

79 Deux-Sèvres



79 Deux-Sèvres is a peaceful rural department especially famous for the “Marais Poitevin”, known as the ‘Green Venice’ which mirrors the Norfolk Broads in character but without the inclement weather factor! Life has moved at a sedate pace for centuries in this peaceful backwater and in the 17/18th centuries, a certain amount of guidance from the Dutch sorted out the question of drainage.

This tranquil area of shaded canals where you can either hire a boat or be taken on a guided tour, whether by boat or canoe, has become a national park. The centre of the region is low-lying and punctuated by the shallow valleys of the Vienne, Clain, Charente, and Sèvre Niortaise rivers. An oceanic climate prevails. An above-average number of people work in agriculture, although in general the activity is not highly productive. Wheat, barley, and especially corn (maize) are widely cultivated, with the lowlands around Poitiers and the central and southern parts of the region specializing in these crops. Sunflowers are also a key crop in these areas. Brandy, especially cognac (named for a town in the Charente River valley), is produced in Charente and Charente-Maritime. Beef cattle are raised on the Massif Central and the Massif Armorican, and dairy cows are raised in southern Deux-Sèvres and in central eastern areas of the region. Sheep are grazed extensively in the Montmorillan area of Vienne, while goat cheese is produced around Melle in southern Deux-Sèvres.

Poitevin is a starter, served cold and made with cabbage, chard, sorrel, spinach, bacon, eggs and herbs.

Snails in Parsley. The recipe for snails in parsley takes time to prepare because you have to fast the gastropods for 15 days to three weeks before cooking them

Fricassee of Eels is prepared in the pan, for example with potatoes, flour, parsley and an onion.

Meats. With its many meadows, especially in the northern part, the department is known for its livestock.

There is lamb from Poitou-Charentes, beef from Parthenaise, recognizable by its tawny color.

The Poitevin Cheesecake is recognizable by its burnt dome. It is prepared with a base of fresh goat's cheese then baked in a special half-sphere mould which preserves a soft and melting texture..

Poitou Broyed is made with sugar, flour, butter, eggs and a pinch of salt.

Angelica in confectionery “L'herbe aux Anges” grows in the Poitevin marshes. It is been used as an ingredient in confectionery (candies, candied sticks or chocolates, for example).

Fricassee of Eels (Fricassée d'anguille)

Preparation Time; 15mins Cooking Time; 25', Serves 4

Ingredients

1 kg of small eels
30g of butter
4 tbsp. at s. of oil
3 tbsp. at s. of flour
2 shallots
3 cloves of garlic
1 bunch of parsley
salt pepper

Method

Skin, gut and head the eels.
Peel the garlic and shallots, chop finely.
Wash and dry the parsley, chop it.
Cut the eels into sections.
Coat them with flour.
Eliminate the excess.
In a frying pan, heat the oil.
Brown the eels on all sides.
Reduce the heat, finish cooking for 20 minutes.
Drain the pieces of eel.
Discard cooking oil.
To melt the butter.
Add the shallots, sweat them gently, covered.
Reintroduce the pieces of eel into the pan.
Add garlic and parsley.
Stir briskly to heat through.
Serve hot

Sweet and salty cheesecake with cherries and crumble

This is the ultimate dinner party dish. All the elements can be cooked well in advance and put together at the very last minute. Adding the feta is sure to win you serious accolades, as it is an original addition in a dessert and completely delicious.

When fresh cherries are not in season you can easily use frozen.

Serves 4 to six

INGREDIENTS

100g feta

300g cream cheese

40g caster sugar

Finely grated zest of 1 medium lemon

130ml double cream

90g fresh blackberries (or de-frosted frozen blackberries, if out of season)

2 tbsp olive oil, for drizzling

Crumble:

100g blanched almonds, roughly chopped

50g cold unsalted butter, diced

50g wholemeal flour

25g plain flour

50g brown sugar

1 tbsp black sesame seeds

¼ tsp salt

Cherry compote:

600g frozen pitted cherries, defrosted

90g caster sugar

4 whole STAR ANISE

4 strips orange skin

4 tbsp Orange liqueur (Cointreau or Grand Marnier)

METHOD

Use a spatula to break down the feta to be as smooth as possible.

Whisk in the cream cheese, sugar and lemon zest.

Place the cream in a separate bowl and whip until soft peaks form.

Fold half of the whipped cream into the cream cheese and feta mix followed by the second half. Be careful not to over mix.

Leave to set in the fridge for at least 2 hours but preferably overnight. The mixture will last up to 3 days in the fridge.

Pre heat the oven to 180C (fan 160C)

Place the almonds and both flours in a large bowl.

Use your hands to rub in the butter until a crumb-like consistency forms.

Stir through the sugar, sesame seeds and salt.

Spread out on a baking tray and cook for about 12 minutes, until golden brown.

Place the cherries, sugar, star anise and orange peel in a medium saucepan and place on a medium-high heat.

Bring to the boil and simmer for between 10 to 15 minutes, until the sauce has thickened.

Add the orange liqueur and simmer for a further 2 minute.

The sauce will become thicker as it cools down.

Once the cherry compote has cooled to room temperature you are ready to serve.

For one portion, spoon out a large scoop of cheesecake onto a plate, top with plenty of the crumble, lots compote, more crumble, some fresh blackberries and finish with a drizzle of olive oil.