremy Cooke, who was Chef de Cuisine at Siroc Restaurant in Washington, D.C., to execute a menu with

Asian noodles from Japan, China, Vietnam and the owners’ homeland of Laos.

Moua immigrated to the United States in 1978, while Keutla arrived three years later. Moua jokingly said, “They flew us over Montana and dropped us off in parachutes. Most people during that time ended up in California.” The two went to Senior High School, where they became sweethearts, marrying after they graduated. They partnered with Keutla’s parents Sisavath and Khanthaly to open Khanthaly’s Eggrolls in 1994.

“We created the menu ourselves,” Keutla said of the offerings that fuse flavors from different Asian cultures. The Kaopoon and Meekatee are most authentic to her heritage, learning the recipes from her mother Khanthaly, who continues to operate Khanthaly’s Eggrolls out of a food truck. The



STELLA FONG

The broth at Lucky’s Ramen Noodles come from hours of cooking. Pork broth is being transferred from the large kettle for the Tonkatsu noodles.

couple sought out the best noodles for their dishes and Moua said, “The secret to any broth is boiling bones and meat for 8 to 12 hours, to extract the flavors.”

Aside from noodle options such as Tonatsu, Tan Tan, Miso, Pork

Udon and Pho, rice dishes with Katsu and Korean barbecue are also offered, along with fried egg rolls, fresh spring rolls and calamari.

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## Plates

From D1

The color red dominates the dining room. Black accents are found in the lantern style lighting and metal chair frames. In the Asian culture, red represents fire and symbolizes happiness, beauty, vitality, good fortune and success; whereas black is the color of water, signifying neutrality and representing immortality, power and knowledge. On the wall are paintings by Chance Robinson, several panels of cherry blossom branches in bloom, symbols of renewal, and a portrait of a trout that highlights the other colors Keutla wove into the design of the restaurant.

Though Lucky's Ramen Noodles is open for in-house dining, Sue and her husband Paul treated me and my husband along with friends Renee and Dave Coppock to takeaway on this night.

Balter-Reitz said of her dish, "It's fun to have a ramen experience in Billings. I had the Tonkatsu, and the broth had a rich and deep flavor with hints of five spice. While nontraditional, it definitely added a spark. Exploring the dish, there were so many different elements and textures, pork, egg, bean sprouts and of course, noodles."

My Meekatee came with rice noodles bathed in a broth of coconut red curry and egg. I topped the noodles with the fresh shredded cabbage, bean sprouts and mint that was packed in a separate container. With the supplied wooden chopsticks, I lifted rice noodles onto a Chinese soup spoon to slurp up tender noodles oozing with just enough spiciness balanced with coconutty savoriness.

On those days when luck and happiness are running low, a long slurp of Lucky's Ramen Noodles may just bring back good spirits.

Stella Fong, author of 'Historic Restaurants of Billings and Billings Food' hosts 'Flavors Under the Big Sky: Celebrating the Bounty of the Region' for Yellowstone Public Radio.

## THE last best PLATES

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STELLA FONG PHOTOS

Lucky's Ramen Noodles' menu is a combination of noodles from Asia. The Tonkatsu is inspired from noodles served at Japanese noodle houses while the Meekatee comes from Lucky Keutla's mother Khanthaly who immigrated from Laos to Billings through St. Luke's Church.



The color red dominates in Lucky's Ramen Noodles restaurant located in Billings at Shiloh Commons. The color of fire is contrasted against black, the color of neutrality and immortality.



Chef Jeremy Cooke, who once cooked at Siroc Restaurant in Washington, D.C., executes the recipes owners Lucky Keutla and Shawn Moua created for their restaurant Lucky's Ramen Noodles.



A generous ladle of pork broth goes into a bowl of Tonkatsu noodles with sliced pork, marinated egg and cabbage.



Chef Jeremy Cooke pours hot red curry coconut chicken broth on top of rice noodles for the Meekatee noodle bowl.



Shawn Moua and Lucky Keutla met when they were in high school after immigrating here from Laos in the early '80s. They married after high school and now are the owners of Lucky's Ramen Noodles.



