



The King's Table: Recipes for a Medieval Feast

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The Romans, with their habits and great tradition of cooking, exerted a profound influence on France (ancient Gaul) from the first century onwards. The ancient culinary culture found refuge in monasteries, where the 4th-century A.D. cookbook *De re coquinaria* (*On cooking*), attributed to Apicius, was used for many centuries.

After the Germanic invasions, Gaul went through a tragic period of food shortage and famines that marked the beginning of the Middle Ages. While the upper classes continued the refined culinary traditions of the Romanized Gauls, the masses survived on diets of oats, soups, and, on rare occasions, meat.

While food production proved unreliable in the Middle Ages, the spice trade expanded, bringing exotic flavors from Asia and Africa including, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, nutmeg, and ginger. Spices were extremely expensive, highly sought after, and served as status symbols in the French courts. In fact, the spice repertoire of a court cook in the Middle Ages was likely more extensive than that used by many cooks today.

The elaborate foods, spices, and arrangement of dishes that appeared on the court tables demonstrated the power and taste of the church and nobleman. Let us travel to medieval France in the J. Paul Getty Museum's special exhibition *Imagining the Past in France, 1250–1500* and enjoy a feast inspired by it. *Bon appétit!*

—Maite Gomez-Rejón

A Medieval Coat of Arms Salad

In French cuisine a "salad composée" refers to a salad in which an assortment of ingredients are arranged aesthetically on a plate. During the Middle Ages it was not uncommon to form a coat of arms with edibles.

Recipe by Maite Gomez-Rejón.

For the salad:

- 6 cups cabbage, thinly sliced
- 2 cups radicchio, thinly sliced
- 3 bunches parsley
- 6 cups beets
- 6 apples, peeled, cored, and thinly sliced
- 2 cups almonds
- 2 cups dried prunes
- 2 cups dried or fresh figs
- 2 cups dates

For the vinaigrette:

3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2/3 cup olive oil
2 teaspoons finely grated fresh lemon zest
½ teaspoon sugar
salt and pepper to taste

1. For the vinaigrette: Whisk together lemon juice, zest, sugar, salt and pepper to taste until the sugar is dissolved. Then, in a slow steady stream, whisk in the olive oil until emulsified.
2. Separately toss the cabbage, radicchio, beets, and apples with the dressing.
3. Artistically arrange the dressed elements of the salad with the dried fruit and nuts so that repetitive patterns of color and shape please the eye or so that a coat of arms is formed...have fun and be creative!

Serves 6

Marinated Leeks in Mustard Vinaigrette

Leeks were cultivated in medieval Europe as a vegetable both nourishing and stimulating to the "desires of Venus." This thought continued through the Renaissance, when they were commonly consumed on wedding nights. Used since antiquity, mustard was highly valued in the Middle Ages. The commercial production of mustard began in the mid-14th century in Dijon, France.

Recipe by Maite Gomez-Rejón.

For the leeks:

6 to 8 leeks
1 bay leaf
5 parsley branches
4 thyme sprigs
1 carrot, thinly sliced
1 celery rib, thinly sliced

For the mustard vinaigrette:

2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 garlic clove, minced
¼ teaspoon salt
pinch pepper
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon plain yogurt
1/3 cup olive oil
1 tablespoon chopped parsley

1. Halve the leeks lengthwise, using only about an inch of the pale green part. Rinse well.
2. Put them, in a single layer, in a large pan with the fresh herbs, carrot, and celery. Add enough water to cover.
3. Simmer until they are tender when pierced with a knife, about 20 minutes.
4. Transfer the leeks to a platter with some of the broth and spoon the vinaigrette over the top.
5. For the vinaigrette, combine the vinegar, salt, and garlic in a small bowl. Let stand for a few minutes then whisk in the mustard, yogurt, and oil until thick and smooth.
6. Add the pepper then stir in the chopped parsley. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Serves 6

Spinach and Fava Bean Soup

Fava beans, also known as broad beans, are among the few beans native to the Mediterranean and can be found as ingredients in ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman dishes. Most other beans we use in cooking today came into Europe after the discovery of the New World. In medieval Europe, fava beans were eaten fresh during their growing season, spring/summer, and were also dried to be enjoyed year round. The following recipe, using ingredients that would have been available in medieval France, can be made with fresh or dried fava beans.

Recipe by Robin Trento.

