GENERAL

paul kelly how to make gravy

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Paul Kelly’s Classic Gravy: A Step by Step Guide to Rich, Flavorful Sauce

When it comes to elevating a simple roast or a hearty stew, a well made gravy can make all the difference. Paul Kelly, a celebrated culinary artist known for his masterful use of pan drippings and subtle seasonings, has spent decades refining the art of gravy making. This guide will walk you through Paul’s tried and true method, share insider tips, and give you the confidence to create a sauce that’s silky, savory, and unforgettable.

Why Gravy Is a Kitchen Cornerstone

Gravy isn’t just a topping—it’s the culmination of flavors that develop during cooking. It captures the essence of meats, vegetables, and aromatics, turning a dish into a harmonious whole. A good gravy:

- Enhances flavor: It amplifies the savory notes of the main ingredient.
- Improves texture: A smooth, glossy sauce adds mouthfeel.
- Creates visual appeal: A rich brown glaze invites the eye.
- Adds moisture: It prevents dishes from drying out.

Paul Kelly’s approach emphasizes balance—using the right amount of fat, the correct thickening agent, and the perfect seasoning blend to keep the sauce bright and not overpowering.

Ingredients You’ll Need

1. Pan drippings from roasted meat (beef, pork, turkey, or chicken)
2. All purpose flour (or a gluten free alternative)
3. Unsalted butter (optional, for extra richness)
4. Low sodium chicken, beef, or vegetable stock
5. Fresh herbs: thyme, rosemary, or sage
6. Salt and freshly ground black pepper
7. Optional flavor boosters: Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, or a splash of wine
8. Optional aromatics: minced onion, garlic, or shallot
9. Optional thickening agent: cornstarch slurry or arrowroot

Paul emphasizes using the freshest ingredients possible. A high quality stock and fresh herbs can elevate an otherwise ordinary gravy.

Step 1: Gather and Prepare Your Drippings

After roasting your main protein, remove it from the pan and let it rest. The pan will still contain flavorful fat, juices, and browned bits—known as fond. If your roast released a lot of liquid, strain it through a fine sieve to remove any solids. This clear liquid is the backbone of your gravy.

Tip: If you’re using a pan that’s not heavy bottomed, consider transferring the drippings to a saucepan to avoid burning.

Step 2: Make a Roux (Optional, but Recommended)

Paul Kelly often uses a roux to achieve a silky consistency. A roux is a simple mixture of fat and flour cooked together to eliminate raw flour flavor and create a thickening base.

1. In a saucepan, melt 1–2 tablespoons of butter or heat the pan drippings until they're lightly browned.
2. Whisk in an equal amount of flour (about 2 tablespoons for a small batch).
3. Cook the mixture for 1–2 minutes, stirring constantly, until it turns a medium brown color and smells nutty.

For a lighter gravy, you can skip the roux and use a cornstarch slurry instead.

Step 3: Build the Flavor Base

Once your roux is ready, gradually whisk in the stock. Start with about one cup of stock and let it simmer until it thickens. Keep whisking to avoid lumps.

If you prefer a more robust flavor, add:

- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1–2 teaspoons soy sauce (for umami)
- 1 tablespoon wine or sherry
- A splash of balsamic vinegar for acidity

These additions mimic the complex taste profile Paul Kelly often achieves in his gravies.

Step 4: Add Aromatics and Herbs

Simmer the sauce for a few minutes with fresh herbs and aromatics:

- 1–2 sprigs of thyme
- 1–2 sprigs of rosemary (leaves removed)
- 1 small shallot, finely minced
- 1 garlic clove, minced

Let the herbs infuse for 5–7 minutes, then strain the sauce to remove the solids. The result is a clean, aromatic gravy.

Step 5: Adjust Consistency and Seasoning

To reach the desired thickness, you can:

- Continue simmering the sauce until it reaches the consistency you want.
- For a thinner sauce, add more stock.
- For a thicker sauce, let it reduce further or add a cornstarch slurry (mix 1 tablespoon cornstarch with 2 tablespoons cold water).

Season the gravy with salt and pepper to taste. Remember, you're seasoning the entire dish, so adjust based on your personal preference and the saltiness of the stock.

Step 6: Final Touches and Serving

Before serving, give the gravy a final stir and taste. A tiny splash of cream or a knob of butter can add silky richness and shine. Drizzle it over your roast, mashed potatoes, or any dish that could benefit from a savory boost.

Paul Kelly's Secret Variations

Paul's expertise lies not just in the basic recipe, but in his ability to adapt it. Here are a few variations that will keep your gravy exciting:

1. Sauté sliced mushrooms in butter until browned.
2. Add them to the roux and continue with the standard steps.
3. Finish with a splash of white wine and fresh thyme.

1. Replace thyme and rosemary with a mixture of parsley, chives, and tarragon.
2. Add a teaspoon of Dijon mustard for depth.

1. Use vegetable stock and a vegan butter substitute.
2. Replace the flour with a gluten free blend or use cornstarch.
3. Finish with nutritional yeast for a cheesy flavor.

1. Replace flour or cornstarch with xanthan gum or a small amount of cream.
2. Use a low sodium stock to keep sodium content down.

Common Gravy Problems and How to Fix Them

- Too thin: Simmer longer or add a roux or slurry.
- Too thick: Add more stock or water.
- Lumps: Whisk vigorously or strain the sauce.
- Flat flavor: Add a splash of acid (vinegar, lemon juice) or a pinch of MSG.
- Burnt taste: Remove the pan from heat immediately after adding stock; keep whisking.

Storage and Reheating

Paul Kelly recommends storing gravy in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 4 days. Reheat gently on the stovetop, adding a splash of stock if it has thickened too much. For longer storage, freeze the gravy in small portions; thaw in the refrigerator overnight and reheat with a little water.

Pairing Gravy With Your Meal

Choosing the right gravy for your dish can transform a simple plate into a memorable experience. Here are some classic pairings:

- Roast beef – classic brown gravy with a hint of thyme.
- Turkey – a sage and onion gravy with a splash of white wine.
- Chicken – a lemon herb gravy with a touch of garlic.
- Vegetable stew – a mushroom gravy with fresh rosemary.
- Mashed potatoes – a rich, buttery gravy for comfort.

Why Paul Kelly's Method Stands Out

Paul Kelly's approach to gravy is rooted in a few core principles:

- Respect for ingredients: Using high quality drippings and stock sets the flavor foundation.
- Balance: He carefully balances fat, flour, and liquid to achieve the perfect thickness.
- Flexibility: His variations allow adaptation to dietary needs and flavor preferences.
- Attention to detail: From whisking technique to seasoning, every step is purposeful.

By following these steps, you'll not only replicate Paul Kelly's signature gravy but also develop a deeper understanding of sauce making.

Frequently Asked Questions

You can use a gluten free blend, cornstarch, arrowroot, or potato starch. Adjust the quantity to match the thickening power.

Yes, but choose low sodium or homemade stock for the best flavor. Store bought stock often contains excess salt and preservatives.

Absolutely. A cornstarch slurry or a reduction of stock alone can thicken the sauce.

Maintain a steady simmer and whisk constantly. Add a small amount of cold water or stock at the end if separation occurs.

Conclusion

Gravy is more than a condiment; it’s the secret sauce that ties a meal together. By mastering Paul Kelly’s method—starting with quality drippings, creating a balanced roux, infusing with herbs, and fine tuning the texture—you’ll produce a sauce that’s both comforting and sophisticated. Experiment with the variations and tips provided, and soon you’ll be able to craft a gravy that perfectly complements any dish. Happy cooking, and may every bite be seasoned with love and skill!

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