ARI LEVAUX

Winter Pebbles, an assortment of turnips, potatoes, carrots, beets, parsnip and winter radishes.

## LeVaux

From D1

So there I was, forced by fate to do what I could have done all along: buy a bunch of different roots, and mix them together myself.

But I kept wondering: What was the gentleman going to do with his huge sack of Winter Pebbles? It's one thing to buy a small amount of Winter Pebbles and cook them right away, but storing a diverse assortment of root crops in the same bag like that can be risky. Each type of tuber will have different storage needs. Radishes, for example, do better in plastic bags, while potatoes, garlic and many others prefer mesh. If you're buying a large volume of roots and planning on storing them, it's actually wiser to buy and store them separately.

Winter Pebbles is more of a way of cooking than a specific mix of roots. It's a way of getting to know what's local in winter, and of tasting the flavors of the land, or the *terroir*, if you will. You may not be able to pronounce it, but you'll know it when you taste it.

### Winter Pebble Tart

This tart comes from Missoula Grain and Vegetable Co. co-owner Katie Madden, who is the co-inventor of Winter Pebbles.

Serves 4

- 1 large potato, sliced into 1/2-inch rounds
- 1 large carrot, sliced into 1/2-inch rounds
- 1 medium parsnip, peeled and sliced into 1/2-inch rounds

- 5 Brussels sprouts, sliced in half
- 1 small red onion, sliced into 1/2-inch rounds
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- salt and pepper
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon fresh rosemary, chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh sage, chopped
- 10-ounce piece of goat cheese
- 1 rolled piece of pie dough or pizza dough (or you can skip this part and proceed with the roots)

Preheat oven to 400. Toss the sliced roots in oil and season with salt and pepper. Arrange them in a single layer on a baking pan. Roast until golden and tender, about 40 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool.

Cook the sugar in 2 tablespoons of water in a thick bottomed saucepan on medium heat, stirring as necessary to prevent burning, until the mixture is amber colored, about 8 minutes. Turn off the heat, add the vinegar and a pinch of salt, and stir it in.

Pour the vinegar into a 9-inch pie pan. Scatter the sage and rosemary over the caramel. Arrange the sliced roots artfully atop the herbs, using pieces to stuff the holes. Sprinkle with the onion slices and crumbled goat cheese. Cover the whole thing with the rolled dough, and bake it at 400 for another 20 minutes, or until the dough is nicely crusted.

Remove from the oven to cool, and invert the pan over a plate to serve.

Ari LeVaux writes Flash in the Pan, a syndicated weekly food column carried in more than 60 newspapers nationwide. Though his audience is national, he says he "always writes about Montana. Usually."

## Patent

From D1

That's the most important part of the recipe. Don't dally! Once you've patted the meat, proceed immediately to browning the pieces.

As an experiment, I left the meat I had patted dry on clean paper towels for a few minutes while I prepped the mushrooms. When I was ready to begin the browning, the clean paper towels had turned pink. So I had to re-pat the meat.

Have fun with this recipe, and bon appétit!

### Beef Stew with Wine and Vegetables

I learned this recipe from watching Julia Child's first public television series, "The French Chef." In French, this beef stew is called Boeuf Bourguignon. Julia's recipe includes mushrooms and onions. I always include them too, and I also add carrots. This is a straightforward, classic way of making virtually any beef stew. Two things to keep in mind: Cut the meat yourself from a single cut of beef. Pat the meat dry very well before browning so that it develops a delicious crust. This stew may be made a day or two ahead. Its flavor gets better over time.

I've broken the recipe into sections to make it easy to follow.

