



FRENCH COOKERY

ALTHOUGH France has been called "the land of good food" it is wrong to suppose that all French cookery is expensive. On the contrary, the French housewife is proverbially thrifty, and she can make the most delicious concoctions with tiny pieces of this and that, ever so skilfully blended. An onion, a cabbage, a little cheese, a small piece of meat, a few fish-heads, a dish of cream—and Madame can evolve a tempting "ragout"—which sounds much more exciting than a stew, but differs only in the expert flavouring. She is, moreover, a keen and discriminating marketer and is not to be put off with a stale vegetable or an aged fowl.

The French housewife does not depend on detailed recipes like her American sister, of whom it is said that she even counts the grains of salt; American recipes are very strict in their measurements, and insist on "one-eighth of a teaspoon" of this or that, while the French cook blithely shakes in a sprinkling of cayenne and nutmeg and lots of other things, achieving her exquisite results by the old-fashioned and trustworthy expedient of *tasting*.

Omelette à n'Importe Quoi (Omelette with anything)

Omelette à la this—omelette à la that—the French make a marvellous diversity of savoury omelettes, stuffed with fish, or meat or vegetables. The base is the same as for the omelette given below; omit the herbs from the egg mixture and double the omelette over on shrimps in thick Béchamel sauce, or on cooked mushrooms and shrimps, or on fried onions, or cooked asparagus tips, with or without sauce—and so on with countless variations.

Omelette aux Herbes Fines

Use fresh herbs, finely chopped. Allow two eggs per person for a small omelette, slightly less in proportion for a big one. Break eggs, white and yolk together, in a bowl or soup plate, add salt and pepper and beat well with a fork until frothy. Add finely chopped herbs; melt butter in frying pan, pour in beaten eggs quickly, and with a knife or fork jab constantly so that in setting the omelette does not become tough; keep mixture free from side of pan. Do not overcook, the top should remain creamy. When ready, remove pan from fire, slide half of the omelette on to a hot dish, and double over on to it the other half; or double in the pan and slide on to the dish. Do not beat up the eggs until the omelette is to be made.

Béchamel Sauce

This is just a good white sauce with the addition of lemon-juice. Melt two ounces of butter, stir in an ounce of flour, and cook for two or three minutes but do not let brown; (a double saucepan makes it very easy to do). Sprinkle in pepper and salt; add gradually about three-quarters of a tumbler of warm milk, stirring whilst the flour cooks and the sauce thickens. At the last moment add a few little bits of cold butter and the juice of half a lemon. To make the sauce richer, put also a little cream, taking care not to let the sauce boil afterwards. Serve immediately. For Sauce à la Crème do exactly the same, using all cream, or half cream and half milk. For Sauce au Vin Blanc use two

parts of stock and one part of white wine instead of milk. Add the yolk of an egg and a little lemon juice.

Sauce aux Oeufs Durs

A different "hard-boiled egg sauce." Allow for each person one hard-boiled egg. After shelling, cut them in halves widthwise, and take out the yolks and

Savoury Crayfish

One cooked medium crayfish, cut into small pieces and arranged on plates. Grate a small onion finely, and sprinkle it over the crayfish. Make a mayonnaise dressing with 4 tablespoons of vinegar, mixed with 1 teaspoon of mustard and 4 tablespoons of sugar, and one egg. Mix well, then put in $\frac{1}{2}$ a teaspoon of salt, pepper, and lastly 4 tablespoons of milk, but do not stir until it is put on the fire. Bring to the boil for 1 minute, or until it is thick, stirring all the time. Still stirring, pour this over the crayfish, and when cold, serve with or without lettuce salad.

pound up. Mix this with salt, pepper and a little mustard; stir in some salad oil drop by drop; then thin out with a little vinegar. Fill the whites of eggs with the mixture. Serve with hot or iced asparagus.

Crème de Laitues

This is just Lettuce Soup—but very nice. Cut three or four lettuces in halves; wash, drain, and cook for ten minutes in two to three ounces of butter previously heated, with a couple of onions, a little bit of parsley and chervil if available. Add three to four pints of boiling water and two tablespoons rice; salt and pepper. When rice is cooked, pass contents of saucepan through sieve. If puree is too thick, add a little milk. Just before serving add a nice lump of butter and some fresh cream or milk.

French Onion Broth

This is simple, delicious, and quickly made.

