



**42 Loire** geographically, is made up of two river valleys, the Rhone in the south, running along the border with Ardèche and the Loire, flowing the whole length of the department from south to north. To the west of this fertile valley lie the

Roanne and Forez mountain and in the north east are the Madeleine mountains and the Black Forest.

In the western hills cattle and dairy produce predominate while the Loire valley and plain concentrate on cereals, used mainly as fodder for the cattle. Charolaise cattle are reared specifically in the Roanne hills. The south eastern hills of Lyonnais and the Pilat regional park specialise in fruit growing and goat rearing. Horse breeding is also becoming a thriving industry. Wine production is concentrated on the banks of the Rhone and the lower slopes of Roanne and Forez hills.

**Côte Roannaise** specialities are wine, local beer, Andouille de Charlieu, high quality meat and sausages., cheese from Mons, praluline brioche, chocolates from Révillon.

**Brique du Forez** is a cheese made from cow's milk and ages for 2 to 3 months. It's named after its brick-like shape and is easily recognizable by its thin white rind that develops blue and grey hues as it ages.

**Fourme de Montbrison** has a characteristic orange-brown rind with a creamy-coloured pâte, speckled with streaks of blue mould. With a musty scent, the cheese is extremely mild for a blue cheese and has a dry taste.

Écrevisse (crayfish) and freshwater fish from the lakes and canal of Forez.

**Born and “bread” – fouace or fouée** are little pockets or turnovers stuffed with many different fillings such as rillettes (a pork paté-style dish), melted butter or goat's cheese. This traditional bread is plain and baked in a wood-fired or more like a brioche. It makes a perfect side dish or appetiser.

Game includes duck, quail, pheasant, pigeon, rabbit, venison, wild boar and deer. The game is caught locally and prepared and served in a rich sauce, typically

consisting of fresh mushrooms as the base ingredient and wine from the local vineyards, accompanied by juicy white asparagus.

**Pithiviers** is a classic pastry pie that's traditionally decorated with a spiral pattern. The dish is made from puff pastry, and it can be filled with sweet or savoury ingredients.

For the dessert pie, pithiviers is often filled with fruits such as plums and cherries or almond cream. The sweet versions are usually served with coffee on the side. The savoury versions are commonly filled with cheese, vegetables, and meat such as beef, chicken, or pork

## **Ham, Chicken and Crayfish Pie**

A surprising but satisfying combination of ingredients here. Plus this pie looks dramatic: a few of the crayfish heads are used as garnish and to let steam escape.

Preparation Time; 30mins, Cooking Time; 2hrs, Serves 4 to 6

### **Ingredients**

1 ham hock

4 chicken thighs, skin on

1 onion, roughly chopped

2 carrots, roughly chopped

2 sticks celery, roughly chopped

small bunch thyme

small bunch parsley stalks

2 bay leaves

10-12 raw crayfish (cooked can be substituted, but you will need to use fish stock)

A drizzle olive oil

1 tbsp tomato purée

A small bunch tarragon

50g unsalted butter

2 tbsp plain flour

A small bunch chives, finely chopped

300g shop-bought all-butter puff pastry

1 free-range egg, beaten

1-2 sprigs of thyme

## **Method**

Preheat the oven to 190C (fan 170C) 375F, Gas 5.

Put the ham hock, chicken, onion, carrot and celery in a pot and cover with water.

Tie together the thyme, parsley stalks and bay leaves with kitchen string and add to the pot.

Bring to a boil and then simmer for around 1½ hours, or until the meat is cooked through.

Remove the meat and then strain and reserve the cooking liquid.

Shred the meat into bite-sized pieces and set aside.

Peel the crayfish and set aside.

Put the shells into a hot pan to brown with a drizzle of olive oil.

Add the tomato purée and cook for one minute. Measure 1 litre of the meat cooking liquid and add to the pan, along with a few leaves of fresh tarragon. Bring to the boil and simmer for 20 minutes before passing through a sieve.

Discard the shells and set the stock aside.

Make a roux by melting the butter and whisking in the flour.

Gradually add the stock, whisking to prevent lumps from forming.

Taste to check for seasoning and add more tarragon at this point if desired.

To assemble, layer the ham, chicken and crayfish in a pie dish and pour over the sauce and scatter over the chopped chives.

Reserve a few crayfish heads.

Roll out the pastry to a 5mm thickness and cover the pie dish with it.

Trim the edges and press them firmly into the rim of the dish.

Brush with beaten egg yolk and sprinkle over some fresh thyme leaves.

Make a couple of incisions into the pastry and insert the reserved crayfish heads to let the steam escape from inside the pie.

Bake for 30 minutes, or until the pastry is puffed up and golden-brown.

## **Classic Almond Pithivier**

This famous pastry from the Loire resembling the galette des rois, is traditionally made for Epiphany.