#### The Beef

- 6 ounces fresh pork belly, in one chunk or thick slices
- Olive oil
- 3 pounds lean beef from the round, rump, or chuck, cut into chunks (2- to 3-inches)
- 1 bottle (750 ml) young red wine, any you like to drink
- 2 to 3 cups beef stock or broth
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper

#### The Vegetables

- 1 pound fresh cremini or white button mushrooms
- 1 bag (14 to 16 ounces) frozen pearl onions

- 2 or 3 large carrots, peeled and cut into 3-inch x 1/2-inch sticks
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Salt

#### Sauce Thickener

- 3 tablespoons butter, softened
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour

#### Pasta for Serving

- 1 pound egg noodles, tagliatelle or pappardelle, or linguine

1. Cut the pork into sticks (lardons) about 1 inch long and 1/4-inch wide. Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat. When hot, add the pork and cook, stirring occasionally, until the sticks are nicely browned all over and crispy, about 6 to 10 minutes. Set the pork onto paper towels to cool, and pour the fat from the browning pan into a large (12-inch) skillet.

2. The beef surfaces must be dry before you brown them. Pat them thoroughly with paper towels just before you put them into the skillet. Add 3 tablespoons olive oil to the pork fat and set the pan over medium-high heat. When the oil is shimmering, add as many chunks that will fit in the skillet without crowding. There must be an inch or so of space between the chunks for proper browning to occur. Cook on all sides, turning the chunks as needed. When browned, transfer the chunks to a large pot, 5- to 8-quart capacity. Continue browning the remaining beef and add more oil to the skillet if necessary.

3. Adjust an oven rack to the lower third position and preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

4. When all the browned beef chunks are in the large pot, discard the fat from the browning skillet. Pour the red wine into the empty skillet, add the tomato paste, and set the pan over medium heat. Cook, stirring with a whisk, to dislodge the browned bits from the bottom of the skillet. Those bits are nuggets of flavor. Pour the wine into the pot with the beef and add the browned pork. Add enough beef stock to almost cover the meat. Stir in the garlic, thyme, oregano, bay leaves, salt and pepper.

5. Bring the casserole to the simmer on the stovetop over medium heat. Cover the pot and put it in the oven. Cook slowly for about 3 hours, or longer, until the beef is very tender when pierced with a fork. Check the liquid level every hour or so and add

more boiling broth or stock if needed to keep the meat just covered.

5. While the beef is cooking, wipe the mushrooms clean and quarter them. Heat 2 tablespoons butter with the olive oil in the 12-inch skillet (used to brown the beef), over medium-high heat. When the butter foam begins to subside, add the mushrooms and toss and cook constantly for 4 to 5 minutes until the mushrooms are lightly browned. Transfer to a side dish and season lightly with salt.

6. Put the frozen onions into a 10-inch skillet with the butter, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 cup water. Cook over medium heat until the onions are heated through. Set aside.

7. For the carrots, bring 2 quarts water to the boil in a medium saucepan. Add the carrots and cook until crisp/tender, about 5 to 7 minutes. Drain, transfer to a side dish and season lightly with salt.

8. When the beef is completely tender, set the pot cover askew, hold it firmly in place with pot holders, and pour out the cooking liquid into a medium saucepan. There should be about 2 1/2 cups. If necessary, add beef stock or broth to bring the liquid to volume. Taste carefully and add salt and pepper if necessary.

9. For the sauce thickener, in a medium bowl, mash together with a fork the soft butter and flour to make a smooth paste. Whisk in a few spoonfuls of the beef cooking liquid and add to the remaining liquid in the saucepan. Whisk in a few tablespoons of the onion cooking liquid, bring the sauce to the simmer, stirring with the whisk until smooth. Taste again and adjust seasoning if needed.

10. For the final assembly, add the mushrooms, onions, and carrots to the beef. Pour in the sauce and simmer, covered, for 5 to 10 minutes.

11. While the stew is heating, cook the pasta in a large pot of boiling salted water until al dente. Drain, divide into heated plates or bowls, and spoon the stew and sauce onto the pasta. Serve at once.

Greg Patent is a James Beard Award-winning cookbook author for "Baking in America," a food journalist, blogger, and radio co-host for "The Food Guys" on Montana Public Radio. Please visit his blog, [www.thebakingwizard.com](http://www.thebakingwizard.com), and follow him on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.