

French Country Cooking

Authentic Recipes from Every Region

*180 delicious recipes from the foundations
of French gastronomy*

FRANÇOISE BRANGET

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
JEANNETTE SEAVER



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Amuse Bouche: A Little Taste of What Is to Follow

Politics and cuisine?

While this might seem an unlikely combination at first glance, the two share singular affinities.

Ambassadors of their departments, French deputies represent their constituents at the Palais Bourbon, home of the National Assembly—the forum where France conducts its politics. Beyond the political aspect of their role, however, these deputies all enjoy good cuisine, and have agreed to share and exhibit with pride a sample of the gastronomy of their particular land—*le terroir*. Each recipe, each dish is made with the prized products, meat and sea fare, identified with their district.

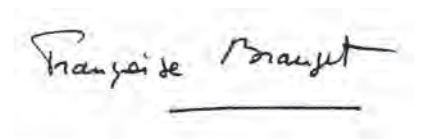
This book is the personal mirror of various culinary traditions born in the course of a long history, passed down through the generations. Today each traditional cuisine, while retaining its authenticity, has traveled beyond its original borders and can be enjoyed throughout all of France—and the world.

Like the scope of their politics, the various regional cuisines presented in this book can be modest or grand, innovative or orthodox, stimulating or soothing. The one basic common denominator is the quality of the products and ingredients assembled for each preparation. Combining flavors is the second act that will determine whether a magical dish appears on the table.

Every five years, deputies in France stand for election, in a sort of grand electoral cook-off. Candidates may get roasted, skewered, raked over the coals, stewed in their own juices, or grilled by their constituents, but at the end of day all are in the same position, presented on the same platter. Both crusty veterans and young sprouts are subject to the electorate’s scrutiny, and only the candidates best able to respond to the issues of the moment will get the thumbs-up and avoid the compost heap. In *French Country Cooking: Authentic Recipes from Every Region*, for the first time, deputies representing every department of metropolitan France, including our overseas territories, have contributed to a collective cookbook offering savory and sweet, time-tested and timeless dishes.

It is with great pleasure that I invite you to share the panoply of gourmand moments with us. You will discover never-published recipes, and will even be surprised by some new combinations of flavors.

My hope is that reading this book will inspire your own creativity, as well as ignite your curiosity to explore our rich and multifaceted country.



Françoise Branget
Deputy of Doubs

Notes from the American Editor and Translator

This book, an armchair travelogue of France with recipes emblematic of each district, will give the reader a rare opportunity of discovering *la France profonde*, off the beaten track.

Endowed with landscapes as rich as they are diverse, fertile farmlands and orchards throughout, France's singular patrimony is its incredibly varied gastronomy—an art refined over centuries.

History points out that a great many of the dishes considered today part of our gastronomic glory trace their roots to a time when rural France suffered extreme poverty. The only way for the countrymen to survive was to avail themselves of all the simple elements growing nearby. Some plants they gathered from nature's bounty, and some they grew themselves. Every possible part was used, either to feed the family, to fertilize the fields, or to feed the livestock. And the animals—besides producing milk or eggs or offspring—were in turn used for food from head to hoof. Driven by necessity, the rural householder learned how best to utilize each part of the beef or lamb, pig or chicken, including delicacies made of the innards and the extremities.

The recipes in this book for the most part date from long ago, emanating from the rural *terroir*, the small villages of *la France profonde*, from a time when farmers' choices to feed themselves were limited to the produce of their own land—and when native creativity and innate ingenuity arose to transform the most humble ingredients into delectable fare.

Most of the deputies in the French Parliament who contributed to this collection were handed down a recipe by a grandmother or mother, secrets of family lore. Their sharing of their closely guarded treasures enables today's reader to enjoy traditional cooking and to survey the origins of French gastronomy.

From these timeworn memoranda, scribbled in patois or local dialect and for the most part fragmentary or imprecise, recipes evolved into what is today our classic French cuisine.

—Jeannette M. Seaver

For the reader's convenience, and to avoid repetition, I include below a few basic components that are used over and over throughout the book.—*Tr.*

AIOLI

2 garlic cloves, germ removed
1 large egg yolk
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 1/2 cups olive oil
pepper and salt

Put ingredients in the blender except for the oil. Turn blender on, and slowly trickle oil until mixture becomes firm. If you feel it is too thick, add a few drops water. If too thin, add 1 slice bread (crust removed), and mix in blender for a few seconds.

BOUQUET GARNI

To flavor a stock or other cooking liquid, a bunch of aromatic herbs is tied with string and immersed in the liquid. Usually the bouquet consists of a few sprigs of parsley, thyme, rosemary, bay leaves, and chives, though the composition may vary. The bundle is removed before using the stock.

