

A Tripe Soup Thickened with Natural Gelatine

The appeal of tripe lies as much in its slightly chewy texture as in its delicate flavour. In *menudo*, the Mexican tripe soup demonstrated here (*recipe, page 125*) the texture of the meat is complemented by a velvety broth, enriched by the gelatine from veal cuts. The mellow flavour of the tripe is drawn into the broth, serving as a background for more assertive seasonings and garnishes.

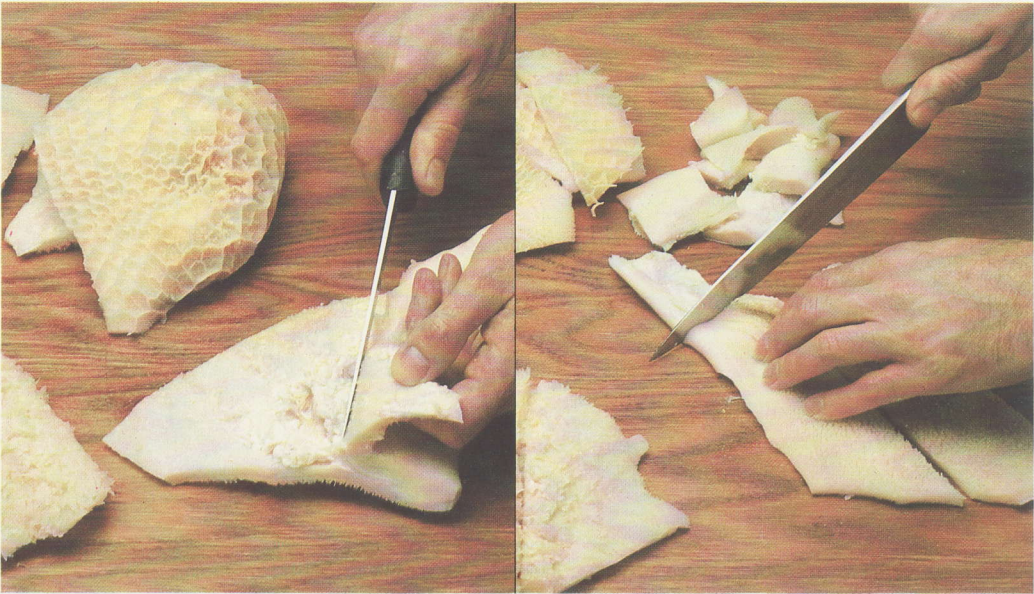
There are three kinds of beef tripe sold, each of which comes from a different chamber of the ruminant's stomach. Although their flavours are similar, each of the three—blanket, thick-seam and honeycomb tripe—has a different texture and calls for slightly different preparation (*Step 1, right*). When available, all types should be used in combination.

Tripe is parboiled as part of the cleansing and bleaching procedure before it is offered for sale. The extent of the preliminary boiling varies, however, so ask your butcher how much extra cooking his tripe will need. The answer may be as little as 2 hours or as much as 4 hours.

Many tripe soups, including *menudo*, are cooked in two stages. First, the parboiled tripe is simmered for 1½ hours to 3½ hours in water enriched with aromatic vegetables, a veal knuckle and for extra gelatine, some calf's feet. The long cooking tenderizes the tripe, releases the flavour of the vegetables and draws gelatine from the bones. Next, the spent vegetables and bones are discarded and new flavourings are set to simmer in the broth. Throughout, the cooking should proceed at a leisurely simmer: boiling would render the tripe stringy and dry.

Authentic *menudo* includes the processed dried maize kernels known as hominy. Instead of hominy, you can use chick peas. Dried hominy or chick peas should be soaked overnight and cooked with the tripe from the start; tinned, pre-cooked chick peas or hominy only need to be heated and can be added during the last half hour of cooking.

With the *menudo*, offer bowls of chopped raw onion, dried oregano or chopped coriander leaves, pounded, dried red chili peppers and chopped, fresh, green ones. These head-clearing accompaniments have earned the soup a reputation as a sure-fire cure for hangovers.



1 Cutting up the tripe. The three kinds of tripe available (*above, left*) are clockwise from the top, honeycomb, thick-seam and blanket. To make the helmet-shaped honeycomb tripe lie flat, halve it symmetrically and make short nicks around the halves' edges. To prepare thick-seam tripe, cut right through the soft centre connecting the outer layers. Scrape away the fat and the lymph nodes on the layers' inner surfaces, as shown here. Cut all the tripe into rectangles (*above, right*).



5 Introducing fresh flavourings. Pour a ladleful of the broth into a sauté pan and cook a finely chopped onion, some chopped fresh coriander leaves and dried oregano for 5 to 6 minutes. Transfer these seasonings, the chopped meats and the strained broth to the rinsed-out saucepan.



6 Adding hominy. If you are using canned cooked hominy—as here—or canned chick peas, add them at this stage, drained of their liquid. Simmer the soup for about 30 minutes longer.