

RECIPES FROM ALT.GOURMAND

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CATFISH COURTBOUILLON

CATFISH-BOIL – Cajun Catfish

Catfish courtbouillon (pronounced coo-be-yon) is a spicy fish dish served over rice.

INGREDIENTS (Serves 4)

2 large	<i>catfish fillets</i> (or any firm fish)
1 cup	<i>onions</i> , chopped fine
½ cup	<i>celery</i> , chopped fine
2	<i>garlic cloves</i> , minced
1/3 cup	<i>butter</i>
1/3 cup	<i>flour</i>
1 tsp	<i>salt</i>
½ tsp	<i>black pepper</i>
¼ tsp	<i>cayenne pepper</i> (or more, for the real cajun flavor)
3	<i>large tomatoes</i> peeled and quartered (or use a 1 lb can of tomatoes)
3 cups	<i>water</i>
2 cups	<i>hot cooked rice</i>

PROCEDURE

- (1) In a deep skillet or dutch oven mix the butter and flour together over low heat to form a roux (a thick, smooth, bubbly mixture).
- (2) Add the onions, celery and garlic and sauté until tender.
- (3) Add the tomatoes, salt, pepper, cayenne and water. Simmer covered for 20–30 minutes.
- (4) Add fillets and cook until tender and flaky, 15–20 minutes. Serve on a bed of rice.

NOTES

The amount of cayenne here is set for a mildly hot taste. It can be increased up to a full teaspoon for the full nuclear version!

RATING

Difficulty: easy. *Time:* 1 hour. *Precision:* approximate measurement OK, but measure the pepper.

CONTRIBUTOR

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MURGH MUSALLAM

CHICKEN-CURRY – Chicken curry

This recipe is the real thing. Throw out your curry powder: you'll never use it again once you've tried this recipe. Chicken curry using the real spices cannot be beat!!

INGREDIENTS (serves 2–3)

1	<i>chicken</i>
1 piece	<i>fresh ginger</i> (about ¾ inch of a ginger root)
12–14	<i>garlic cloves</i>
1	<i>large onion</i>
1	<i>cinnamon stick</i>
2	<i>whole brown cardamom pods</i>
4	<i>whole green cardamom pods</i>
1	<i>whole star anise</i> (use all 8 arms and the seeds inside them)
12–14	<i>black peppercorns</i>
6–8	<i>cloves</i>
1 tsp	<i>turmeric</i>
1 tsp	<i>red chili powder</i> (or substitute fresh red chilies, diced)
2	<i>green chilies</i>
½ cup	<i>yogurt</i>
¼ cup	<i>oil</i> (preferably ghee, if available)
salt	<i>to taste</i>
	<i>fresh coriander leaves</i> (optional)

PROCEDURE

- (1) Clean and joint chicken. If you don't like the skin, remove it.
- (2) Mash the ginger into a paste (or chop finely) and mince the garlic.
- (3) Heat oil in a large frying pan. Use "medium high heat".
- (4) Break apart the star anise to release the seeds inside the arms. To the frypan, add onions, cinnamon stick, cardamom pods, star aniseed, peppercorns, cloves, garlic and ginger. Be careful not to burn the garlic. Sauté until the onions are cooked but not browned.
- (5) Add the chicken, turmeric, and chili powder and cook on a medium heat, stirring often.
- (6) When the oil starts to separate (the gravy will have oil floating on its surface), add the yogurt and cook till the chicken is done and the gravy is thick. Finally, add the fresh coriander leaves.

NOTES

This is the basic recipe. Try varying the whole spice combinations until you find a favorite. The recipe doubles well.

A cardamom pod is not the same thing as a cardamom seed. Make sure you get the pods. A pod is about the size of a pea, and contains seeds inside it. Don't substitute the ground version of any of the whole spices, the effect will not be the same. And don't use white cardamom pods.

You may want to remove the smaller whole spices prior to adding the yogurt so that unwitting guests don't eat them. Try the recommended quantity of garlic. The flavour is surprisingly subtle. More yogurt makes more gravy. Also a longer cooking time. Vary the amount of chilies to suit your taste. This recipe is medium hot. I hope this satisfies your mouth-hunger. The spice quantities may be varied to suit your preferences.

