

# FRENCH VEGETARIAN COOKING



Paola Gavin

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M Evans

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*To Francesca, Seana, and Bianca*

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# INTRODUCTION

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French cooking is considered to be the finest in the world. There are two cuisines—*haute cuisine*, which evolved from France’s great chefs—La Varenne, Antonin Carême, and Auguste Escoffier, and *cuisine régionale*—regional country cooking made with local produce from recipes passed on from mother to daughter for generations. This book is a personal collection of regional vegetarian dishes from all of the provinces of France.

French provincial cookery varies enormously. In the northeast it is influenced by Flemish and German cuisine. Savoie, Provence, the Comté de Nice, and Corsica have much in common with the cooking of Italy. Roussillon and the Pays Basque have strong links with Spanish cooking.

Vegetarian food is nothing new to France. In the Middle Ages, France suffered many famines. Meat and fish were replaced by cereals, which, together with dried beans, vegetables, and herbs, formed the basis of the peasant diet.

However, French food as we know it today did not evolve until the middle of the sixteenth century after Catherine de Medici married the Dauphin and brought her Italian chefs to France. At that time Florence was the most sophisticated city in Europe with the finest cuisine. New vegetables were introduced—tiny peas, artichokes, broccoli, Savoy cabbage, and various salad greens, along with new methods of cooking. *Haricots* (French green beans), Jerusalem artichokes, sweet corn, tomatoes, and potatoes were introduced from the New World, although it took two hundred years before the tomato and potato were widely accepted as edible in France.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century a great chef and cookbook writer emerged—Antonin Carême—“King of Cooks and Cook of Kings.” At this time the division between *haute cuisine* and *cuisine régionale* began. Restaurants sprang up all over Paris, run by chefs who formerly had cooked for the aristocracy, and by wellknown chefs from all of the provinces of France, each outdoing another with their culinary inventions. At about the same time French regional cooking was evolving. New stoves were invented with adjustable heat, which helped to advance cooking techniques. Before then most cooking was done in cauldrons over hot coals. In many villages food had to be taken to the local baker to be cooked as he had the only oven.

After World War I cooking and eating in France changed greatly. More meat and fish were eaten and more butter and cream were used. Many traditional recipes were lost during the war. Fortunately a new interest in regional cooking emerged, led by Curnonsky, the prince of gastronomes, who motored around the French provinces seeking out local specialties. Unfortunately a visitor to France today would find few local specialties in restaurants, which now cater to “international” tastes. Nevertheless traditional dishes are still prepared with much loving care at home.

The recipes in this book are very simple and easy to prepare. Unlike for *haute cuisine*, no great skill is needed. There is plenty of room for improvisation and flexibility. As Roger Lallemand writes in *Vrai Cuisine à Travers La France, La Lyonnais et La Bresse*, “cooking is above all a question of heart and personality, not weights and measures.”

# ***THE REGIONS AND THEIR SPECIALTIES***



In this chapter I have divided France into regions that roughly coincide with her historic provinces, with the exception of Gasgony and Guyenne, which I have subdivided and re-grouped according to their gastronomic similarities.

After each section I have given a list of local specialties, which are by no means definitive—such work would take a lifetime of research—which I hope will give the reader a fuller understanding of the great diversity of French vegetarian cooking. Many of these specialties have not been included in the recipe section of this book, where I have chosen dishes based entirely on my personal preferences and taste, and on the simplicity of their preparation.

## ***Picardy, Flanders, Artois***

Picardy, Flanders, and Artois lie in the northeast corner of France, on the Belgian border, facing England across the Channel. These are the flatlands of the north—the most industrialized region of France, and the least inspiring. Picardy, perhaps more than its two neighbors, has retained its own customs, folklore, and cooking, with many vegetable dishes, cakes, and sweets that date back to the Middle Ages.

All kinds of vegetables—leeks, carrots, peas, pumpkins, beans, and a wide variety of salad greens—are grown in *hortillonnages*—market gardens divided up by canals that can only be reached by punt. Many vegetable soups are made as well as vegetable or cheese tarts, which are called *tartes*, *tourtes*, *flamiches*, *flamiques*, or *goyères*.

Desserts are simple and rustic. Various fruit tarts and pies are made, usually with apple, pears, or rhubarb. *Tarte à l'ancienne* is filled with a mixture of *fromage blanc* (fresh white cheese), egg yolks, and cream. Amiens is famous for its macaroons.

The cooking of Flanders is more Flemish than French. Flanders became French in 1668, when it was acquired by Louis XIV, (before then it was part of the Spanish Netherlands, which were ruled by the Hapsburgs).

Cumonsky called Flanders “the country of brick and beer.” Beer is often used in the cooking of Flanders—*flamiche au maroilles* is a tart filled with *Maroilles* cheese, beer, eggs, and cream; *petits légumes à la bière de garde* is a dish of mixed vegetables simmered in beer, white wine, and herbs.

Cereals, sugar beets, and hops are widely grown. Cabbage and potatoes are favorite vegetables, and of course, the Belgian endive. Endive, or chicory, to use the original name, was first grown in Belgium in the middle of the nineteenth century, and was introduced to France some years later. However, by the end of the century the French were forced to use the same name “endive,” as the Belgians objected to the French using the same name. In Flanders, coffee is always served with the ground roots of dried chicory, which gives it its characteristic bitter taste.

Many cakes, pies, waffles, pancakes, and brioches are made, often with Flemish names. *Kok*

*boteram*, or *Couque-bootram*, is a large raisin brioche; *crakinoskis à la rhubarbe* is a kind of pound cake topped with rhubarb. *Pain d'épice* (spice bread) is said to have originated in Flanders during the time of the spice trade.

Artois is sandwiched between Picardy and Flanders, and has no coastline. It is a little hillier than its neighbors, and is sometimes called "la petite Suisse" (little Switzerland) by the locals.

Artois has few culinary traditions, although fine vegetables are grown around Saint-Omer. Like in Flanders, Artois has a beer soup. The *coeurs d'Arras* are little spice cakes. *Gateau d'Artois* is a puff pastry filled with *crème pâtissière*. *Craquelin* is an oval-shaped brioche.

