



08 Ardennes is the natural geographic massif that stretches from northern France into the Belgian Ardennes to the north and borders Luxembourg to the west. Just north of Reims, the department's capital is Charleville-Mézières, a delightful medieval and Italian Renaissance

Town. The Ardennes does not produce Champagne or wine but it does have a well-deserved reputation for producing fabulous beer from its micro-breweries. The Ardennes is France's greenest department. Gourmet cuisine and wines are synonymous with the Ardennes, with the locally reared meat and game sourced from the forests of this northern French region providing a taste of tradition plus the renowned sparkling wines of Champagne-Ardenne.

Le Jambon de Reims is the local ham often shredded to make a terrine with jelly. It's perfect enjoyed as a starter.

Pieds de Porc à la Sainte-Menehould – pigs' trotters, a speciality from Sainte-Menehould. The bones inside are edible, though the cooking method is a closely guarded secret

Andouillettes de Troyes – the traditional ingredients include a pig's large intestine and stomach, onions, salt and pepper.

Champagne Sauerkraut – goes well with pork. The Aube in Champagne is the second largest producer of cabbage in France.

Ardennes Ham – a cured meat not unlike prosciutto from Italy.

La Dinde rouge des Ardennes – a slow growing breed of turkey that lives outdoors.

Reims Mustard – a mixture of champagne wine vinegar, mustard seeds and spices.

Haute-Marne truffles – in season from mid-September to mid-March.

Rethel white sausage – otherwise known as boudin blanc.

Reims Vinegar – white wine vinegar from champagne.

Potée Champenoise – a hearty stew made from pork, sausages and root vegetables.

Chaource – this soft, creamy cow's milk cheese. Often used to make mushroom fondue.

Langres – another soft cow's milk cheese. This one has a distinctive orange crust and a strong smell!

Rocroi – a soft, square shaped cow's milk cheese that is low in fat and covered in a brown rind.

Les Biscuits Roses de Reims – these little pink biscuits are designed to be dipped in a glass of champagne. They are vanilla flavoured and often crumbled and used to make anything from glace aux biscuits roses (ice-cream) to chocolates aux biscuits roses (chocolates).

Bouchons de Champagne – hollow chocolaté champagne cors shapes filled with Marc de champagne.

Croquignoles de Reims – very crunchy meringue-like biscuits, often used as decoration.

Drinks

Prunelle de Troyes – a digestif made from sloe berries.

Champagne – brut (fairly low in sugar) is the most popular type of champagne.

Marc de Champagne – brandy made from champagne grapes.

Ratafia – a blend of grape juice and Marc de Champagne.

Les Côteaux Champenois – the famous wine growing region of France also produces some still wines, red, white and rosé.

Ardennes beer – two of the better known brands are Princess and Ardwen.

Cacasse à Cul Nu

This is a traditional dish from the Ardennes and is a hotpot of potatoes cooked in a roux with onions

Serves 2

Ingredients

650 g of small potatoes

1 onion

2 cloves of garlic

50 ml of white wine (optional)

1 tbsp of flour

1 bay leaf

Twigs of thyme

Sprigs of parsley

2 tbsp olive oil

Salt and freshly ground pepper

Method

Peel, wash and dry potatoe

Cut them into halves or wedges if they are larger.

Peel the onion and cut it into thin slices.

Peel and degerm the garlic clove and leave it whole.

Brown the potatoes on all sides in hot olive oil.

Reserve them.

In the same pot, brown the onion slices.

Add the flour and mix with a wooden spoon as if making a roux.

Add white wine if desired and mix well.

Place the potato wedges and cover them with water.

Add salt, pepper, garlic, thyme and bay leaf.

Cover and cook over low heat for about 45 minutes.

Watch the cooking and add a little water if necessary:

The sauce must be creamy and coat the potatoes which must be melting

Remove herbs and garlic, sprinkle with chopped parsley.

Serve hot with a green salad or raw vegetables.

Biscuit Roses de Reims

Ingredients

4 large eggs (separate the yolks from the whites)

1 tsp vanilla extract

250gr sugar

375gr flour

75gr corn flour

1 tsp baking soda

Drop of red food colouring

Powdered (confectioner's) sugar for dusting the cookies

Pastry bag with 5mm smooth tip

Method

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan 160C) 300F.

Mix the yolks, sugar and vanilla in a bowl using a hand blender for 5-6 minutes.

Beat in 2 of the egg whites for another 2 minutes.

Beat in the remaining 2 egg whites and the food colouring for an additional 2 minutes until the mixture begins to form stiff peaks.

Sift the flour, corn flour and baking soda into the bowl

Folding in gently with a spatula.

You want a final result that is smooth and uniform in colour.

Scrape it into the pastry bag.

Cover a baking sheet with wax paper and grease it with butter

Squeeze out strips of the mixture that are 5mm wide and about 75mm long.

Sprinkle with powdered sugar and bake for 15-20 minutes, until a toothpick comes out clean.

You don't want the biscuits to start browning though, or else they won't be pink

Take the biscuits out, sprinkle them with more powdered sugar

Place them back in the oven for another 12-15 minutes.

When you take them out, cut the edges of the biscuits to give even rectangles.

Do this before they cool, or else they become rather difficult to cut.

If they cool before you finish, return them to the oven for a few minutes to soften.

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