Slice some onions and fry them in butter until they are a golden brown. Remove them from the pan and place in a well-warmed soup tureen or basin. Have ready some small cubes of bread. Put these into the pan to absorb all the fat in which the onions have been frying. When the pan is quite dry take the bread and add it to the onions. Have ready a kettle of boiling water. Pour over the onions and the bread and allow the whole to draw for a few minutes like tea. Add a little seasoning as needed and serve hot.

Breton Fishermen's Soup

This is the Breton fishermen's staple dish. They put into their cooking-pot a big piece of fish, generally conger eel, and also the heads of several large fish. A poor family will make this with heads only. Cover with plenty of water, add a good pinch of salt, and boil up quickly, removing the scum as it forms. Add two or three leeks cut up, two carrots, a parsnip, a turnip, a cabbage cut up, a large onion, a laurel leaf or two, and anything else you have in the way of vegetables. Now simmer gently for several hours. The fish-heads only are taken out—any pieces of fish are eaten in the soup along with the vegetables.

Crepe Suzette

This is really a very rich and delicious pancake. I saw it made by a French chef of some note; and afterwards ate it! A small glass each of brandy and curacao were poured over the dish of pancakes, and set on fire just as they were brought to the table. This no doubt played its part in giving the pancakes the exquisite flavour. I remember with what dexterity the small plump dark man handled the little round-bottomed frying pan, shaking each pancake, and tossing it two or three times, before slipping it on to a dish, and spreading it with good strawberry jam. He then folded the circle in half and then in half again to form a triangle. When the "crêpes" were all done—about a dozen, I think, they were arranged in two straight rows on a silver dish, one overlapping the next; then set on fire as I said before. Here is the recipe: 4 eggs, 3 tablespoons of milk, 1 tablespoon of water, a pinch of ground nutmeg, 3 tablespoons of flour, a pinch of salt, a teaspoon of ground almonds. Stir the ingredients smoothly to the consistency of thick olive oil, or until it will pour back silently and smoothly from a foot or more above the mixing bowl. Heat in a round bottomed frying pan 1 tablespoon of sweet butter. When it bubbles, pour in enough paste to cover the bottom. Move the pan to spread the paste thinly and keep it moving. After one minute, turn the pancake upside down, then turn it again and again until it is nicely browned. Then spread with strawberry jam, and fold into the triangles, as I have already described, and arrange them on the dish.

FROM THE MAIL BAG

Preserved Mushrooms

Dear Aunt Daisy,

Having heard your suggestions for preserving mushrooms, I thought you might be interested in a method which, in the main, is the same, but which I think is a little easier. I have been doing them in this way for several seasons with perfect results.

The mushrooms must be cooked, if possible, on the day on which they are gathered, or not any later than the day following. Peel and place them in layers in a pot or preserving pan, sprinkling each layer with salt. When the juice starts to run, place the pan on a gentle heat, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon to prevent sticking; and go on adding the mushrooms so that they are cooking as you peel. As soon as sufficient juice has come out, increase the heat and boil all until thoroughly cooked—about an hour. Turn them into a basin and when cool (this can be done next day if pressed for time!), pack them firmly into jars. I use the glass top clamp ones. Fill them up with their own juice to within half an inch of the top; attach new rubber rings, and clamp the lids down lightly. Place in a water bath—I use a gas copper, and place the jars on a little platform with the water half-way up the jars. Put the lid on the copper, bring to the boil, and boil for one hour. Then clamp the jars down and leave boiling for ten minutes longer; then turn out the gas and leave the jars in until cold. Take them out, turn them upside down, and store.

Ketchup

There is usually much more juice than is required, so by adding mace, pepper corns, more salt and ginger to taste, and boiling up for about half an hour, a delicious ketchup can be made. Mushrooms which I did in this manner, two years ago, have been pronounced by all who have tasted them to be superior to any others they have had, even to freshly gathered and cooked ones!—"Listener," (Dunedin).

That is a valuable letter, and we do thank you for your interest and trouble.

Cooking Beetroot

Dear Aunt Daisy,

We were discussing how to cook beetroot without its losing colour. Well, do you know, I have never yet failed to retain the colour in my beetroot, and yet I always peel mine like a potato, then cut it into slices, and boil it in a little salted water. When cooked, I add vinegar and sugar to taste. As it boils, the colour comes out, but after the vinegar and sugar have been added it behaves like a boomerang (shall I say?), and the colour comes back! You try

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