The cheeses of the north are strong: *Maroilles*, *Rollot* (a favorite of Louis XIV), and *Gris de Lille* sometimes called "Le Vieux Puant" (the old stinker). *La Boulette d'Avesnes* is a low-fat cheese seasoned with salt, pepper, crushed cloves, and fines herbes, and left to ripen for four months on windowsills or on special shelves nailed to window frames. The sunlight helps dry the cheese.

No wine is produced in the region. Besides beer, gin (*genièvre*) is made, which is often added to a cup of coffee (*l'bistouille*). Cider and *poiré* (perry) are also made.

## LOCAL SPECIALTIES

**LE PAIN DAUSSÉ or DAUSSADE.** Chopped scallions and lettuce mixed with vinegar, cream, and coarse salt, served on slices of country bread.

**SOUP DE BETTERAVES.** Beetroot soup with onion and celery.

**SOUP DES HORTILLONS.** Vegetable soup with cabbage, leeks, potatoes, peas, lettuce, sorrel, and chervil.

**SOUP DE FLANDRES.** Puréed vegetable soup made with potatoes, leeks, celeriac, and tomato, thickened with tapioca.

**FLAMICHE AUX POIREAUX or FLAMIQUE À PORIONS.** Leek pie.

**FLAMICHE AUX OIGNONS or FLAMIQUE À L'OIGNONS.** Onion pie.

**FLAMIQUE À L'CHTTROUILLE or TOURTE AU POTIRON.** Pumpkin pie.

**GOYÈRE DE VALENCIENNES.** A Maroilles and fresh white cheese tart.

**TARTE À LA DJOTTE DE NIVELLES.** Tart filled with beet greens, onions, and fresh white cheese.

**TARTE AU MAROILLES.** Maroilles cheese tart.

**SOUFFLÉ PICARD.** Leek soufflé.

**HARICOTS BLANCS, SAUCE PICARDE.** Dried white haricot beans simmered with onion and carrots, topped with a thick onion sauce.

**ENDIVES AU GRATIN.** Belgian endives topped with *béchamel* sauce and grated cheese and gratinéed.

**GRATIN DE CHOUFLEUR PICARDE.** Cauliflower topped with a thick onion sauce, breadcrumbs and melted butter and gratinéed in a hot oven.

**POMMES DE TERRE DE DUNKERQUE.** Parboiled potatoes, cut in half and deep-fried.

**SALADE AMIÉNOISE.** Salad of Belgian endives, apples, lettuce, and walnuts.

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**GAUFRES AU POTIRON.** Pumpkin waffles.

**GALOPIAUX.** Thick pancakes sprinkled with brown sugar.

**GALOPINS.** Thick pancakes made with bread or brioche.

**GÂTEAU DE MERS.** Apple cake topped with whipped cream.

**RABOTTE PICARDE.** An apple baked in puff pastry—similar to the *douillon* of Normandy.

**TARTE À L'PRONÉE or TARTE AUX PRUNEAUX.** Prune tart.

**ESKOUKEBAEKE.** Large pancakes made with beer, served with honey or jam.

**NIEULLES.** Little flat cakes.

## ***Normandy***

The Normans are descendents of the Vikings, or Norsemen, who, in the latter part of the ninth century, plundered the valleys of Normandy almost as far as Paris. Eventually Charles the Simple (who was no fool) decided the only way to secure peace was to give the Vikings the land. So, in 911, their leader, Rollo, became the first Duke of Normandy.

The land is suprisingly varied, with long, sandy beaches near the fashionable resorts of Deauville and Le Touquet, the chalky cliffs of Etretat—mirroring the white cliffs of Dover—the rocky headlands of the Cotentin Peninsula, and the extraordinary Mont-St-Michel—often called the eighth wonder of the world. To the south and west lie the hilly peaks of the Norman Switzerland, and the beech forest of the *bocage* that stretches toward Brittany.

Normandy has been called “the farm of France.” It is one of the most prosperous of the French provinces; its wealth comes directly from the fertility of the land and its superior cattle. Norman cooking is based on dairy products; cream is lavished on everything and the butter of Isigny is unrivalled by the sweet butter of the Charente. Normandy cheese is world famous—Camembert, *Livarot*, *Pont-Lévêque* (known as the three graces), *Neufchâtel*, *Demisel*, and *Petit-suisse*.

Vegetables, especially asparagus, Brussels sprouts, green beans, carrots, cabbage, salsify, and peas are widely grown. Rouen is famous for its watercress, and more parsley is cultivated in Soutrainville than anywhere else in France. Many creamy vegetable soups and fluffy omelettes are made. Wild mushrooms are gathered in the Avranchin and Orne forests.

Although pears and cherries are grown, the apple is queen. Apples appear in pies, cakes, tarts, flan, crêpes, and omelettes. Normandy has no vineyards: this is cider country. There are several *crus*—*brut*, *bouché* (slightly effervescent), and *sec*. *Sec* is best. Perry is also made, as well as cider and pear vinegars. Normandy is also famous for its apple brandy, Calvados, which also has its *crus*; the best Calvados comes from the Pays d’Auge. Norman appetites are renowned, and their meals are lengthy only to be broken by *le Trou Normand* (literally, the “Norman hole”), which was traditionally filled with a digestive glass of Calvados. Bénédictine, a liqueur originally made by Benedictine monks in the fourteenth century from twenty-seven local herbs, is produced at Fécamp.

## **LOCAL SPECIALTIES**

**ASPERGES À LA NORMANDE.** Asparagus topped with cream and baked.

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**POTAGE AVRANCHINAIS.** Creamy tomato soup.

**SOUPE AU CRESSON CAUCHOISE.** Cream of watercress soup.

**SOUPE DE L'ORNE.** Cabbage, leek, and sorrel soup.

**NOQUES.** Small dumplings. Also made in Alsace.

**DIABLOTINS DE CAMEMBERT.** Camembert croquettes.

**OMELETTE DE LA MÈRE POULARD.** The famous fluffy omelette made originally by Madame Poulard at her restaurant in Mont-St-Michel.

