



02 Aisne borders the Départements of Nord, Somme, Oise, Ardennes Marne, and Seine-et-Marne and Belgium to the north-east. The river Aisne crosses the area from east to west, where it joins the Oise. The Marne forms part of the southern boundary of the department with

the department of Seine-et-Marne. The southern part of the department is the geographical region known as la Brie poilleuse, a drier plateau known for its dairy products and Brie cheese.

The landscape is dominated by rock masses which often have steep flanks. These rocks appear all over the region, but the most impressive examples are at Laon and the Chemin des Dames ridge.

Alexandre Dumas was born in this Département

The north of the department is a farming area and dairy produce such as Maroilles cheese and Dulce de Leche are typical of the area. There are also typically Picardy specialties such as ficelle, a sort of rolled crêpe with cream cheese, béchamel, ham, and mushrooms. Foie gras is a product developed in Thiérache of the highest quality.

The cultivation of soft fruits such as strawberries, raspberries and blackberries is increasing.

In the south there are kidney beans from Soissons and Champagne in the Chateau-Thierry region.

Thiérache cider, its eau-de-vie brandy and the production of craft beer give the department of Aisne real identity.

The professional management of bees and the varied flora provide exceptional honey flavours to be added to the local dishes.

Baguette Laonnaise is a cheese from Laon. This semi-soft cheese is made from pasteurized milk. Underneath its washed rind, the texture is supple and open. The cheese is shaped into a brick or a baguette, and usually left to age for 3 to 4

months. The aromas are pungent, the flavour is spicy and similar to Maroilles and as it ages it becomes sharper. It goes well with a glass of Riesling.

Maroilles, a soft cow's milk cheese, comes from Maroilles. It is sold in blocks and has an orange rind and a strong smell!

Guerbigny is very similar to maroilles.

Ficelle Picardes are rolled up crepes filled with ham, grated cheese and mushroom sauce, covered in crème fraîche and baked in the oven.

Dulche de leche is a caramel spread made with milk from the same Thiérache cows involved in making Maroilles cheese. Ideal on toast, in tarts and in cakes.

Champagne. Ten percent of champagne is made in the south. The wine producing region of Champagne-Ardenne is located directly to the east of the Département.

Ficelle Picarde

Ficelle picarde is a very recent dish in regional gastronomy. It's a thin savoury crêpe rolled around a slice of ham containing finely chopped mushrooms (duxelles). Then everything is gratinéed in a cream sauce.

Adding a few drops of lemon juice to the mushroom duxelles helps them exude their liquid more quickly; remember to add a pinch of salt as well to bring out the water. The lemon also helps keep the mushrooms from darkening. But above all, taste the duxelles and adjust the seasoning so that it's strongly flavoured, even a bit over seasoned, so that it will give flavour to the ficelles.

Adding melted butter to the crêpe batter helps prevent the crêpes from sticking to the pan. Be sure to cool the crêpes and duxelles completely before proceeding, since the hot and cold don't make for a good mix.

Preparation time: 25 mins, Resting time for the batter: 2 hours, Cooking time: 25 mins, Serves 6

Ingredients

For the crêpe batter

250 ml milk

125 g flour

2 eggs

30 g melted butter

Salt and pepper

For the filling

200 g finely minced white mushrooms

6 slices of ham

120 g grated Gruyère

150 ml liquid cream

2 large French shallots, minced

A drizzle of lemon juice

20 g butter

Salt and pepper

Method

Preheat the oven to 210° C 425° F

Preparing the Duxelles

Sweat the shallots in butter.

Add the minced mushrooms, lemon juice, salt and pepper.

Sauté over high heat for about 2 minutes until the mushrooms have released their liquid; continue cooking 2 minutes longer over medium heat.

Add 50 ml (3 tbsp.) cream to the mushroom duxelles.

Let rest for about 2 hours.

Making the Crêpes

Combine all the ingredients.

Make the crêpes (12) in a small crêpe pan or small non-stick skillet. The crêpes should be lightly browned on both sides.

Let the crêpes rest for about 2 hours.

Finishing

Lay the crêpes on a work surface; on each, place 1/2 slice of ham and 1-2 tbsp. of mushroom duxelles.

Roll each crêpe up tightly.

Take 6 individual gratiné dishes and place a little cream in the bottom of each, followed by two ficelles (crêpes), being sure to place the rolled edge of the crêpe on the bottom to keep it from opening up when cooked.

Cover with cream, sprinkle with gruyère cheese and place under the grill for about 5 minutes until nicely browned.

Finish by placing in a 220° C (fan 200C) 425° F oven for 5 minutes longer.

The top should be browned and the cream bubbling.