6 pounds fresh fava beans in their pods (yields 8 cups of beans, shelled and skinned) *OR*
2 pounds (32 oz.) dried fava beans (yields 8 cups of beans, rehydrated and skinned)
1 teaspoon salt
¼ cup olive oil
3 onions, chopped
4 stalks celery, chopped
4 carrots, chopped
¼ cup each of fresh herbs (parsley, sage, rosemary & thyme), all finely chopped
salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
5 quarts (20 cups) hot water
8 cups fresh spinach leaves, chopped

1. Remove fresh fava beans from pods. Then cook beans in a pot of salted, boiling water for 2 minutes. (If using dried beans, boil for 10 minutes in unsalted water, then proceed as follows.) After boiling, drain and immediately rinse beans with cold, running water. Score each bean on its smooth edge and slip it out of its tough skin and set skinned beans aside.
2. Heat the olive oil in a large stockpot (6 to 8 quart), over moderate heat. Add the chopped onion, celery, and carrots, and sauté about 7 to 10 minutes. Add the chopped fresh herbs; continue to cook for another 2 to 3 minutes and salt to taste.
3. Pour in 5 quarts of water, and stir in the beans. Cover and bring to a boil, then lower heat and cook until beans are soft (about half hour for fresh fava beans, an hour for dried). Add salt and freshly ground pepper as desired.
4. Add chopped spinach leaves for the last 10 minutes of cooking (after the beans are sufficiently soft).
5. Remove from heat and cool slightly before serving. Serve with a little grated cheese and drizzle of olive oil. This soup is even more delicious if allowed to cool somewhat before eating, and even more so when re-heated the next day.

Makes 10 to 12 bowls of soup, or 20 to 24 cups of soup

Grilled Fish Fillets with Yellow Sauce *Poivre Jaunet*

"Take ginger and saffron, then take bread soaked in broth (or even better, meatless cabbage water) and boil; when it boils, add vinegar" (Ménagier de Paris). In the Middle Ages, this yellow sauce was used with meat as well as fish.

Recipe by Nancy Real.

For the sauce:

½ cup plain breadcrumbs
2 cups vegetable broth
½ teaspoon saffron threads
½ teaspoon ground ginger
3 cloves garlic, crushed
3 tablespoons white wine vinegar
salt and pepper, to taste

In a 2-quart saucepot, stir to combine the breadcrumbs, broth, saffron, ginger, and garlic. Bring the mixture to a boil and stir in the vinegar. Simmer and stir for 2 minutes. Stir in the salt and pepper, to taste. Strain sauce and set aside. Warm up sauce before serving.

Makes 1 cup

For the fish:

5 to 6 tablespoons olive oil
six 5-ounce fish fillets (trout, haddock, or red snapper)
salt and pepper, to taste
1 lemon, thinly sliced (for garnish)
6 sprigs of parsley (for garnish)

Heat oil in a 12- or 14-inch nonstick skillet. Add fish fillets and sauté on medium heat 3 to 5 minutes per side or until fish is flaky and cooked through. Serve fish on a platter or in individual dinner plates; spoon some warm sauce over each fish fillet. Garnish with lemon slice and parsley.

Serves 6

French Country Sausage (*Saucisse a Cuire*)

Sausage making dates to ancient times; it evolved as a way to maximize the yield of a hunt and preserve meat that could not be consumed fresh at slaughter. The word sausage derives from the Latin word salsus, which means salted, or preserved. Sausage recipes from around the world reflect local climates, cuisines, and ingredients. This recipe combines ingredients that would have been typically used during the Middle Ages in French country cooking. Sausages were traditionally stuffed into casings of animal intestines, or fried as patties, as below.

Recipe by Robin Trento.

1 pound fresh pork (shoulder or Boston butt)
1 pound fresh veal (stew meat or shank)
½ pound slab bacon, rind removed
1 tablespoon each freshly ground pepper and salt
1 teaspoon each of fresh herbs (thyme, sage, marjoram, parsley) all finely chopped
1 teaspoon each of exotic spices (nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves) all ground
¼ cup dry white wine
2 to 4 tablespoons flour (for light dusting of sausage patties before frying)
Vegetable oil, as needed (for pan frying)

1. Chop meat, and slab of bacon (with its fat) into coarse pieces. Partially freeze meat.
2. Place these very cold meat chunks (excluding bacon) into a meat grinder on a medium coarse setting and grind them all together.
3. Finely dice the cold bacon pieces (including fat) by hand, and add to ground meat mixture.
4. Mix in the salt, herbs and spices; then pour in white wine. Blend well with fingers. Allow the mixture to rest overnight in a tightly covered bowl in refrigerator so all flavors can mingle.
5. With moistened hands, shape the sausage mixture into round patties about ¾" thick and 2" wide. Lightly dust both sides of the patties with flour prior to frying. Place them in a lightly greased pan set over medium heat. As they cook, gently press the patties with a slotted spatula to squeeze out excess fat. Brown patties 5 to 8 minutes on each side, then drain on paper towels and serve hot.

