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4343 Pacific Avenue - Suite B-1
Stockton, CA 95207
(209) 952-1966
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Italian Sausage and Pepper Stew
(Makes 4 servings)

I've always been wild about Italian sausages and often make my own. The combination of sausages and bell peppers is typical of the kind of Italian-American home cooking one comes across in New York and on Long Island, where I went to high school. I'm not sure my mother ever made a stew like this, but this is the type of stew she could have made. Leftovers, as you can imagine, make for wonderful heroes. Take a soft Italian hero (also known as a submarine), roll and heat it in the oven until it begins to harden on the outside, then lay the hot leftover sausage and peppers in it with a sprinkle of Parmigiano cheese.

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
4 green bell peppers (about 1-1/2 pounds total), seeded and cut into strips
1/2 pound red onions, chopped
4 large garlic cloves, finely chopped
1-1/4 pounds hot Italian sausages
1 pound ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped
1-1/2 cups water
1 bouquet garni, consisting of 5 sprigs each fresh basil and mint, tied with kitchen twine
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1. In a stove-top casserole or Dutch oven, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Cook the peppers, onions, and garlic until the onions are translucent and the peppers slightly limp, stirring frequently so the garlic doesn't burn, about 5 minutes. Add the sausages, tomatoes, water, and bouquet garni and season with salt and pepper. Increase the heat to high until the mixture starts boiling, about 5 minutes. Then reduce the heat to medium and cook until the sausages are firm, stirring occasionally, 20 to 25 minutes.

2. Discard the bouquet garni. Slice the sausages or leave whole and serve.