RATING

Difficulty: easy, though timing matters when cooking the onions. *Time:* 20 minutes preparation, 1½ hours cooking. *Precision:* measure the oil.

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It is better to travel happily than to arrive

SESAME GRANOLA

GRANOLA – A crunchy sesame seed granola

I got this recipe from the back of a page from a green engineering pad with a circuit diagram on the other side. Where it came from before that I do not know.

INGREDIENTS (About 6 servings)

½ cup	<i>vegetable oil</i>
½ cup	<i>honey</i>
1 tsp	<i>vanilla extract</i>
2 cups	<i>rolled oats</i> (quick or old fashioned oatmeal, uncooked)
2 cup	<i>wheat flakes</i>
1 cup	<i>sunflower seeds</i>
1 cup	<i>raisins</i>
¾ cup	<i>sesame seeds</i>
½ cup	<i>chopped walnuts</i>
½ cup	<i>flaked coconut</i>

PROCEDURE

- (1) Preheat oven to 350°F.
- (2) Combine all the dry ingredients and mix well (do not break up the wheat flakes).
- (3) Heat oil, honey and vanilla in a large saucepan.
- (4) Remove from heat and mix in the other ingredients stir until everything is coated well.
- (5) Spread into a 13×19-inch baking pan, and bake at 350°F for 15–20 min or until golden brown.
- (6) Allow to cool before removing from pan.

NOTES

These are much better than any "store bought" granola. I eat it as desert or carry it instead of gorp when backpacking. It is very good eaten straight, with no milk.

RATING

Difficulty: easy. *Time:* 15 minutes preparation, 20 minutes cooking *Precision:* no need to measure.

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SOAP

SOAP – A nice body and face soap

This is a luxurious and gentle handmade soap. It's a lot of work to make, but it's also a lot of fun. It is a good use for huge quantities of fat left over from cooking something.

One of the main ingredients in soap is lye (sodium hydroxide, NaOH). Lye is *extremely* caustic even at room temperature, and in this recipe it is heated. Because of this, you need to exercise extreme care when you make soap. You should always wear shoes (not sandals), long pants, a long-sleeved top, and gloves (I use rubber gloves). Also, *be sure to wear eye protection*. If you get lye on your skin, you can quickly run to the sink and wash it off with LOTS of cold water; if you get lye in your eyes, rinsing it off may involve going to the emergency room. You should make certain that children and pets are somewhere else and will not interrupt you. There is no room for mistakes when dealing with lye.

INGREDIENTS (6 pounds of soap)

9 pounds *suet* (this is also called tallow or beef fat)
 1 container *lye* (see note)
 3 cups *water*
 2 cups *lemon juice*
 ¼ oz *volatile fragrance oil* (optional; see note)

TOOLS

You will need a large pot (metal or ceramic), at least 2 gallons, with a lid. This is for rendering the fat.

One long wooden spoon (at least 10 inches). This should be a spoon that you can sacrifice, because the lye will eat away the wood.

You will need a large ceramic or glass bowl. This must be capable of holding all the water, lemon juice, and fat with some room to spare. I use a ceramic tub that is about 6 inches high and 24 inches in diameter. *do not use metal*, as it will corrode. Even stainless steel will corrode.

Finally, you will need some glass, ceramic, and/or wooden molds to pour the soap into. I use glass baking dishes; two 8½×14-inch glass pans will make bars of soap that are about 1 to 1½ inches thick. Again, **DO NOT USE METAL CONTAINERS**, as they will corrode.

PROCEDURE

- (1) Render the fat. To do this, cut the fat into hand-sized pieces and place in a large pot and cover it. Heat on a medium heat until all the fat is melted. You should stir it occasionally. You should probably plan to turn the fan on high or open your kitchen windows while you are doing this. (Note that if you are starting with a pure fat, such as coconut oil or olive oil, you don't need to do this. Skip to Step 4.)
- (2) Cool the fat so that it is below the boiling point of water. Add an equal volume of water to the fat, and bring the mixture to a boil. Cover and let cool over night.
- (3) Take the fat out of the pot. I find the easiest way to do this is to slice the fat in half with a knife and then cut wedges. You can push the first wedge down into the water and then lift its neighboring wedge out. Scrape all the non-fat gunk off the bottom of the fat (the side of the fat that was at the fat-water interface).
- (4) Measure out six pounds of rendered fat (be accurate with this measurement). Cut the fat into small pieces (about the size of a tennis ball, but squarish, not round) and place in a bowl.
- (5) Set up your soap-making work area. It should be outside, in a very well ventilated area. It's supposed to help to do it on a warmer day rather than a cooler day, but I've never noticed the difference. Also, clear your stove top and open the window in the kitchen before you start making the soap.