Makes 20 sausage patties

Rissoles

In the Middle Ages, pastry was used to envelop a variety of ingredients that could be baked—and held cleanly. As a result, rissoles, or turnovers, became popular confections in the 14- and 15- centuries and were served at banquets as entremets (small bites that were enjoyed between courses.)

Recipe by Nancy Real.

For the Pâte Brisée (pastry dough):

1 cup water
1 teaspoon saffron threads
1 ¾ cups all-purpose, unbleached flour
9 tablespoons cold, unsalted butter, cut into squares
scant 1 teaspoon salt

1. Prepare saffron water up to a day ahead prior to making rissoles: In a small saucepan boil together the water and saffron for 2 to 3 minutes (water should turn yellow). Transfer saffron water to a Pyrex or porcelain bowl and cool completely. Strain water into a glass or porcelain bowl, reserving saffron threads; cover and refrigerate. (Do not use a plastic container as it will permanently discolor.)
2. Meanwhile, in a large mixing bowl, combine the flour, butter squares, and salt. With a pastry cutter or a fork, blend in butter until mixture is uniform and resembles small peas.
3. Sprinkle 1/3 cup plus 3 tablespoons of saffron water over ingredients in bowl, mixing gently, until mixture amalgamates and dough is formed. Reserve remaining saffron water for cheese filling.
4. Gather dough with hands, shaping it into a ball. Cover dough ball completely with plastic wrap. Refrigerate dough while preparing fruit filling.

For the fruit filling:

3 tablespoons white or dark raisins, chopped into ¼-inch pieces
4 ounces dried figs (about 8 figs), chopped into ¼-inch pieces
½ cup almonds or walnut meats, chopped into ¼-inch pieces
¼ teaspoon ground ginger
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
pinch ground cloves
½ cup cold water
½ cup white wine
1 apple, peeled, cored, and chopped into ¼-inch pieces

1. In a 2-quart saucepot, combine all ingredients and bring to a boil. Cook until apple is soft (do not overcook). Strain cooked fruit into a Pyrex or porcelain bowl, discarding liquid. Cover and set on a counter to cool completely. In the meantime, roll out pastry as follows:
2. With lightly floured hands, flatten dough to an 8-inch circle. Working on a flat surface place dough between two floured waxed paper sheets, each measuring 18 inches. Gently roll out dough from center to outer edges to form a 16-inch circle. To prevent sticking, peel off the waxed paper sheets and dust them with flour two or three times while working. The dough should be thin.
3. Remove top waxed sheet and, with a 2½-inch round cookie cutter or a glass, cut circles into the dough. Set circles aside on a lightly floured surface.
4. Gather remaining scraps of dough, shaping them into a ball. Flatten them to form a 6 or 8-inch circle; repeat flouring, rolling and cutting instructions. Set aside.
5. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 375°F. Grease and flour two large baking sheets and set aside. Prepare a small bowl with cold water and set aside.
6. Place scant 1 teaspoon of the fruit filling onto each dough circle. Wet edges of dough circles with water and seal the rissoles into half-moon shapes. Place the rissoles on baking sheets, spaced one inch apart (each sheet will hold approximately 15 to 18 rissoles).
7. Bake 6 minutes and then invert sheets. Bake an additional 6 to 8 minutes or until underside of rissoles are golden brown. Serve warm.

Makes 32 to 36 rissoles

For the cheese filling:

½ cup reserved saffron water and threads
 1 pound farmer's or ricotta cheese
 3 large eggs, beaten
 4 ounces unsalted butter, cut into squares and softened
 1 cup plain breadcrumbs
 ½ cup dark or golden raisins
 1/8 to ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
 1/8 to ¼ teaspoon ground ginger