**POMMES BRAYTOISE.** Baked potatoes stuffed with *Bondart de Neufchâtel* cheese, eggs, and cream.

**POMMES DE TERRE À LA NORMANDE.** Potato gratin with cream. There are many versions; some include onions or leeks.

**MORILLES À LA ROUENNAISE.** Morel mushrooms cooked in cream.

**CAROTTES À LA SAUCE NORMANDE.** Carrots in a sauce made with butter, cream, cider, lemon juice, and nutmeg.

**CRÊPES FÉCAMPOISES.** Apple pancakes flambéed with Bénédictine.

**OMELETTE NORMANDE.** A sweet omelette, filled with apple purée and flambéed with Calvados.

**BOURDELOTS.** Whole apples baked in pastry.

**DOUILLONS.** Whole pears baked in pastry. Sometimes called *rabottes*.

**MIRLITONS DE ROUEN.** A custard tart flavored with vanilla or orange flower water.

**GÂTEAU D'EVREUX.** Almond cake made with rice flour and flavored with orange flower water.

**LA TARTE BON ACCUEIL.** Apple tart topped with an almond crumble.

**LA TARTAPAPA.** Apple custard tart.

**LA GÂCHE.** Yeasted bread enriched with eggs and dried fruit. Sometimes it is made with buckwheat flour. A specialty of the Cotentin Peninsula.

**SABLÉS.** Shortbread. A specialty of Caen.

## ***Brittany***

Brittany, in the northwest corner of France, is a remote granite peninsula, dominated by the sea. Almost an island, Brittany has 750 miles of rugged coastline, with picturesque villages, sandy beaches, rocky inlets, and windswept headlands. The land was originally inhabited by the Druids, the Gauls, who called it Armorica, or *Ars Mor*—land of the sea. The interior was called *Ar Goat*—land of the woods. The Celts first invaded Brittany in the fifth century BC, but then they moved on to

the British Isles. It was not until the fifth century AD that the Celts finally returned, fleeing the Angles and Saxons, and renamed the land *Petite Bretagne*. Eventually the “Petite” was dropped.

Brittany was not annexed to France until 1532. Even today it retains a strong sense of identity. In many ways the Bretons have stronger links with their Celtic brothers in Cornwall and Wales than with their fellow Frenchmen. They share the legend of King Arthur (except that it is set in Brittany). Bretons have a love of folklore and legend, and believe in ghosts. The Breton language, which is still spoken, especially in parts of Finistère, is very similar to Welsh.

The cooking of Brittany is simple and rustic, molded by centuries of poverty. In the past the diet was based on thick soups, gruels, and porridges, crêpes and galettes, eggs and dairy products, and vegetables, especially potatoes and haricot (small white) beans. Meat was rarely eaten and no cheese is produced. There is no word for cheese in the Breton language. Instead various dairy products are made—*caillé* (curds), *lait baratté*, or *lait ribot* (buttermilk), and *manguaux rennais* (a kind of cream that is mixed with day-old milk; the exact recipe is a well-kept secret).

A wide variety of vegetables are grown, especially on the fertile plains in the north, near the sea. Since the Second World War the population has dwindled, as many people moved into the cities. Modern farming techniques were introduced and now Brittany produces more vegetables than anywhere else in France. The large round artichokes grown in the Laon, *gros camus*, are known all over France. Asparagus is grown at Cherveix and potatoes, shallots, turnips, cauliflower, carrot, onions, peas, beets, cabbages, and green beans flourish. Various types of mushrooms are gathered, including *coulemelles* (parasol mushrooms) which are called *champignons de blé noir* because they grow in fields of buckwheat.

Plougastel is famous for its strawberries (*fraises*). The first plant is said to have been brought back from America by a sailor called Frezier. Melons called *petit gris*, which have deep pink flesh, are grown around Rennes.

Breton crêpes and galettes are world famous; they are more substantial than the usual French crêpes. Galettes are usually made with buckwheat flour and water, without eggs, and have savory fillings. Crêpes are generally sweetened and made with wheat flour, eggs, milk, and melted butter.

*Fars* or *farz* are various kinds of dumplings, puddings, and porridges that were once a substantial part of the Breton diet. However, few are made today, except for the sweeter versions called *fars fourrés* or *far Breton*, which may include prunes or raisins, and are baked like a flan.

Perhaps the best known cake or pastry is *gâteau Breton*, which comes in many versions, from a rich, crumbly butter cake, almost a biscuit, to an apple tart. *Kouign amann* is another rich, yeasted butter cake.

Brittany, like Normandy, is cider country, but Muscadet wine is produced around Nantes. Pear cider, mead (*hydromel*), and various fruit liqueurs are also made.

## LOCAL SPECIALTIES

**POTAGE À LA BRETONNE.** Haricot bean soup.

**POTAGE AUX MARRONS DE REDON.** Cream of chestnut soup.

**POTAGE ROSCOVITE AU CHOUFLEUR.** Cauliflower and potato soup.

**OEUFS BROUILLÉS CHERRUEIX.** Scrambled eggs with asparagus tips.

**SOUFFLÉ DE SAINT-POL.** Artichoke soufflé.

**OMELETTE CORNOUAILLAISE.** A plain omelette garnished with fried potatoes.

**SOUPE MORDELLAISE.** Mixed vegetable soup with fresh white haricot beans, green beans, carrots, onions, sorrel, herbs, and cream.

**PANNEQUETS GLAS-GWER.** Crêpes stuffed with spinach.

**BIGNEZENNOU, or BEIGNETS D'ARTICHAUT.** Artichoke fritters.

**FONDS D'ARTICHAUTS BROCELIANDE.** Artichoke bottoms and wild mushrooms simmered in Muscadet wine.

**PURÉE BRETONNE.** Puréed dried white haricot beans with butter and cream.

**CHOU À LA NANTAISE.** Cabbage salad with sliced banana and walnuts.

**PETIT POIS À LA NANTAISE.** Tiny garden peas simmered in butter with tomatoes, thyme, and summer savory.

**SOUFFLÉ PLOUGASTEL.** Strawberry soufflé.

**GÂTEAU BRESTOIS.** Almond cake flavoured with lemon and curaçao.

**BEIGNETS DE MAM GOZ.** Sweet fritters made with pureéd potatoes, flour, sugar, and orange or lemon rind.

**CRÊPES DENTELLES.** Wafer-thin, rolled crêpes, flavored with vanilla.

**BIGOUDENS.** Sweet almond biscuits.

**BARA SEGAL.** Rye bread.

## **Anjou, Touraine**

The French statesman and writer, George Clemenceau claimed, “To fully understand and appreciate the temporary sweetness of life, one must know Anjou.” Anjou and Touraine were once the heart of French culture, especially during the Renaissance. Rabelais was born here; Francis I brought Leonardo da Vinci to the Touraine, where he stayed until he died. Balzac was a native of Tours, and Curnonsky was born in Angers.

