



Recipe, photography and styling by [Tanya Zouev](#).

For those who don't know, my heritage is Russian and I have an affinity for Russian food because I grew up with it and enjoy eating it. One of the dishes I enjoy the most is Beef Stroganoff and when I started researching it's history, I thought there was only one authentic version, my mother's. I was wrong. I then read one of the original known recipes by Russian cookbook author Elena Molokovhets in her 1861 book *A Gift For Young Housewives*. She made hers with sour cream whereas my mother only uses pure cream (slivki in Russian) because she says it makes for a more flavoursome strog. It in fact turns out there are hundreds of different versions from ones made with sausage in Finland to versions made with buffalo meat in the USA. It is obviously a far more international dish than the strictly Russian one I thought it to be. But for this post I will focus on the one I love, the recipe I grew up with and which I still believe to be the best.

I travelled to Russia in 2006. In my usual fashion of eating my way around foreign countries, I ate Beef Stroganoff wherever I could find it. I ate it at small family run restaurants in the country and I ate it at the exclusive and über pricey Café Pushkin in Moscow and I'm sorry to say I was somewhat disappointed. Perhaps it's a case of what one grows up with being the benchmark, but the versions I ate just didn't taste as good. My mother's Stroganoff is literally melt in the mouth. It is made up of delicately sliced rump steak sitting in an incredibly flavoursome sauce with just the right amount of mushrooms and cream. She says the secret is in cooking the mushrooms separately in butter and adding them at the very end, just before you serve.

It is an interesting fact that the name of the dish is said to have originated in the kitchens of the Stroganov family around the mid 18th century. The upper classes of Pre-Revolutionary Russia loved the French and considered everything *Le Francaise* to be the epitome of class and style. Russian cooks and chefs of the time were encouraged to cook in a French manner and many of them were shipped off to France to study cookery by their employers. Such an employer would have been Alexander Stroganov (see pic below) and if you ask me he looks a bit of a scamp. I'm sure he enjoyed downing vodka

shots with Beluga caviar whilst hanging out with his mates in the courts of old Russian aristocracy. He would have loved my mum's strog, and I hope you do too.



(Pic: Mr. B. Stroganoff himself, circa mid 1800's.)





Prep time: 20 mins, cooking time: 60 mins. Serves 4-6 as a main meal.

Ingredients:

one tablespoon butter

at least one cup of mushrooms, preferably Swiss Browns cut thin (I use around two cups because I like my Stroganoff mushroomy)

one tablespoon olive oil

1kg (2 pounds) rump steak cut into fine strips approx 4cm x 1cm (2"x.5")

1 medium to large onion halved then cut into fine strips

1/2 cup chicken or beef stock if required (water can be used as well)

2-3 tablespoons soy sauce (I use tamari, a wheat-free soy sauce)

1 cup of thickened cream

lots of cracked pepper (mum says that Beef Stroganoff just loves black pepper)

salt to taste

Method:

- 1.** Heat the butter over medium heat in a heavy base pan (I used a Le Creuset 24cm cast iron casserole pan) and fry your mushrooms until cooked through, they should have a dark brown appearance and some lovely juices in the bottom (approximately 5-7 mins). Put aside.
- 2.** Using the same pan heat the olive oil on medium heat and brown your meat. Add onions and cook with meat until soft and translucent and keep cooking until there is quite a bit of moisture in the pan from the meat juices.
- 3.** Add two of the tablespoons of soy sauce and stir to mix through. Do not add the third tablespoon until you have tasted the sauce towards the end of cooking.
- 4.** Add chicken or beef stock (or water) if the meat and onions are dry but I find there is usually plenty of moisture in the pan at this stage. Simmer for at least 40 minutes on low heat until meat is soft, about 45 minutes is usually adequate but you may need a little more if your cut of beef is a little tough.
- 5:** When the meat is cooked through add the cream and plenty of black pepper. If sauce is too pale, add a little bit more soy sauce to darken and if you feel the sauce needs a little more flavour. Bear in mind the sauce will darken a little from the mushrooms upon standing after Step 6.

6: At the end of cooking your meat and onions add the mushrooms, stir and simmer for another couple of minutes. Thicken if required (see notes below) and serve immediately.

*If the sauce is a little runny, you can thicken with either a heaped teaspoon of corn flour or tapioca starch dissolved in about a third of a cup of water then add slowly to the pan whilst heat is still on stirring thoroughly. Be careful not to over thicken.

Serve with steamed white rice or mashed potato. Also goes well with large flat pasta noodles though in my family it was pretty much always rice or mash, or on toast for breakfast (we weren't much of a corn-flakes family). The flavours actually get better upon standing.

Variation: you can also use veal.

*Styling notes:

Well I couldn't decide between a rustic tabletop setting or a simple setting for two so I did both. The one thing I had decided on was that I wanted to use predominantly vintage props. Both settings with the exception of the beautiful green Le Creuset pan and the wonky wooden spoon are made up entirely of bits and bobs from charity shops (thanks again Vinnie's). The wooden spoon has been in my family for decades so it's a veritable heirloom!