CRÈME FRAICHE

In a bowl, mix 1 cup heavy cream and 2 tablespoons sour cream. Cover and let sit overnight or a bit longer. Stir the crème fraîche and refrigerate.

PÂTE BRISÉE

2 1/2 cups unbleached flour
2 sticks unsalted butter, cut into pieces
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar
1/2 cup ice water

Pulse all ingredients in the food processor until it comes together. Remove from processor, and form a ball of dough with your hands. Wrap and refrigerate at least one hour.

STOCK

Stock can be made with the bones of beef, veal, chicken, or fish. Immerse the bones in a kettle of water with carrots, leeks, onion, celery, bouquet garni, peppercorns, and salt, and simmer for at least an hour, or longer for a stronger stock. Strain, discarding the solids, and refrigerate. A vegetable stock may be made without bones. For a dark stock, or *fond brun*, the bones and vegetables are roasted before simmering. Fish stock, *fumet de poisson*, is made with white wine.



Hare from the Mothers Blanc

Lièvre des mères Blanc

The department of Ain, situated at the eastern edge of France in the Rhône-Alpes region, is named after the Ain River, which divides the department's pastoral western half from the mountains of the Jura that extend east to Switzerland.

Étienne Blanc, saluting his ancestresses in his recipe title, plays on the fact that the region's foremost chef, Georges Blanc, took over a restaurant already made famous by his mother, La Mère Blanc.

"I discovered this old recipe on very yellowed, nearly transparent paper one day in my family home as I was looking at a book dating from before the Revolution. It belonged to an ancestor of mine."

Étienne Blanc
Deputy of Ain

Serves 8

- 1 hare, about 4–5 pounds, cut up in pieces, blood reserved
- 4 cups red wine
- 4 carrots, sliced
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 1 bouquet garni (parsley, thyme, bay leaf, chives)
- Pepper and salt
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1/3 cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 3 cups beef stock, from pot-au-feu (see Monday)
- 2 small blood sausages made with onion

BEFOREHAND:

✓ On a tray, leave hare outside in the open air, if you can, lightly covered with a thin cheesecloth, for 3–4 days. Reserve blood and giblets in the refrigerator.

MONDAY:

✓ [While I share with the Blanc family a preference for making the traditional pot-au-feu, and using its flavorful broth, these days one can find excellent ready-made beef stock in cartons or cans.—Tr.]

POT-AU-FEU

✓ In a large kettle, put a meaty beef shin bone, 3–4 short ribs, 2 marrow bones, 1 onion studded with 3 cloves, celery, leek, 2 carrots, and parsley. Cover meat with water all the way to the top of the kettle. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, add sea salt and peppercorns, cover, and continue cooking 1 hour, skimming now and then with a slotted spoon to remove the scum.

✓ When the meat is tender, you must sit down and enjoy the pot-au-feu with some of its rich broth. *Bon appétit!* The leftover stock will be used in the hare recipe on Thursday. Filter it through a colander. You should have at least 3–4 cups. Refrigerate.

TUESDAY:

✓ Remove and discard layer of fat formed on top of cold stock. Replace in refrigerator.

✓ In a bowl, mix wine, carrots, onions, bouquet garni, pepper, and salt. Transfer marinade into a plastic bag along with the pieces of hare. Refrigerate 24 hours.

WEDNESDAY:

✓ In a pan, heat 1 tablespoon butter and 1 tablespoon olive oil. Sauté neck, giblet, and head, with chopped carrots and onion from the marinade, and garlic clove. Cook 1 hour. Deglaze the pan with the balsamic vinegar. Reserve liver and heart.

✓ Discard the hare pieces. Press the vegetables and liquid through a sieve. Discard the solids and save the *jus*.

THURSDAY:

✓ Remove meat from marinade. Dry with absorbent paper. Filter marinade. In a heavy pot, melt the remaining 2 tablespoons butter and 2 tablespoons oil, and sauté meat until nicely golden. Sprinkle with 2 tablespoons flour, pepper and salt. Pour in the filtered marinade, 1 cup beef broth, and the reserved blood and *jus*. Stir. Cover. Cook over low heat 1 hour. Add stock as needed.

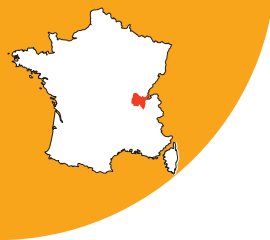
FRIDAY:

✓ Finely chop the reserved liver and the heart. Add to the meat preparation, along with the pieces of mashed blood sausage, bringing up to a simmer and stirring to incorporate well. Set aside.