The land is dotted with elegant châteaux along the Loire and its tributaries—at Amboise, Chinon, Azay-le-Rideau, Chenonceaux, Chaumont—to name a few. The French claim that the finest French spoken in Tours. This is “the Garden of France” with its market-gardens, orchards and vineyards. It is often said that there are few regional dishes in the cooking of Anjou and Touraine. Perhaps that is because their cuisine was so pure and simple that it became the foundation of French cooking today.

Vegetables grow in abundance, especially the choicest early vegetables known as *primeurs* (literal “first”), which have been cultivated since the sixteenth century. It was Charles VIII who first brought artichokes and cardoons to France at the end of the fifteenth century (after a trip to Italy, where he became enamored with Italian food and gardens). Shortly after, other “exotic” vegetables such as petits pois were introduced by Catherine de Medici when she left Florence to marry the Dauphin (who later became Henry II). Excellent thick-stemmed white asparagus is cultivated, as well as small white onions, mushrooms, and shallots (the kind called *échalotes gris*), which are so typical of Angevin cooking. Anjou is the second largest producer of shallots in France (Brittany is first). All kinds of

cabbages are grown; Angevins are often affectionately called *piochoux* (little cabbages). Vegetables are prepared simply *à la crème* or *au gratin*, and are often served as a separate course.

Fruit is plentiful, especially cherries, peaches, apricots, strawberries, and black currants, but apples and Williams pears are the most widely grown fruit. Plums were brought back from Damascus at the time of the Crusades. Tours is famous for its *gros damas* prunes, and melons have been cultivated since Roman times.

The traditional pastries of Anjou and Touraine are simple and rustic. *Fouace* (a small, flat hearthcake or bun), *russeroles* (fritters), and *cassemusses* (literally, jaw-breakers) date back to the Middle Ages. Various fruit tarts are made, as are desserts and ices flavored with Cointreau.

Few cheeses are produced, except from goat's milk, and the well-known *Crêmet d'Angers*—a very light molded cheese that is made with a mixture of cream cheese, whipped cream, and stiffly beaten egg whites, and served sprinkled with sugar.

Vouvray wine is the best known wine of the Touraine. Red wines of note are Bourgueil and Chinon. Anjou is world famous for its wine, especially the sweet Rosé d'Anjou, Saumur and Saumur Mousseuse (which is naturally sparkling), and the fine white wines of the Côteaux du Layon. Various fruit and nut liqueurs are made, and Cointreau is produced at Angers.

## LOCAL SPECIALTIES

**CERNAUX AU VERJUS.** Green walnuts marinated in the juice of unripe grapes.

**MILLIÈRE.** A kind of porridge, or gruel, made with millet, milk, butter, and cream.

**CRÈME TOURANGELLE.** Cream of dried white bean soup, with onion, leek, and potatoes, garnished with green beans.

**NOUZILLARDS AU LAIT.** Chestnuts in hot or cold milk.

**OMELETTE TOURANGELLE.** An omelette filled with sautéed mushrooms, cream and herbs, topped with cream and grated cheese, and baked briefly.

**OEUFS POCHÉS SAUMUROIS.** Eggs poached in white wine with mushrooms.

**HARICOTS À LA TOURANGELLE.** Fresh white haricot beans and green beans in a *béchamel* sauce.

**PIOCHONS SAUTÉS.** Small green cabbages sautéed in walnut oil.

**CÔTES DE BLETTES AU GRATIN.** Gratin of the white stalks of Swiss chard, eggs, cream, and fresh goat cheese.

**CARDONS DE TOURS AU GRATIN.** Cardoons topped with *béchamel* sauce and breadcrumbs and gratinéed in a hot oven.

**SALADE ANGEVINE.** Potato salad with flageolet and green beans, dressed with walnut oil, wine vinegar, and mustard. (Sometimes this is a mixed-green salad).

**SALADE TOURANGELLE.** Similar to *salade angevine* but dressed with mayonnaise.

**CRÊPES BELLES ANGEVINE.** Crêpes flavored with Cointreau, and filled with a thick, sweetened apple purée.

**PRUNEAUX AU VOUVRAY.** Prunes simmered in Vouvray wine, topped with whipped cream.

**LA BIJANE AUX FRAISES.** Strawberries marinated in sweetened wine, poured over slices of oven-dried brioche.

**PÂTÉ DE PRUNE ANGEVIN.** Plum pie made with puff pastry.

**FOUACE, or FOUGASSE.** Small flat loaves flavored with saffron, usually eaten with soft cheese or jam.

## ***Orléanais, Berry***

Curnonsky wrote of the Orléanais, “The cooking of the Orléanais is pure, noble, and simple, like the line of its landscapes, like the language that is spoken, like the light that bathes it . . . a picture of harmony and gentleness.”

In the north lie the huge wheat plains of the Beauce, the granary of France, and the Gâtinais, famous for its honey and saffron. Vegetables grow in abundance, including Chinese artichokes (*crosnes*) grown from tubers imported from China. Fruit is plentiful, especially apples, pears, cherries, quince and greengage plums (*reines-claude*), named after the wife of Francis I. The town of Orléans is famous for its pure wine vinegar, which has been produced here since the Middle Ages. Butter, olive oil, and walnut oil are all used in cooking.

South of the Loire is the Sologne, a low-lying area of marshy heathland with four thousand lakes and ponds. Although it is sometimes called “*triste Sologne*” (sad Sologne), it has a quiet, unspoiled charm. This is the hunting ground of France, once favored by the French aristocracy. On the edge of the Sologne is Chambord, one of France’s most impressive Châteaux, with 365 chimneys, one for every day of the year!

