



16 Charent is probably best known for Cognac which takes its name from the town surrounded by the vineyards which have been producing this amber liquid since the 18th Century when such famous names as Martell arrived from Jersey and Hennessy from Ireland

The Charente region is certainly most famous for the silky smooth spirit, cognac, but there are many more local specialities such as delicious aperitif, Pineau?

In the East of Charente there are the Limousin cattle. The meat is low in fat but still tender and full of flavour. In the Barbezieux area of the Charente another local speciality is the black chicken of Barbezieux and are renowned for their flavour.

The area is particularly well known for its goats' cheeses.

Mothais sur Feuille is a cheese often served on a chestnut or plain leaf and is shaped into a disc 100mm to 125mm in diameter and 25mm thick.

Jonchee is a soft cheese made from cow's milk, first flavoured with bay leaves and then rolled in dry marsh rushes.

Le Tourteau Fromagé, is somewhere between a cake and a cheesecake and it is made from cow's milk, round in shape with a black top

Cognac can only be given this name if it is made with grapes grown within a certain area. This includes much of the Charente, the Charente-Maritime and parts of the Deux-Sèvres. this strong classy spirit is the favourite after dinner drink of the Charente. Famous brand names include Courvoisier, Hennessy, Martell, and Remy Martin.

Pineau des Charentes is a superb fortified wine made from adding unfermented grape juice to cognac. After the ageing process, the wine produced is slightly sweet. Occasionally, pineau will be aged for five years or more to ensure an even richer flavour. There are two types of pineau, white which is made with white wine grapes and red which is of course made with red wine grapes

Whilst this region might not be as celebrated as Bordeaux or the Loire, it still produces fine wines.

Charentais Melon are a mainstay of summer meals and aperitifs, Charentais melons are paired to spectacular effect with white pineau des Charentes.

Cagouilles à la Charentaise are snails stuffed with meat and slow-cooked with white wine, carrots, garlic, onion, thyme, bay leaves, tomato and, of course, a dash of cognac!

Potatoes from Île de Ré are harvested before they're ripe; their sugars don't have time to turn into starch giving them a slightly sweet taste.

Le p'tit Manslois is a fresh artisanal cheese that has been produced in a cloth using whole cow's or goat's milk

Truffles have always lived comfortably next to vines including the Périgord black truffle.

Caviar is produced in Charente. In Gensac-la-Pallue and Saint-Genis-de-Saintonge, farms produce high-quality caviar.

Cornuelle, a delicious triangular biscuit made from shortcrust pastry and studded with pink and white aniseed.

Galette Charentaise is a traditional cake from Saintonge. It is made from flour, eggs, sugar, butter and baking powder, flavoured with candied angelica.

Galette Charentaise

This delicious galette is a perfect symbol of France's Charente region, where butter is king.

With a softer texture than some of its shortbread cousins, the galette has graced festive tables for centuries.

A little extra: you can add some finely chopped angelica, a little vanilla or some lemon zest.

Total time: 15 to 30 minutes, Makes 3 galettes

Ingredients

500 g flour

15 g (1 tbsp.) baking powder

225 g sugar

200 g butter

10 g (2 tsp.) salt

3 eggs

Decoration

Crystallized sugar

Method

Thoroughly beat the eggs and sugar together until very light and pale.

Gradually blend in the flour and the slightly softened butter.

Combine everything, without overworking, to form a smooth dough.

Place the dough in a thin layer in a large round pie pan.

Sprinkle with crystallized sugar and bake in a 180° C (fan 160C) 350° F oven for 20 minutes

The galette can be served warm or cold.

Cagouilles à la Charentaise

In Charente, near Château Bernard or Segonzac, the cagouille (understand the snail), is eaten stuffed with sausage meat and simmered in a tomato sauce. The snail used is not the big Burgundy snail but the little grey.

Ingredients

For 6 persons

100 cagoilles or small gray snails

350 g seasoned sausage meat (you can also make 2/3 pork and 1/2 veal)

4 medium or out of season tomatoes

20 cl of a good tomato coulis

2 tablespoons of duck fat (use butter if not)

3 cloves of garlic

1 small bunch of parsley

2 sprigs of thyme

2 sprigs of rosemary

1 bay leaf

1 onion

2 cloves

2 tablespoons peanut oil

1 small handful of salt (to clean the snails)

1 pinch of salt for the recipe

1 pinch of pepper

1 small bouquet garni

250ml vinegar

250 ml Charentais white wine for the court bouillon

50 ml Charentais white wine for cooking the snails

Method

Put the snails in a basin with the coarse salt and vinegar and leave them for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring often.

Then rinse them thoroughly with clear water and drain them.

Make a good, full-bodied court bouillon with the thyme, bay leaf, onion studded with 2 cloves, rosemary, salt, pepper, Charentais white wine and 2 tablespoons of peanut oil.

Put the snails in and cook at a low boil for 1h 30mins.

Drain and reserve.

Stuff the cagouilles one by one with the parsley and marbled sausage meat

Put them in a cast iron casserole dish with the duck fat, chopped tomatoes (or the tomato coulis), garlic, parsley, and a small bouquet garni.

Add the tomato

Add the garlic

Add the parsley

Moisten with 50 ml of Charentais white wine and cook for 1h30 to 2 hours on a low heat, covered, stirring regularly.

Be careful when mixing so as not to break the shells (the barrels in Charentais).

Season with salt and pepper and serve immediately, it cools quickly.

Tip for more gourmet cagoouilles

1/2 hour before the end of cooking, add a dash of Cognac and a minced ceps.