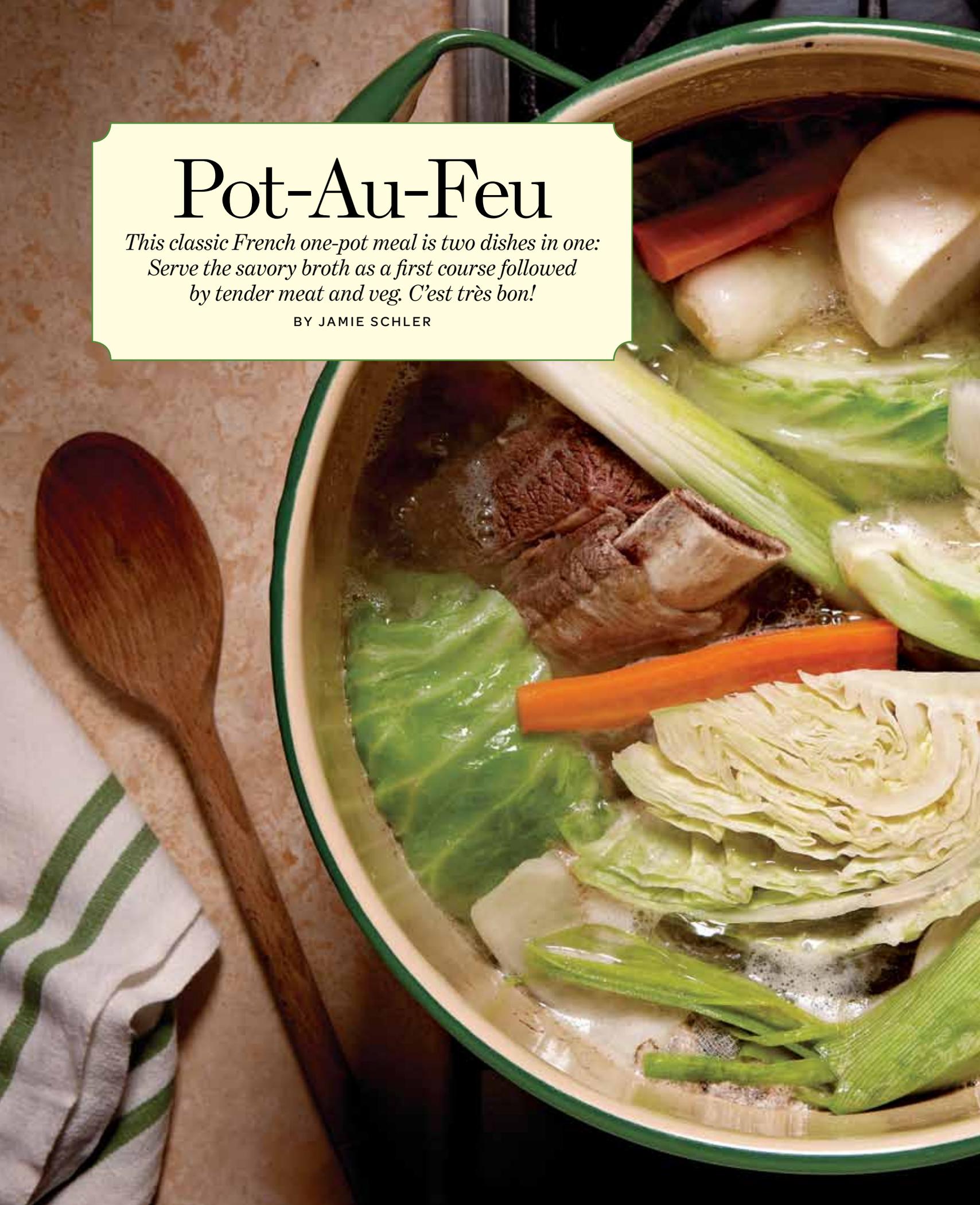


# Pot-Au-Feu

*This classic French one-pot meal is two dishes in one:  
Serve the savory broth as a first course followed  
by tender meat and veg. C'est très bon!*

BY JAMIE SCHLER





*When I first moved to France* almost 30 years ago, my idea of French cuisine tended toward the fancy, the fussy, the formal—dishes complicated to prepare and fastidious to serve. Then I married into a French family and discovered wonderful, traditional dishes that were quite the opposite: rustic, one-pot meals using the humblest ingredients.

*Pot-au-feu*, which means “pot on the fire,” is the epitome of this kind of cooking. To make pot-au-feu, meat, usually a mix of different beef cuts, simmers gently in water along with an abundance of vegetables, generally hearty winter favorites like potatoes, leeks, carrots, and cabbage, until the meat is fall-off-the-bone tender. As the meat and vegetables cook, a flavorful broth, seasoned simply with some herbs, garlic, salt, and pepper, is also in the making. The result is quintessential comfort food, much the way chicken soup is in the United States. But instead of the meat, veg, and broth being served together as a soup, the broth is strained and served separately.