Fine asparagus and strawberries are grown in the Sologne. *Cèpe*, *chanterelle*, and parasol mushrooms are gathered. Small farms produce eggs, milk, cream, and goat cheese.

Delicious pastries and pies are made: *Pithiviers*—an elegant almond pastry, and the famous *Tarte des desmoiselles Tatin*—a caramelized, upside-down apple tart, which was created by the Tatin sisters in their hotel in Lamotte-Beuvron.

Several goat cheeses are produced, including *Troû and Vendôme* cheese, and *Olivet bleu*, a blue-rinded cow’s milk cheese.

Wines of note are the Gris Meunière (red, white and rosé), Cheverny, and Sauvignon (both white). Several ciders are produced, a liqueur made from quince, and *hydromel* (mead).

Berry lies between the Sologne and the Central Massif, in the literal heart of France. It is the smallest and one of the most ancient of the French provinces. Here the cooking is simple, healthy, and robust. The Berrichons are traditionally soup-eaters—at one time soup was eaten three times a day. Vegetables are abundant, especially cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, pumpkin, and the potato called *truche* or *tartuffe* in the local patois. Many substantial galettes, tarts, and pies are made, often including goat cheese.

North of the ancient town of Bourges, the capital of Berry, pears, apples, and hazelnuts are grown. Hazelnut oil is much appreciated for its flavor.

Morels, *chanterelles*, *cèpes*, and parasol mushrooms are all gathered, and chestnut trees grow on the border of the Limousin. Desserts are simple and rustic, including various waffles, fritters, and crêpes.

Berry is famous for its cheeses. The most well known are the *Crottin de Chavignol* and *Sancerre*.

Other cheeses of note are *Levroux*, *Poulligny-Saint-Pierre* and *Valençay*.

~~White Sancerre is the best-known wine of the region, followed by Chavignol, which was a favorite of Balzac.~~

## LOCAL SPECIALTIES

**VELOUTÉE or CRÈMEUSE BERRICHONNE.** Creamy white haricot bean and potato soup.

**POTAGE BERRICHON.** Mixed-vegetable soup with onion, lettuce, cabbage, broad beans, and peas.

**SOUPE À L'ORTRUGE.** Nettle and potato soup.

**ROUTIE or SOUPE AU VIN.** Hot sweetened wine poured over slices of toast; traditionally served to couples on their wedding night.

**OEUFs À LA TRIPE.** Sliced boiled eggs in a *béchamel* and onion sauce.

**POMMES À LA FORESTIÈRE.** Baked potatoes stuffed with mushrooms, herbs, and cream.

**POMMES DE TERRE SOLOGNOTES.** Potato gratin with milk, cream, butter, garlic, and herbs, topped with Gruyère cheese and browned in the oven.

**ÉCHALOTES D'ORLÉANS.** Shallots cooked in a vinegar and honey sauce.

**SALADE DE MOISSONEURS.** Potato salad with hard-boiled eggs, sliced onion, and herbs, dressed with a vinaigrette sauce made with walnut oil.

**GALETTE AU FROMAGE BLANC.** A round, flat cake or pastry made with puréed potatoes, fresh white cheese, flour, and eggs.

**TRUFFIAT or BOURRE-CHRÉTIEN.** Potato pie.

**LE CITROUILLAT.** Pumpkin pie (sweet or savory).

**SANCIAUX.** Thick pancakes served with fresh white cheese, honey, or jam.

**GALOPINS D'ORCHAISE.** Whole apples baked in a pastry—similar to the *bourdelots* of Normandy.

**GOUERRE, or GOUÉRON AUX POMMES.** Sliced apples marinated in brandy and baked in a pancake batter.

**BEUGNONS.** Sweet fritters fried in walnut oil.

**LE POIRAT.** Pear and cream pie.

**LA TART DES DESMOISELLES TATIN.** Carmelized upside-down apple tart.

**GÂTEAU DE PITHIVIERS or FEUILLÉTÉ AUX AMANDES.** Light puff pastry with an almond cream filling flavored with rum.

**PAIN D'ÉPICE DU GÂTINAIS.** A spice bread made with wheat and rye flour, honey, candied orange rind, and anise seed.

**PETITS BERRICHONS.** Little walnut macaroons.

**LA BADRÉE.** An apple and pear jam.

**COTIGNAC or PÂTÉ DE COING.** Quince paste or jelly.

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## **Paris, Ile-de-France**

Paris has been called the gastronomic capital of France, even of the world. It has also been said that Paris has no cuisine of its own, but this is not true. Paris has a vast repertoire of creamy vegetable soups, sauces, and excellent pastry created by its innovative cooks during the past four centuries. The first restaurants opened in Paris in 1765 were called *bouillons restauratifs*—hence the derivation of “restaurant.” Although Paris has a long history of haute cuisine dating back to the Renaissance, when Catherine de Medici brought her Italian chefs and bakers to France, it was not until after the French Revolution that modern French cuisine evolved. Many new restaurants were opened, especially in the Palais Royal, run by chefs who once cooked for the aristocracy, and by famous chefs from all the regions of France. The cooking was modified to suit the less frivolous taste of the wealthy bourgeoisie; it became a combination of haute cuisine, good country cooking of the Ile-de-France, and the ingenuity of the individual chef.

The Ile-de-France was so-named because in the Middle Ages any land surrounded by rivers was called an island. Originally the Ile-de-France was bounded by the Marne, the Seine, and the Oise, but gradually it expanded to surround Paris by a radius of fifty kilometres. The Ile-de-France was once the dairy and the garden of Paris: Argenteuil was famous for its asparagus, Arpajon for flageolet beans, Crécy for carrots, Clamart and Saint Germain for peas, and Laon for artichokes. Mushrooms (*Champignons de Paris*) were grown in caves around Paris (now moved to the Loire). Each village lent its name to specialties that have become synonymous with French restaurant fare the world over: *potage Argenteuil*, *potage Saint-Germain*, *potage Crécy*, and *petit pois Clamart*. Paris is also famous for its sauces—*béarnaise*, *béchamel*, *mornay gribiche*, and *soubise*, which were all invented here. *Duxelles*, a mixture of finely chopped mushrooms and shallots sautéed in butter, was probably created in the seventeenth century by La Varenne, chef to the Marquis d’Uxelles, though it is sometimes said that *duxelles* comes from the village of Uxel in Brittany.

