



51 Marne is a department in the Grand Est region of France. It is named after the river Marne which flows through it. The prefecture of Marne is Châlons-en-Champagne. The Champagne vineyards producing the eponymous sparkling wine are in Marne.

The area consists mostly of flat plains interrupted by low hills and by the valley of the Marne River. The region itself is traditionally divided into two parts, the Dry (Pouilleuse) Champagne in the west and the Wet (Humide) in the east. Traditionally, in the Dry Champagne, crops could be raised easily only in the river valleys, the areas between them being restricted to pasturage and fodder crops. The Wet Champagne, in contrast, could be farmed almost everywhere. Today, however, mechanization has made the east more productive. The main crops include cereals, sugar beets, and alfalfa (lucerne). Throughout Champagne large modern farms predominate and are linked to an important food-processing industry. The region gave its name to the most famous type of wine produced from its extensive vineyards.

The best champagne comes from vineyards along the Marne from Château-Thierry eastward to Épernay and on the plain from Épernay to Reims. Champagne is made from only three grapes: pinot and meunier, both black, and chardonnay, white. Champagne has a crisp, flinty taste, sometimes ascribed to the chalky soil. A small amount is made from green grapes only and is called blanc des blancs. Pink champagne is made by adding a little red wine, or by leaving the crushed grapes in contact with their skins for a time.

Reims Ham incorporates nutmeg, parsley and shallots then cooked in stock, seasoned and coated in breadcrumbs. It is sold either in a large rectangular block or small individual cylinders. Enjoy it with salad dauphinoise or simply in small cubes as an aperitif

Reims Mustard is smooth and pale yellow and owes its particular flavour to the vinegar content and addition of spices.

Chaource is a soft cows milk cheese with a creamy, slightly crumbly texture and encased in a white rind. Goes well with Chablis.

Langres is also made from cows milk and is slightly salty with a strong aroma. Try it with the local red wine Muid Montsaigeonnais or a Vin de Coiffy.

Truffles are best eaten in their raw state to preserve their delicate hazelnut flavour.

Les Biscuits Roses de Reims are light, crunchy and vanilla-flavoured. As they are hard, it is a local tradition to dip (dunk) them into a glass of champagne

Bouchons de Champagne are dark chocolates, filled with Marc de Champagne liqueur and moulded in the shape of champagne corks

Champenoise Fondue is a shared dish made from Langres and Chaource cheeses, mixed with crème fraîche, white wine, potato flour and pepper Usually served with a green salad and a selection of local charcuterie and a glass of white wine, such as a white Chardonnay Coiffy.

Caisses de Wassy are small almond meringues with a pale golden colour made from sugar, egg white, almonds and vanilla extract. These meringues go very well with ice cream or with coffee at the end of a meal.

Bragardise is an extremely flavoursome biscuit containing cane sugar, flour, butter, cinnamon and coconut.

Biscuits Roses de Reims Maison

Preparation and Cooking Time; 70mins, Makes 30

Ingredients

180 grams all-purpose flour

90 grams cornstarch

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

Pinch of salt

4 large eggs, at room temperature, separated

200 grams sugar, divided

2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Red food colouring, optional

120 grams confectioners' sugar

Method

Preheat the oven to 180C (fan 160C) 350F.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat.

Whisk the flour, cornstarch, baking powder, baking soda and salt together.

Working with a whisk, beat the egg whites at medium speed until opaque.

Increase the speed to high, and add half the sugar (100g), 1 tablespoon at a time, until you have a stiff-peaked, glossy meringue.

Transfer to another bowl and put the yolks in the original bowl (no need to wash it).

Beat the yolks, the remaining sugar and the vanilla on medium-high speed for 5 minutes, scraping as needed, until pale and thick.

Add enough food colouring to tint the batter deep pink, if you like.

Turn the meringue out over the yolks, and working with a flexible spatula and a gentle hand, fold the 2 mixtures together until almost combined.

Fold in half the dry ingredients, and when almost blended, add the rest, and finish incorporating

N.B. Check the bottom of the bowl for lurking flour.

If you're using parchment paper, use a little of the mixture to "glue" the four corners to the baking sheet.

Scrape batter into a piping bag with about a 25mm opening (no tip needed).

Pipe out roughly 100 x 25mm fingers, spaced at least 25mm apart.

Sift confectioners sugar generously over the cookies, leave 5 minutes, then repeat.

Bake for 6 minutes, then rotate the pan, and bake 6 minutes more.

Turn off the oven, prop the door open a crack and let the biscuits dry for at least 30 minutes (or for up to 2 hours). Serve now, or store in an airtight container.

They'll hold for 1 week.