At our house, we serve that broth as a light first course along with some toasted bread. Then we bring the platter of meat and vegetables to the table and let everyone help themselves. To kick up the flavor, we pass around the traditional accompaniments of tangy Dijon mustard, sharp cornichons, and flaky sea salt. Let it be known that these are not optional; it’s especially wonderful when the mustard mixes with some of the juice on the plate, creating a sauce of sorts.

Serving pot-au-feu family style is something the French are adamant about, which means if you’re ever invited over for pot-au-feu, you’re considered part of the family. So put a pot on the fire, gather some good friends together, open some wine, and enjoy.



A simple but rich beef broth begins the meal. Starting the meat in cold water helps keep the broth clear, while a little fat on the surface adds flavor,

## pot-au-feu

Pot-au-feu is akin to a New England (or an Irish) boiled dinner, but thanks to the addition of a bouquet garni (see Test Kitchen, p. TK), which perfumes the broth, and to the sharp, briny condiments served with the meat to counter the richness, it packs much more flavor. As it slowly simmers, pot-au-feu needs little attention, but it does need time, so plan accordingly. **Serves 8**

- 5 sprigs fresh parsley
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 large bay leaf
- 4 large leeks, white and light green parts, sliced in half lengthwise, rinsed well
- 2 lb. boneless beef chuck roast, bottom round roast, or brisket
- 2 lb. bone-in beef short ribs, shank, or oxtail  
Kosher salt
- 1 small head green cabbage, trimmed and cut into eighths through the stem end
- 4 large carrots, cut into 2 or 3 pieces, thick pieces halved lengthwise
- 2 medium turnips, peeled and quartered
- 1 large onion, cut into 8 wedges
- 2 large cloves garlic, peeled and crushed  
Freshly ground black pepper
- 4 medium Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and halved
- 8 toasted baguette slices  
Flaky salt, Dijon mustard, and cornichons for serving

**Tie the parsley,** thyme, and bay leaf in a 10-inch square of cheesecloth with kitchen string to make a bouquet garni. Tie the leeks into a bundle.

**Put the meat in** a 10- to 12-quart stockpot. Cover with cool water by 1 inch and bring to a boil over medium-high heat.

**Meanwhile, bring** a 6- to 8-quart pot of salted water to a boil, add the cabbage, and boil for 3 minutes. Drain and set aside.

**Skim the surface** of the liquid in the pot, add the bouquet garni, the cabbage, carrots, leeks, turnips, onion, garlic, TK oz. salt (about 2 Tbs. TK brand), ½ tsp. pepper, and enough water to just cover the meat and vegetables. Return to a boil, skim again, turn the heat down to low, and partially cover. Cook at a very gentle simmer, skimming off any foam, until the meat is very tender, 2½ to 3 hours. Start checking the cabbage after 30 minutes and the other vegetables after 1 hour and transfer each to a platter when very tender.

**If using marrow bones** (see sidebar ATDIR), add them when there is from 30 to 60 minutes left of cooking.

**Meanwhile, boil the potatoes** separately in lightly salted water until tender, about 20 minutes, and drain. Set aside.

**Transfer the meat** to a large platter and cover with foil to keep warm. Discard the bouquet garni. Put the potatoes and the other cooked vegetables into the broth to reheat for a few minutes, then transfer them to the platter with the meat. Ladle enough broth over the meat and vegetables to keep them moist, cover with foil, and keep warm in a low oven. Strain the broth if you think it needs it (I generally don't).

**Serve some of the hot broth** as a first course along with the toasted baguette slices. (You won't use all of the broth; save it for another use.)

**Serve the meat** and vegetables as the main course along with small bowls of flaky salt, mustard, and cornichons.

**Make ahead:** Pot-au-feu may be made 1 day ahead; refrigerate the meat and vegetables separately from the strained broth. Degrease the broth, then reheat it gently to a simmer before adding the meat and vegetables to the pot to just heat through.

*American Jamie Schler now calls Nantes, France, home. She writes about food, family, and culture on her Life's a Feast blog. She's also the writer for the award-winning blog Plated Stories with photographer Ilva Beretta.*

## BRING ON THE BONE MARROW

The best pot-au-feu includes bones, which is why the French almost always add a marrow bone or two to the pot. Aside from adding rich flavor, marrow bones release gelatin into the broth, which make it more unctuous. If you're using other gelatinous cuts, such as oxtails or shank, in your pot-au-feu, adding a marrow bone is not as crucial, which is why it's optional. If you do use it, though, you're in for a treat: The cooked marrow, which easily slides out of the bone, is wildly delicious; it tastes rich and meaty but has the consistency of room temperature butter. We love to smear it on the toast that we serve with the broth. (Top it with chopped parsley and sea salt, if you like.)

### Here are the details on using marrow bones in pot-au-feu:

- Use about 2 lb. beef marrow bones, crosscut by the butcher into 3- to 4-inch pieces.
- Season the marrow bones by sprinkling some salt into each open end and patting it on to adhere.
- Add the marrow bones, if using, for the final 30 to 60 minutes of cooking.
- Remove the bones from the pot-au-feu at the same time you remove the meat.
- Remove the marrow from the bone by pushing it out with the end of a wooden spoon. Spread it over toasted baguette slices to serve with the both.