Desserts are equally world famous: crêpes Suzettes, Paris–Brest, and gâteau Saint–Honoré. The Ile-de-France is also famous for fine fruit: the cherries of Montmorency, the peaches of Montreuil, Chasselas grapes, and wild strawberries, which are often served with crème chantilly—sweetened whipped cream flavored with vanilla.

The most famous cheese is Brie, which has been made in the Ile-de-France since the eighth century. There are various kinds of Brie: *Brie de Melun*, *Brie de Meaux* (which is also made in Champagne), *Brie façon Coulommiers*, and *Brie de Montereau*. *Fontainebleau* is a very light cream cheese that is usually eaten with sugar and cream.

Paris has no wine, but Grand Marnier, an orange-flavored cognac, is produced at Neauphle–le–Château. There is also a cherry-flavored cognac.

## **LOCAL SPECIALTIES**

**ASPERGES À LA FONTANELLE.** Boiled asparagus served dipped in melted butter and soft-boiled egg.

**POTAGE CRESSONNIÈRE, or POTAGE AU CRESSON.** Cream of watercress soup.

**SOUP À L'OIGNON MONTMARTOISE.** Creamy onion soup, flavored with white wine, poured over fried croutons, and served with grated cheese on the side.

**POTAGE CRÉCY.** Creamy carrot soup with potato and leek.

**GNOCCHIS À LA PARISIENNE.** Dumplings made with cream puff pastry topped with *béchamel* sauce and grated cheese, and gratinéed.

**OEUFS FARCIS CHIMAY.** Eggs stuffed with a mixture of sautéed mushrooms and shallots, topped with cheese sauce and grated cheese, gratinéed.

**POMMES ANNA.** Thinly sliced potatoes baked in a covered dish with plenty of clarified butter until golden. Created by Adolphe Dugléré for the nineteenth-century courtesan, Anna Deslions.

**POMMES MACAIRE.** A potato galette, or flat cake made with puréed potatoes, butter, flour, cream and nutmeg.

**POMMES ALLUMETTES or POMMES FRITES.** French fries the size of matchsticks.

**PETIT POIS CLAMART or PETIT POIS À LA FRANCAISE.** Tiny peas simmered with small white onions, lettuce hearts, butter, sugar, and herbs.

**SAUCE PARISIENNE.** A sauce made with *Petit-suisse*, a fresh unsalted cheese made with pasteurized milk, cream, oil, and lemon juice.

**TALMOUSES.** Cheese-filled pastries dating from the Middle Ages. The name comes from *talmelier*, meaning baker.

**PARIS-BREST.** A large cream-puff pastry filled with almond butter cream.

**SAINT-HONORÉ.** An elaborate pastry filled with *crème pâtissèrie*, named after the patron saint of pastry cooks.

**TARTE DE MONTFORT-LAMAURY.** A large puff pastry filled with whipped cream, strawberries, or raspberries.

**POIRES À LA BOURDALOUE.** Poached pears with vanilla custard, topped with crushed macaroons and red currant jelly.

**MOUSSE FONTAINEBLEAU.** Fresh cream cheese topped with strawberry purée and chopped almonds.

## Champagne

Champagne is one of the larger French provinces, stretching from the Belgian border to Burgundy, and from Lorraine in the west to the Ile-de-France. The name Champagne derives from the Latin *campana* meaning “land of the plains.” Much of Champagne is fertile agricultural land where cereals and sugar beets are grown. It is, however, on the chalky plains south of Rheims that the world’s most famous wine is produced.

It was the Romans who first planted vines here, but they disappeared in the fifth century when the

land was overrun by Barbarians. Viticulture was started again by monks in the seventh century, and although excellent wine was produced—both Henry VIII of England and Henry IV of France had vineyards here—it was not until the seventeenth century that Dom Perignon, a monk and cellar-master at the Benedictine Abbey of Hautvilliers near Epernay, created champagne as we know it today. He did not “invent” champagne, but he discovered if the bottles were closed with cork bark instead of a plug of wadded cloth, the wine would retain its sparkle.

Champagne is not well known for its gastronomy, as Prosper Mantagné wrote in *Larousse Gastronomique*, “its repertoire is rather limited.” Many dishes are prepared with champagne, but it is often “still” Champagne, or *champagne nature*, that is used, as champagne loses its bubbles when heated. The cooking is often influenced by the surrounding regions—*gougère de l’Aube* (a cheese puff pastry) resembles the *gougère* of Burgundy. As in Alsace, there is *choucroute* (sauerkraut), and cheese fondue is made with champagne.

Potatoes and cabbage are the favorite vegetables.

Bread is a staple, and often sold in huge loaves called *miches*. Plenty of fruit and nuts are grown. Excellent honey is produced at Rheims, which is used to make *pain d’épice* (spice bread) and *noisettes* (little iced honey cakes). The pink *biscuits de Rheims* are traditionally eaten with champagne. Châlons is famous for its sugared almonds.

Champagne produces many fine cow’s milk cheeses: *Brie de Meaux*, *Chaource*, *Langres*, *Barbery*—sometimes called ‘*Fromage de Troyes*’—and *Carré de l’Est*.

Besides Champagne, “the wine of kings,” there is a full-bodied rosé wine Rosé de Riceye, and the red and white wines of the Côteaux Champenois. There is also Marc de Champagne and a ratafia made with grape juice blended with *eau-de-vie*.

## LOCAL SPECIALTIES

**SOUPE À LA BIÈRE.** Beer soup poured over slices of toast and served with grated cheese on the side. A specialty of Mezières.

**POTAGE DOM PERIGNON.** Creamy lentil soup made with champagne.

**SOUPE AU LAIT ARDENNAISE.** Milk-based soup with onion, leeks, potatoes, and escarole.

**GRATINÉE AU CHAMPAGNE.** Onion soup made with champagne, topped with slices of bread and Gruyère cheese, and gratinéed.

