



40 Landes is forested region bordering the Bay of Biscay in the Aquitaine Basin of south western France. It extends northward to the Garonne Estuary and southward to the Adour River. Formerly a vast tract of marshland and moors, it now consists

chiefly of the most extensive forest in France. The monotonous, sandy plain was originally covered with lakes and bordered by dunes of moving sands. Early in the second half of the 19th century, the plain was drained and pine forest was planted that provided timber and turpentine. Paper mills were established in the region and great tracts of land were also made suitable for arable, almost exclusively corn (maize) cultivation. The Côte d'Argent is Europe's longest beach which stretches almost uninterrupted for over 60 miles from Arcachon in the north to Biarritz in the south.

Foie Gras is the indisputable star of south western cuisine, coming from the very best duck farms, and fed with Landes maize

Magret (breast), **Aiguillettes (breast)**, **Confit (leg)**, as well as delicious hearts and gizzards, all make the basis of many dishes.

White Asparagus is a local delicacy and can be enjoyed simply with a vinaigrette or with a cloud of mousseline for the more gourmet chefs.

Kiwi Fruits are cultivated on the banks of the river Adour which is rich in river silt. Best eaten between November and May. Try the softer and sweeter yellow kiwi variety.

Pastis Landais is a generous brioche with subtle scents of vanilla, orange blossom and rum or Armagnac often accompanied by a vanilla cream or a fresh fruit salad.

Tourtière des Landes is made from a series of leaves of fine dough with apples and sprinkled with a sweet Armagnac syrup and melted butter. It is best eaten warm, and for the purists, flambéed in Armagnac!

Coteaux de Chalosse, Tursan and Armagnac are three of the best known wines of the area.

Salmis de Palombes is a traditional French south western preparation, similar to a meat sauce. The palombe is a wood pigeon that is simmered in red wine. Bayonne ham, onion, garlic cloves and aromatic herbs are added.

Landaise Salad is best enjoyed in summer and includes gizzards, aiguillettes, duck breast, asparagus, tomatoes, cucumbers and seasonal vegetables.

Garbure des Pyrénées

Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients

500ml dried white beans

1 kg smoked ham hock

50ml rendered duck fat, or extra-virgin olive oil, or unsalted butter (4 tablespoons)

6 carrots, halved crosswise and cut into 4-centimeter sticks

5 leeks, white and pale green parts, coarsely chopped

4 onions, quartered

5 garlic cloves, halved

1 medium Savoy cabbage, cut into 8 wedges

Fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 pig's tail, optional

6 small to medium russet potatoes

Method

Put the beans in a medium bowl and add enough cold water to cover them by at least 5mm.

Let soak overnight in a cool place.

In a separate bowl, cover the ham hock with water and let soak overnight in the refrigerator.

The next day, heat the duck fat in a very large pot, over medium heat.

Add the carrots, leeks, onions, garlic, and cabbage and cook until slightly softened, 3 to 4 minutes.

Season with salt and pepper.

Drain the ham hock and add to the pot, along with the pig's tail, if using.

Cover with water and bring to a low boil.

Lower the heat, and simmer until the ham hock meat is very tender, about 3 hours.

Drain the beans and add to the pot, along with the potatoes.

Simmer until the beans and potatoes are cooked and tender, about 1 hour longer.

Transfer the ham hock and pig's tail to a cutting board.

Remove the meat, discarding the skin and bones.

Shred the meat into the sauce and serve.