On a table, put your ceramic tub, the bowl of fat, the opened container of lye, a container with the water, and a container with the lemon juice. If you will be adding scent, keep its container nearby. Also place your soap mold containers nearby.

Put on all your safety gear.

- (6) Make the soap: Pour the water into the ceramic tub. Very carefully pour the lye into the tub. This is an exothermic reaction: it gives off heat, which is used to melt the fat. It also gives off odors which you don't want to breathe, so keep your head back. Stir the lye to dissolve it in the water. Then start adding the fat to the water/lye mixture, stirring with the long wooden spoon. Add the fat a bit at a time and stir until it's all melted. Then stir in the lemon juice, scent (if you are using it), and pour into molds. When the soap is firmer but not yet hard, cut into bars with a knife. It should be hard in an hour or so; you can test it with your finger.
- (7) Wrap in clean cotton rags and store in a cool, airy place for 3-6 months.
- (8) When you clean up the pan that you made the soap in, be somewhat careful as there is probably still some unreacted lye in the pan. The only time I've had a problem with this is when I've tried to scrape the dry soap that lines the pan off with my fingernail and then a few minutes later I notice that the skin under my fingernail is burning. The easiest solution is just to wear gloves when you're cleaning the pan. It probably also helps to wash with extremely hot water so that the remaining soap (and fat if there is any) melts and dissolves in the water.

NOTES

In the U.S., Red Devil lye comes in 12-oz containers. In Europe it generally comes in 350-g containers, which is about 3% more. You don't want to measure lye—you want to use the whole container. If your container is not this size, then scale the recipe up or down accordingly. Leftover lye is a serious disposal problem.

Where to buy 9 pounds of fat? If you're using an animal fat (beef or pork), you can buy it from your butcher. What I find I have to do is reserve it, because they normally don't keep the fat after they've cut up their cow. Sometimes they will charge you for the fat (I've paid anywhere from 10 to 45 cents a pound); sometimes they won't. I've only ever made soap with beef fat; this makes a hard, mild, slow-lathering soap. The recipe will work equally well with other animal fats to produce a similar result. Coconut oil yields a softer, quick-lathering soap. Olive oil and other vegetable cooking oils yield a very soft soap that never completely hardens. Unfortunately, these oils are sensitive to air and light, and soap made from cooking oils will spoil in a few weeks unless it is refrigerated.

Volatile fragrance oils, also called essential oils, are highly concentrated scent ingredients. You can usually buy them at health-food stores, and you can sometimes find exotic fragrances at specialty food-and-spice shops. The amount that you should use depends on how fragrant you want the soap to be. A few drops of musk oil is enough to scent an entire batch of soap; less-potent fragrances such as a fruit oil might require a teaspoon or two. Soap scented with herbs is also popular; herbs like lemon thyme or verbenas or lavender work well. To scent with herbs, make an herbal oil by packing a ½-cup container with herbs and then filling it with a pleasant-smelling vegetable oil such as almond oil. Let this mixture sit for a few weeks, stirring it every day, then heat in a double boiler for 10 minutes, then cool and strain the oil.

The soap works just fine with no fragrance at all, and many people prefer it that way. I certainly do.

You may run into problems at the stage "Add the fat and stir until it's all melted." I almost always do. What happens is that the water/lye mixture runs out of heat before all the fat melts. What you have to do is add heat somehow. The way I do this is to grab the tub (which now contains all the fat), go into the kitchen, put it on top of a burner, and turn the burner (and the fan) on high. (Make sure the windows are all open too.) When all the fat is melted, I go back outside and continue, adding the lemon juice.

The lemon juice lowers the pH. The finished soap will have a pH of about 9; you can lower this by adding more lemon juice.