**TOURTELETS, or TETULOTS.** Rectangular egg noodles served in cold milk.

**BAILLINE or BAÏENNE.** New potatoes cooked in water and white wine with onions.

**CHAMPIGNONS À LA SAINT-MÉNÉHOULD.** Mushrooms sautéed with shallots and herbs, spooned over slices of bread soaked in milk, and baked until golden.

**PURÉE DE POIS–CASSES SAINT-MÉNÉHOULD.** Split-pea and potato purée.

**SALADE D’ENDIVES AUX BETTERAVES ROUGES.** Belgian endive and beet salad with walnuts.

**ANGLOIS.** Plum tart.

**FLAN CHAMPENOIS.** Pudding made with *biscottes* soaked in Marc de Champagne, eggs, milk,

sugar, and cherries.

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**DARIOLES.** Little custard tarts flavored with orange flower water.

**BEIGNETS DE FROMAGE BLANC.** White cheese croquettes.

**PAIN D'ÉPICE DE RHEIMS.** Spice bread made with rye flour, honey, ground almonds, candied peel, and anise seed.

**SABAYON DE CHAMPAGNE.** Frothy cream similar to the Italian zabaglione made with eggs yolk, sugar, and champagne.

## ***Alsace, Lorraine***

Alsace is the most easterly of the French provinces, bordering on Switzerland and Germany. Blessed with a warm, dry climate and rich alluvial soil, it has been called “the wine cellar, the granary, and the larder” of the surrounding countryside. The medieval towns and villages, with their quaint half-timbered houses and steeped roofs, seem more Teutonic than French, for Alsace was under German rule for more than eight hundred years. Despite its long history of wars, invasions, and occupations, which continued up until the end of World War II, Alsace has retained its own customs and language—a dialect of German. Since the thirteenth century Alsace has had a strong Jewish community, and both German and Jewish influences are reflected in the cooking. Sops are substantial, such as potato, barley, and split pea. All kinds of dumplings and noodles are made.

The Alsatians are great lovers of savory pastries, especially onion tarts, which are called *quich*, *tarte*, *tourte*, *flan*, or even *gâteau*. Herbs and spices are distinctive: cumin, caraway seed, juniper berries, cinnamon, anise seed, poppy seed, and horseradish.

Cabbage is the favorite vegetable. White cabbage is used for sauerkraut, which could be called the national dish. Unlike its German counterpart, Alsatian sauerkraut is flavored with white wine. Red cabbage is simmered with apples or chestnuts, or cooked *ziss-sauer* with sugar, cinnamon, and vinegar (Jewish-style). Turnips are cut into sticks as thin as spaghetti and salted and marinated to make turnip sauerkraut called *sûri-ruena*. Hop shoots are added to omelettes. Potatoes appear in salads, dumplings, gratins, and pancakes. Asparagus has been grown since the Roman occupation; white asparagus is preferred.

The fruit of Alsace is superb, especially bilberries, cherries, apricots, pears, and plums, which all appear in delicious fruit tarts.

There are a vast number of breads, cakes, and pastries, many of which were originally baked on feast days and religious holidays: *milchweka* (milk bread), *kaffeekrantz* (coffee cake), *bretzel* (pretzels), *loeffelpastrlas* (sourcream fritters), *krapfen* (jam-filled doughnuts), and *jungfraukiechle* (sweet, fried pastries), to name a few.

The most famous cheese is Munster, which was originally made in Alsace by Irish monks in the seventh century. It is a soft cow's milk cheese with an orange-yellow washed crust. Sometimes it is flavored with cumin or anise seed.

Alsace is famous for its white wines—Tokay, Gewürztraminer, Syvaner, Pinot, Muscat, and Riesling. Many excellent white fruit brandies are distilled from cherries, raspberries, *mirabelle* and *quetsche* plums. Beer has been brewed since Roman times.

Lorraine, like Alsace, spent part of its history under German rule. In 1736, it was ceded to Stanislaus

Leczynski (the former king of Poland and father-in-law to Louis XV), and finally became French after his Leczynski's death in 1766.

The cooking of Lorraine is substantial, with many savory pastries and quiches, usually filled with cheese, onions, or potatoes. One rustic tart (*tarte fermière*) is simply filled with a mixture of eggs and cream, and seasoned with salt and black pepper. Dumplings (*kneppes*), and sauerkraut are made. Potatoes are often used; they appear in galettes, pancakes, and gratins. Cabbage, tiny peas, carrot turnips, salsify, and Chinese artichokes are all grown. Metz is famous for its asparagus.

Like Alsace, Lorraine produces excellent fruit: bilberries, cherries, pears, raspberries, strawberries, and mirabelle plums, which are also made into fine fruit tarts and preserves. Bar-le-Duc is famous for its red and white currant preserves, which Victor Hugo was so fond of that he would order for a hundred pots at a time.

Lorraine is well known for its cake and pastries. *Baba au rhum* was created in Nancy by Stanislas Leczynski. *Pâte feuilleté* (puff pastry) was invented by Claude Gelée, who started his career as a pastrycook's boy, but later became known as the great landscape painter, Claude Lorraine. *Madeleine* of Commercy are the little shell-shaped cakes flavored with orange or lemon that were immortalized in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

*Géromé* or *Gérardmer*—a similar cheese to Munster—is made in the Vosges mountains. There is also a *fromage cuit* that is heated, wrapped in muslin, hung up to drain, and potted for a week. Butter and raw milk, egg yolks are added before the cheese is heated again, potted, and served cold. *Fromage blanc de la Messine* is a fresh white cheese flavored with onions and shallots.

The wines of Lorraine are no match for those of Alsace. The best known is *vin gris* which is, in fact, a pale rosé, Côtes de Toul, and the red, white, and rosé of the Moselle. Excellent fruit brandies are distilled, especially cherry (*kirsch*), raspberry, and mirabelle. Two of France's renowned mineral waters, Vittel and Contréxeville, come from Lorraine.