SUNDAY:

✓ Bring the civet to a simmer and finish the cooking. Serve with flat noodles.





Bresse Chicken in Vin Jaune Sauce with Rutabaga Purée

Poulet de Bresse au vin jaune et purée de rutabagas au comté

With its legendary poulet from the Bresse region and its lush woods and meadows, the department of Ain is often referred to as the farmyard of France. In 1957 the Agriculture Ministry under President Coty granted the poulet de Bresse the rare and coveted AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) designation, guaranteeing its place of origin. A chicken with blue feet, it is the only fowl in the world to have received such distinction. Star of all worthy grandes tables, the Bresse chicken is widely exported and can be found in good American poultry shops.

Vin jaune too is of strictly local production, a characteristic Jura wine. Its bouquet is not unlike that of sherry. In the absence of vin jaune, one can substitute with half white wine, half sherry.

The Comté cheese, from the same region, is a dry, rich cheese with a hint of hazelnut flavor.

"Our Michelin three-star chef, Georges Blanc, and all the fine restaurateurs of the Ain have spotlighted our star product. Here is a traditional poulet de Bresse recipe to enjoy with—or without—moderation."

Xavier Breton
Deputy of Ain

Serves 8

2 Bresse chickens, plucked and drawn

1 tablespoon butter

1 tablespoon olive oil

1/2 cup chopped parsley

3 tablespoons fresh thyme

1 tablespoon fresh marjoram

1 tablespoon fresh oregano

Pepper and salt

1 bottle vin jaune or Jura macvin

1 pound Comté cheese

1 cup walnuts, chopped

4 cups heavy cream

1 caul (your butcher will give you one)

For the rutabaga purée:

1 pound rutabaga, peeled and cubed

2 sticks butter

Pepper and salt

✓ Wash chickens, pat dry. Remove legs, cut them at the joint.

✓ In a pan, melt butter and oil, sauté legs until brown. Add herbs and seasonings. After 15 minutes, deglaze with wine, reserving 1 cup for the end. Continue cooking 30 minutes.

✓ Meanwhile, grate 1/2 pound of the Comté, set it aside, and cut the other 1/2 pound into cubes. Cut the breasts off the chickens and cube the meat. In a large bowl, combine cubed chicken breasts, cubed Comté, and walnuts. Add 2 cups cream, mix well.

✓ Preheat oven to 350°F.

✓ On a board, lay out the sheet of caul fat or *crépine*. Cut into 8 pieces/*crépinettes*. Place a dollop of the chicken mixture in the center of each section of *crépine* and fold it into a neat package. Set the 8 stuffed *crépinettes* in an ovenproof dish, seam side down.

✓ Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes.

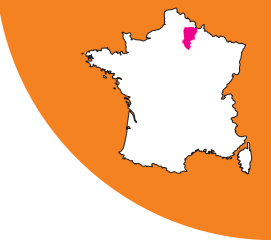
✓ While the *crépinettes* are baking, start the rutabaga (below).

✓ When chicken legs are cooked, remove and keep warm. Strain the sauce into a saucepan, reheating while stirring in the remaining 2 cups heavy cream. Gently stir in the 1/2 pound grated cheese until it melts and thickens the sauce. Keep sauce warm, and stir in remaining 1 cup wine.

RUTABAGA

✓ In a pot half filled with boiling, salted water, cook rutabaga for 20 minutes. Drain. Purée in the food processor or mash by hand, incorporating all the butter. Season to taste.

Place one crépinette along with a half chicken leg on each plate. Add a dollop of rutabaga purée. Coat with the sauce, and serve.



Maroilles Cheese Tart

Tarte au maroilles

The two deputies from the Aisne department—whose name comes from the most central of its three main rivers—have agreed to jointly contribute the same traditional recipe.

This tarte is prepared with a *pâte levée*, a yeasty dough characteristic of the region. Its main ingredient, the Maroilles cheese, has been produced for centuries in Thiérache, the vast region bordering Belgium, and takes its name from the village of Maroilles in the Nord department just adjacent to Aisne. Square, with a perfectly edible smooth pink skin, Maroilles is a soft cow's-milk cheese that imparts a strong flavor.

The tarte aux maroilles is served hot as the main part of the meal, savored with a green salad. This recipe was prepared by Xavier Bertrand and Isebel Vasseur, deputies of Aisne.

✓ Preheat oven to 450°F.

✓ In a small cup, put yeast sprinkled with a little sugar. Add warm milk. Wait a few minutes until it becomes foamy. In a bowl, mix yeast mixture with flour and salt. Add eggs and butter. Knead 2 minutes until it becomes elastic and smooth. Cover. Let rise 1 hour.

