

CORNER BEEF *Serves 10 or more*

4 to 6 pound piece of beef
(brisket or flank)

1 bouquet garni

1 carrot, chopped

1 onion, chopped

1 celery stalk, chopped

1 leek, chopped

1/2 garlic bulb

THE BRINE:

5 quarts water

1 pound demerara or light
brown sugar

3 pounds coarse sea salt

1 teaspoon black
peppercorns

1 teaspoon juniper berries

5 cloves

4 bay leaves

A sprig of thyme

3 tablespoons saltpeter
(optional)

I love corned beef – the best use of two cheap beef cuts, brisket and flank, that few have time for these days. In fact, I'm so keen that you should make time for it that I feel justified in reproducing this recipe, more or less verbatim, from The River Cottage Cookbook. The "added value" is my recipe for Red Flannel Hash on page 498.

Some people cite bottom round as the superior cut for corned beef. But I find it too lean, with a tendency to dryness, and prefer to set it aside for the Italian dry-cured beef, Bresaola (page 436).

Put all the ingredients for the brine into a large saucepan and stir well over low heat until the sugar and salt have dissolved. Bring to a boil, allow to bubble for 1 to 2 minutes, then remove from the heat and leave to cool completely.

Place your chosen piece of beef in a nonmetallic container, such as a large Tupperware box or a clay crock. Cover the meat completely with the cold brine, weighting it down if necessary with a piece of wood. Leave in a cool place for 5 to 10 days (joints of less than 6 pounds should not be left for more than a week or they will become too pickled).

Before cooking, remove the beef (or tongue) from the brine and soak it in fresh cold water for 24 hours, changing the water, at least once (you could make that 48 hours if it had the full 10-day immersion). Then put it in a pan with the bouquet garni, vegetables, and garlic, cover with fresh water, and bring to a gentle simmer. Poach very gently on top of the stove – or in a very low oven (275°F) if you prefer. A 6 pound piece of beef will take 2 1/2 to 3 hours. Cook until the meat is completely tender and yielding when pierced with a skewer.

Serve hot corned beef carved into fairly thick slices, with lentils, beans, Horseradish Mash (page 519), or boiled potatoes, and either Creamed Fresh Horseradish (page 512) or good English mustard.