## LOCAL SPECIALTIES

**SOUP DE CHOUCROUTE.** Sauerkraut and potato soup.

**BIERSUPP, or SOUP À LA BIÈRE.** Beer soup with cream and cinnamon.

**SURAMPFERSUPP.** Sorrel soup.

**GRUMBEERESUPP.** Potato soup.

**KNEPFLE, or OEUFS À LA JUIVE.** Potato dumplings served with melted butter and grated cheese.

**NOUILLES À L'ALSACIENNE.** Egg noodles topped with fried breadcrumbs and melted butter.

**TOTELOTS.** Square egg noodles served with a vinaigrette.

**GRIESSCHNIETTE, or CROQUETTES DE SEMOULE.** Semolina croquettes.

**WASSERSCHTRIWLE, or SPÄEZLE.** Egg noodles served with melted butter and fried croutons.

**RAMEQUIN MESSIN.** Cheese soufflé.

**ZEWELWAÏ or GÂTEAU DES OIGNONS.** Creamy onion tart.

**QUICHE AUX CHAMOTTES.** Onion and poppyseed tart.

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**LA FIOUSSE.** White cheese tart.

**EIERKUCHAS.** Pancakes flavored with herbs. There is also a sweet version.

**REIZFLOÏMES.** Rice with prunes and raisins. A Jewish specialty.

**KACHELMUES.** Onion fondue with sliced hard-boiled eggs—usually served with baked potatoes.

**POMMES DE TERRE À LA LORRAINE.** Sliced potatoes and onions baked with beer and cream.

**CHOUROUTE AU MAIGRE.** Sauerkraut simmered with onions and apples.

**CRÊPES À L'ALSACIENNE.** Pancakes stuffed with white cheese and sprinkled with sugar.

**BETTELMAN (literally, “beggarman”).** Cherry bread pudding or cake.

**CHINOIS (literally “Chinaman”).** Almond and raisin pastry flavored with kirsch.

**KUGELHOPF or GUGELHUPF.** Light yeast cake with almonds and raisins.

**GÂTEAU AU CHOCOLAT DE NANCY.** Chocolate almond cake.

**BIREWECKA.** Rich fruit bread with dried pears, prunes, figs, raisins, walnuts, lemon rind, spices, and liqueur.

**LA CHAUDÉE.** Apple or plum tart.

**HEIDELBEEREKUECHE, or TARTE AUX MYRTILLES.** Bilberry tart.

**LA TARTE AUX PAVOTS.** Poppyseed tart.

**SCHWOWEBREDLE.** Almond *petits fours* with candied orange peel. A Christmas specialty.

**QUATRE-QUATRE AUX MIRABELLES.** Pound cake topped with mirabelle plums.

**SCHENKELES.** Fried almond pastries flavored with cinnamon and cognac.

**FRAISES DES BOIS LORRAINE.** Wild strawberries marinated in kirsch and topped with whipped cream.

**SIASKAS.** Homemade cream cheese served with cream, sugar and kirsch.

## ***Franche–Comté***

Franche–Comté, “the free country,” has been known for its independent spirit and self-rule since pre-Roman times. It was acquired by the Dukes of Burgundy by marriage, and later by the Hapsburgs, who also ruled Spain. Louis XIV finally secured Franche–Comté by treaty in 1678. To the south the land is mountainous, with plateaux, pine forests, ridges, and waterfalls that give way to the terraced hillsides and gentle plains in the north, on the borders of Alsace, Lorraine and Champagne.

The cuisine is based on fine cheese, numerous wild mushrooms, and distinctive wine. A hundred years ago, white bread was virtually unknown in the Jura mountains. An oatmeal bread called *grésillon* was eaten, usually dunked in a vegetable broth made with cabbage, carrots, turnips, onion

and leeks.

~~*Gaudes*, a cornmeal porridge similar to Italian polenta, is the national dish. As in Savoie and Dauphiné, potatoes are a staple and appear in various gratins. Cabbage, turnips, spinach, cardoon, kidney beans, peas, and lentils are cultivated. Wild mushrooms include cèpes, morels, chanterelle and mousserons. Salads are often dressed with walnut oil.~~

Fruit is bountiful, especially plums, cherries, apples, blackberries, and bilberries. Fritters, waffles, various fruit pastries and tarts, and a delicious cream caramel, called *pain d'oeuf au caramel*, are made. Spice bread is a specialty of Vercel and Dôle.

*Comté*, or *Gruyère de Comté*, made from raw cow's milk, is one of the finest hard cheeses in France. *Emmental Français Beaufort*, *Bleu de Gex*, *Septmoncel*, and *Morbier* are also made. The latter, one of the oldest cheeses produced in France, is made of two disks of cheese that are rubbed with charcoal before being joined, giving the appearance of a black line running along the center of the cheese.

*La Cancoillotte* is a *fromage fort* (strong-flavored potted cheese) and is also the name given to a kind of Welsh rarebit made with melted cheese, egg, and garlic.

Franche-Comté is the only wine-producing province of France that makes five types of wine: white, yellow, rosé, red, and *vin de paille* (straw wine), which is made from grapes picked in November and dried on beds of straw until February. It is said to be one of France's best dessert wines. Château de Chalon is the most famous of the *vin jaunes* (yellow wines), and is also made from late-flowering grapes.

## LOCAL SPECIALTIES

**FONDUE DE GEX.** Cheese fondue made with Comté cheese, dry white wine, and brandy or kirsch.

**FONDU FRANC-COMTOISE.** As above, but with the addition of beaten eggs and butter.

**POTAGE CHARLES QUINT.** Tomato soup with fresh sweet corn cooked in milk with celeriac, butter, and cream.

**LA SOUPE AUX CERISES.** Sweetened black cherry soup, thickened with flour, flavored with kirsch, and served with fried croutons.

**OMELETTE DE LA CHANOINESSE.** An omelette with various wild mushrooms.

**OMELETTE MONTAGNARDE.** An omelette made with bread soaked in milk, grated Comté cheese, and nutmeg.

**ATTEREAUX JURASSIENNES.** Comté cheese and semolina croquettes.

**CROQUETTES DE FROMAGE BLANC.** White cheese croquettes.

**FLAN COMTOIS.** Cheese tart or flan.

**MATEFAIMS or MATAFANS .** Thick pancakes. The name comes from the Spanish *mata famé* (hunger-killer).

**RAMEQUIN.** Little cheese cream-puff pastries.

**PAIN DE POIREAUX.** A savoury loaf made with chopped leeks and bread soaked in milk, eggs,

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