



65 Hautes-Pyrénées department is situated along the French border with Spain, and includes the central area of the Pyrenean mountains. The department is part of the Midi-Pyrenees region of France. Most of the scenic highlights are in the high mountains to the south, and the pilgrimage town at Lourdes is the most important of the places to visit towards the north.

The department is quite different in character between the north around Tarbes and Lourdes which is a much flatter landscapes than to the south with the high mountains of the Pyrenees National Park.

The Pyrenees mountain range rises in the south to heights in excess of 3,000 metres and covers much of the départements of Hautes-Pyrénées, Haute-Garonne, and Ariège.

Agriculture is highly varied, reflecting in part the range of different natural conditions found in the area. Beef and dairy cattle raising is widespread, although concentrated primarily in the upland areas of the Pyrenees and the Massif Central. Sheep farming, for the production of Roquefort cheese, is practiced in the Pyrenees and Aveyron.

Vegetable and fruit cultivation has developed on a large scale in Tarn-et-Garonne, while the fattening of geese and ducks for the production of foie gras is widespread.

Garbure is a typical soup made with Haricots Tarbais, cabbage and potatoes, among other things. The longer the garbure simmers – sometimes several days – the better it is

Gâteau à la Broche resembles a golden pyramid or a sugar pine cone. It is cooked above an open fire and the mixture is poured slowly onto the mould while it turns on a spit. The mixture is composed of flour, eggs, butter, rum and vanilla.

Haricot Tarbais is a marvel, with a pearly lustre, tender skin, low starch content, and incomparable succulence once cooked.

Trébons Onion is a superb onion, sweet and tender, so sweet that you can eat it raw.

Confit de Canard is made by slow-roasting duck meat in its own fat. The meat is seasoned with salt, pepper, and fresh herbs and spices such as thyme, garlic, shallots, and bay leaves. Duck confit is so rich and savoury that it is usually served on its own, without sauce. However, a side of puy lentils makes an excellent accompaniment to this dish.

Aligot incorporates mashed potatoes, melted cheese, cream, and crushed garlic. This velvety mixture is similar to fondue.

Pastissou is a traditional cake made with flour, sugar, butter, ground walnuts, milk, eggs and baking powder. The walnuts are roasted with caramel, and the cake is topped with a light sugar meringue. The cake has a delicate texture and rich flavour.

Cassoulet

Preparation time: More than 2 hours, Cooking time: 2h to 3h, Serves 4

Ingredients

400g to 500g dried haricot beans

2 confit duck or goose legs, cut in half.

4 x 80g pieces of Toulouse sausage

4 x 50g pork meat taken from the shank, shoulder, breast or loins

250g of pork rind, half of which will be used after cooking for the assembly of the cassoulet.

A little salted bacon

1 chicken carcass or a few pork bones onions and carrots

Method

Preparation of the Haricot Beans

The day before, soak the beans overnight in cold water.

The next day, drain, put the beans in a saucepan with three litres of cold water and boil for 5 minutes.

Turn off the heat, drain the water and reserve the beans

Proceed with the preparation of the broth with another 3 litres of water, the rinds cut into wide strips, a poultry carcass if you have it or a few pork bones (and/or beef) and, according to your taste, a few onions (planted with cloves) and carrots. Salt and pepper (generously)

Cook this broth for at least an hour then strain the broth and recover the rinds

In this filtered broth put the beans to cook until they are soft but remain whole.

For this it takes about an hour of boiling

Preparation of the meats

While the beans are cooking

In a large sauté pan, degrease the pieces of confit over low heat then set aside

In the remaining fat, brown the Toulouse sausages then set them aside

Brown the pieces of pork which must be golden brown and reserve them with the other meats

Drain the beans and keep the broth warm.

Add a few cloves of crushed garlic to the beans and half the salted bacon

All meats are therefore cooked first

Keep the cooking juices of the sausage and pork loin

Assembly of the Cassoulet

For this, use a hollow terracotta dish or failing that a fairly hollow terracotta dish suitable for the oven use.

Line the bottom of the casserole with pieces of rind

Add about a third of the beans

Arrange the meats and on top pour in the rest of the beans

Arrange the sausages by pushing them into the beans with the tops of the sausages remaining visible

Complete the cassole by pouring in the hot broth (and the meat cooking juices) which should just cover the beans

Sprinkle pepper on the surface and add a tablespoon of the duck fat used to brown the meat.

Cooking

Heat the oven to 150°C/160°C (fan 130C/140C) and cook for two to three hours

During cooking, a golden brown crust will form on the top of the casserole which will have to be pushed in several times

When the top of the beans starts to dry add a few spoons of broth

N.B. Prepare this cassoulet the day before.

If you do so, it will have to be reheated in the oven at 150°C (fan 130C) for an hour and a half before being served.

Do not forget to add a little broth or, failing that, a few spoonfuls of water.

It is very important not to have a dry cassoulet!

The cassoulet is served bubbling in its terracotta casserole.

You just have to serve it delicately without stirring it