Preparation Time; 20mins, Cooking Time; 60mins, Serves 8 to 10

### **Ingredients**

Butter for greasing

500g block puff pastry

Plain flour to dust

1 tsp icing sugar for the glaze

For the almond paste

125g butter, at room temperature

125g caster sugar

1 medium free-range egg, plus 2 yolks

125g ground almonds

15g plain flour, plus extra to dust

2 tbsp dark rum

## Method

Lightly grease 2 baking trays with butter. Roll out the puff pastry on a lightly floured work surface to a 45cm x 25cm rectangle.

Cut out two discs, one measuring 20cm, the other 25cm in diameter.

Transfer to the trays, then chill for 20 minutes.

For the almond paste, cream the butter and sugar together in a bowl until pale and fluffy.

Beat in the egg and one of the yolks, then stir in the ground almonds, flour and rum.

Remove the pastry discs from the fridge.

Spoon the almond paste onto the smaller disc and spread out with a palette knife, leaving a 2.5cm border around the edge and mounding it up in the centre.

Beat the remaining yolk with 1 tsp cold water, then brush a little around the pastry border.

Lay the second disc over the filling and press the edges together to seal, smoothing out any trapped air.

Crimp the edges between your thumb and forefinger.

Use the tip of a sharp knife to make a small hole in the centre for the steam to escape, then chill for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat the oven to 220°C (fan200C) gas 7.

Remove the pithivier from the fridge and brush with the rest of the egg glaze.

Using the tip of a small, sharp knife, score radial arcs into the pastry, working from the centre outwards and taking care not to cut all the way through.

Seal the edges of the pastry carefully to stop the filling leaking out during baking.

Bake for 15-20 minutes until puffed and golden.

Turn the oven down to 180°C (fan 160°C) gas 4 and bake for 35-40 minutes more until a skewer pushed into the centre comes away clean and the pastry is deep golden.

If it starts to brown too much, lay a sheet of foil loosely over the top.

Remove the pithivier from the oven and increase the temperature to 220°C (fan 200C) gas7.

Dust the pithivier with the icing sugar, then return to the oven for 3-4 minutes until caramelised and glossy.

Transfer to a cooling rack to cool slightly.

Serve warm with ice cream or cream

The cooled pithivier will keep for 2-3 days, covered in the fridge.

Warm gently in a low oven to serve.

## **Potato, Leek and Stilton Pithivier**

Preparation Time; 20mins, Cooking Time; 60mins, Serves 8

### **Ingredients**

500g block puff pastry

Plain flour to dust

1 medium free-range egg yolk

### **For the filling**

400g floury potatoes, such as king edward, peeled and thinly sliced

25g butter

2 banana shallots, thinly sliced

400g leeks, thinly sliced

1 tbsp fresh thyme leaves

1 medium free-range egg

2 tbsp crème fraîche

2 garlic cloves, crushed

2 tsp Dijon mustard

150g stilton, finely crumbled

### **Method**

Lightly grease 2 baking trays with butter. Roll out the puff pastry on a lightly floured work surface to a 45cm x 25cm rectangle.

Cut out two discs, one measuring 20cm, the other 25cm in diameter.

Transfer to the trays, then chill for 20 minutes.

For the filling, bring a large pan of salted water to the boil.

Add the sliced potatoes, bring back to the boil, then cook for 2 minutes or until just tender when pierced with the tip of a knife.

Drain well.

Melt the butter in a medium pan, add the shallots and cook gently for 3-4 minutes until softened.

Add the leeks and thyme, then cook, uncovered, for 8 minutes until the leeks have softened.

Season with salt and pepper to taste, transfer to a mixing bowl and leave to cool.

Beat the egg with the crème fraîche, garlic and mustard, season with salt and pepper, then stir into the cooled leek mixture.

Remove the pastry discs from the fridge.

Layer the sliced potatoes in the centre of the smaller disc, leaving a 2.5cm border around the edge and seasoning with pepper and a little salt as you go (the stilton will add saltiness).

Scatter the crumbled stilton over then, using a slotted spoon, top with the leek mix. Discard any runny egg left in the bowl.

Beat the egg yolk with 1 tsp cold water, then brush a little over the pastry border.

Beat the remaining yolk with 1 tsp cold water, then brush a little around the pastry border.

Lay the second disc over the filling and press the edges together to seal, smoothing out any trapped air.

Crimp the edges between your thumb and forefinger.

Use the tip of a sharp knife to make a small hole in the centre for the steam to escape, then chill for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat the oven to 220°C (fan 200°C) gas 7.

Remove the pithivier from the fridge and brush with the rest of the egg glaze. Press into the edges of the pastry again with a fork to make sure it's fully sealed.

Bake for 15-20 minutes until puffed and golden.

Turn down the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C) gas 4, then bake for 40 minutes more or until the pastry is deeply golden.

If it starts to brown too quickly, lay a sheet of foil loosely over the top.

Transfer to a cooling rack to cool slightly.

Serve warm with a dressed green salad. delicious. tips



**Note.** Make sure the pastry is well chilled when assembling the pithivier to make it easier to work with.

The cooled pithivier will keep for 2-3 days, covered in the fridge.

Warm gently in a low oven to serve.