✓ Punch risen dough down, roll it out, and line a tart mold with it. Let rise another 30 minutes.

✓ Scrape skin of Maroilles without removing it. Cut in thin slices. Line pie dough with cheese slices. In the food processor, blend yolks and *crème fraîche* until smooth. Cover cheese with the mixture.

✓ Bake 30 minutes.

Serves 6

For the dough:

1 envelope dry yeast

Pinch of sugar

1/4 cup warm milk

1 1/2 cups unbleached flour

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 eggs

4 tablespoons butter, softened

For the filling:

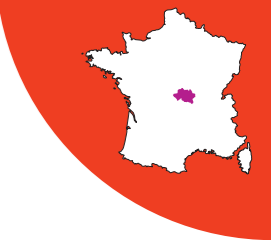
1 Maroilles cheese

2 egg yolks

6 ounces *crème fraîche*

1/4 teaspoon fresh pepper





Potato and Cream Pâté

Pâté bourbonnais aux pommes de terre

“The pâté bourbonnais? A very local recipe in every way—its name, its ingredients, the know-how necessary to make it, and especially what it is: un rien trublion, a little troublemaker. As was considered the old province of the Bourbonnais, the land now called the Allier, from early on was regarded as unruly by the government of the Auvergne, which tried to annihilate it, unsuccessfully.

“The pâté bourbonnais is like that, mutinous. It goes against all the traditions of the culinary canon. Potatoes? Encased in pastry? And flooded with heavy cream? Such an unlikely union. Yet all who taste it are won over.

“Another confirmation of its local authenticity is that it is best eaten only with other products of the Bourbonnais. The rougette or doucette lettuce grown in the mud of the Allier banks, or the ham air-dried in our Bourbonnais mountains, and of course the white Auvergne wine of Saint-Pourçain—a unique cépage that balances perfectly the richness of our pâté.

“Omit or add any ingredient at your own risk. Beware of turning our pâté into a most improbable pudding!”

Gérard Charasse
Deputy of Allier

“The potato pâté was born in the farming country between Target and Voussac in the Allier in 1789, a time of great food shortage. In those days the farmers, all observing the religious rules strictly, never ate meat on Fridays. To add to the privation, they were not permitted to fish the ponds in the woodlands belonging to their Bourbon overlords. What were they to do?

“With the few components they were able to scare up, they devised a new Friday meal consisting of a potato-filled two-crust pie, cooked without liquid and then infused with crème fraîche, an ingredient all farms had in good supply.

“This pâté bourbonnais has survived the years, and today many bakeries in the region as well as local restaurants offer the potato pâté every Friday.”

Jean Mallot
Deputy of Allier

“Among the excellent recipes from the Auvergne, the most ubiquitous in the Allier is without doubt this very pâté. All three of us agree that our pâté bourbonnais represents the best that our region has to offer. This is the gourmet version, although some who incline more toward gourmand may add ham, or even turn it into a dessert by substituting pears.”

Bernard Lesterlin
Deputy of Allier

- ✓ Preheat oven to 350°F.
- ✓ In a bowl, with your fingers, mix flour, oil, water, and salt until it forms a homogeneous dough. Do not overmix. You may wish to add either a few more drops of water, if it appears too dry, or some more flour or oil. The more oil, the more unctuous the dough will be.
- ✓ Divide dough into two equal balls. On a floured work surface, roll out the first ball and place it in a 10-inch pie plate, letting extra dough hang over sides.
- ✓ In a bowl, mix potatoes with onions, herbs, nutmeg, pepper, and salt. Place potato slices in a circular array in the piecrust, making sure to have more slices in the middle.
- ✓ Roll out the second ball of dough and place over potatoes. Crimp the two crusts together to seal the pie. With a knife, cut out a cross in the middle and fold back the four corners to create a chimney. For decorative effect, make light incisions all around. In a small bowl, lightly beat the egg yolk with 2 tablespoons water. Brush top of pie with this egg wash. Bake 45–60 minutes.
- ✓ Remove from oven. Cut out a circle in the middle of the crust and pour the cream inside, poking with a knife and tilting the pie to distribute the cream as best you can. (A little messy, but worth it.) Replace the circle. Serve hot, warm, or cold.

Serves 6

For the crust:

- 3 cups unbleached flour
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 6 tablespoons cold water
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

For the filling:

- 2 pounds potatoes, peeled and cut into thin slices
- 1 large onion, minced
- 1/4 cup chives, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup parsley, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup chervil, finely chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
- Freshly ground pepper
- Pinch of fleur de sel
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons heavy cream
- 1 egg yolk