1. In a 3-quart mixing bowl, combine the cheese, eggs, butter, breadcrumbs, raisins, and the lesser amounts of spices together. With a fork, gently stir in 3 to 4 tablespoons of the saffron water and threads to combine or until cheese mixture is uniform. Taste and, if needed, adjust spice level. Set cheese mixture aside and roll out pastry as follows:
2. With lightly floured hands, flatten dough to an 8-inch circle. Working on a flat surface place dough between two floured waxed paper sheets, each measuring 18 inches. Gently roll out dough from center to outer edges to form a 16-inch circle. To prevent sticking, peel off the waxed paper sheets and dust them with flour two or three times while working. The dough should be thin.
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4. Gather remaining scraps of dough, shaping them into a ball. Flatten them to form a 6 or 8-inch circle; repeat flouring, rolling and cutting instructions. Set aside.
5. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 375°F. Grease and flour two large baking sheets and set aside. Prepare a small bowl with cold water and set aside.
6. Place scant 1 teaspoon of the cheese filling onto each dough circle. Wet edges of dough circles with water and seal the rissoles into half-moon shapes. Place the rissoles on baking sheets, spaced one inch apart. (Each sheet will hold approximately 15 to 18 rissoles).
7. Bake 6 minutes and then invert sheets. Bake an additional 6 to 8 minutes or until underside of rissoles are golden brown. Serve warm.

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Spiced Quince Butter Cake

Most spices came from the East and long remained rare and expensive commodities in Europe. Roman food was always liberally spiced, and the practice of cooking with spices continued through the Middle Ages and remained common until the 18th century. Because of their rarity and value, spices were highly esteemed gifts during the Middle Ages. In France, it is reported that taxes, ransoms, or customs dues were sometimes paid in spices. Guillaume Taillevent listed ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, and cloves (among others) necessary in a well-stocked kitchen. Much later, the French gastronome C  re regarded the abuse of spices as one of the enemies of good cookery!

In medieval France, quince was used not only in cooking, but also in perfumery and medicine.

Recipe by Maite Gomez-Rej  n.

For the quince:

1 quince, peeled, cored and cut into 16 slices
 1 cup water
 1 cup sugar
 1 cinnamon stick
 1 star anise

For the cake:

1 stick butter, cut into pieces
1 1/3 cup confectioner's sugar
1/2 cup ground almonds
1/3 cup flour
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon ground cardamom
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
4 egg whites
1/2 teaspoon orange zest

1. To prepare the quince: In a large saucepan, combine the quince, water, sugar, cinnamon, and star anise. Cover. Bring the mixture to a boil over high heat, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until the quince is tender. Let cool in the poaching liquid, then remove from liquid and pat dry on paper towels.
2. To make the cake: Preheat oven to 400° F. In a large skillet over medium heat, melt the butter. Continue to let the butter heat until the white milk solids fall to the bottom of the skillet and turn a rich hazelnut brown. (This is called brown butter.)
3. Separately sift together the confectioner's sugar, ground almonds, flour, and spices in a bowl.
4. On the lowest speed of a Kitchen Aid or hand blender, whisk in the egg whites and orange zest. Mix until all the dry ingredients are moistened. Increase the speed and stir in the brown butter. Beat until smooth.
5. Butter a 10-inch cake pan, pour in the batter and smooth the top. Arrange the quince slices on the batter and bake 25 to 30 minutes, or until golden brown. Let cool before serving.

Serves 6 to 8

Spiced Honey Nut Crunch (*Nucato*)

The term dessert comes from desservir, an Old French word meaning "to clear a table," and originated during the Middle Ages. This nucato is related to the delicious "nougat noir" or black nougat that is still made in the southern French town of Sisteron. This recipe contains a pleasant surprise— the perfumed bite of spices.

Recipe by Nancy Real.

1 1/2 cups honey
1 pound walnuts, coarsely chopped
1/2 to 3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

1. In a 4-quart saucepot, gradually bring the honey to a boil. Add the nuts and spices to the simmering honey.
2. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly and standing away from burner to avoid hot splatters, for 6 to 10 minutes or until honey turns amber.
3. Place parchment paper onto a large baking sheet or butter a large, Pyrex baking dish.
4. Carefully pour honey-nut mixture evenly onto parchment paper or baking dish, spreading it evenly with a lemon.
5. Cool completely before serving, about 40 minutes. Using shears, cut nucato into two-inch squares, placing them in a serving platter.

Makes 30 to 36 pieces

Spiced Red Wine (*Hippocras*)

Attributed to the 5th-century B.C. Greek physician Hippocrates, hippocras is a drink of wine mixed with sugar and spices. It was a popular drink, served hot or cold, during the Middle Ages and up to the 17th century.

Recipe by Maite Gomez-Rejón.

1 bottle red wine
½ cup sugar
4 cardamom pods
4 cinnamon sticks
4 whole cloves
6 whole peppercorns
1 lemon, cut in thin slivers

1. Place all ingredients, except the lemon, in a saucepot and bring to a boil.
2. Lower heat and simmer for about 8 minutes.
3. Remove the cinnamon, cloves, peppercorns, and cardamom pods and serve warm garnished with a sliver of lemon.

Serves 6

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