RATING

Difficulty: challenging. *Time:* Day 1: 30 minutes preparation; 1–2 hours cooking. Day 2: usually about 1 hour. *Precision:* Be precise. Also be careful.

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SOAP(O)

Alt.Gourmand Cookbook (7 Aug 86)

SOAP(O)

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SPANAKOPITA

SPANAKOPITA – Greek spinach and cheese pie

This recipe is from the *Vegetarian Epicure* by Anna Thomas. It takes lots of time to make, but is well worth it.

INGREDIENTS (serves 8)

2 lbs	<i>fresh spinach</i>
1 lb	<i>filo dough</i>
½ lb	<i>feta cheese</i>
7	<i>eggs</i>
1	<i>onion, diced</i>

PROCEDURE

- (1) Dice the onion and sauté it until golden brown.
- (2) While the onion is cooking, wash the spinach. Put it in a bowl and rub lots of salt into it. Let the spinach/salt sit for 15 minutes. This is meant to reduce the volume of spinach. An alternative to this is to barely steam the spinach (30–60 seconds).
- (3) Beat the eggs. Crumble the feta cheese and add to the eggs. Note that feta cheese is fairly salty. You can replace half or all of it with ricotta cheese.
- (4) Rinse all the salt out of the spinach. Add it and the onions to the eggs/cheese and mix. Also add some spices. The original recipes calls for salt, pepper, and oregano. I use basil.
- (5) Melt some butter (at least 2 oz.)
- (6) Butter the bottom of a 9×13 inch baking dish. Lay the filo down one layer at a time, brushing butter on each layer. Turn each successive layer a little so they are not all piled directly on top of each other. The filo will hang over the sides of the dish. Continue until you have 3–5 sheets of filo left.
- (7) Pour the filling into the filo.
- (8) Fold the filo that hangs over the side over the filling. Place the last pieces of filo on top, buttering each as you go. Trim off the filo that hangs over the edge of the dish. These last pieces serve to cover the filling.
- (9) Make two or three slits with a knife in the top layers of filo that go all the way down to the filling.
- (10) Bake at 375°F for 50 minutes.

NOTES

You can vary the filling to suit your tastes. We've thought of adding mushrooms.

My husband complains about how thick and hard to cut the bottom of the spanakopita is. His suggestions (none of which I've tried) include using more butter, and alternating layers of filo and filling.

RATING

Difficulty: moderate. *Time:* 45 minutes preparation, 1 hour cooking. *Precision:* no need to measure.

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SPANISH CREAM

SPANISH-CREAM – Exquisite New Zealand custard dessert

This dessert was a family favourite, and although we used to eat it in conjunction with some flavored jellies, it's delicious in its own right. The recipe comes from my mother, and I don't know what the *Spanish* part signifies.

INGREDIENTS (serves six)

2½ cups	<i>milk</i> (one Imperial pint)
4 tsp	<i>gelatine</i>
2	<i>eggs</i>
½ tsp	<i>vanilla essence</i>
1/3 cup	<i>sugar</i>

PROCEDURE

- (1) Save a small amount of the milk; put the rest in a saucepan, together with the sugar and vanilla, and heat.
- (2) Separate the egg whites and save for later. Beat the egg yolks with the remainder of the milk and add to the heating mixture.
- (3) Stir to ensure the sugar is dissolved and bring to near boiling point to thoroughly cook the eggs. Do not actually boil.
- (4) Take the saucepan off the heat. Dissolve the gelatine in ¼ cup of boiling water and stir into hot custard.
- (5) Pour into serving dish and put into refrigerator to cool.
- (6) When mixture has cooled and almost set (it should be *shivery* at this point) thoroughly beat the egg whites until stiff and fold them in using a metal spoon. Return mixture to refrigerator to properly set.

NOTES

The texture of this dessert is supposed to be *semi-fluffy*. In this regard, step 6 is somewhat critical. If you fold in the egg whites too soon, the liquid custard won't support them and you end up with a two-layer result—solid custard on top, very light on the bottom. Some people may like this, but it's not the way I make it. On the other hand, if you leave things too long, it becomes difficult to fold in the egg whites at all.

It's a good idea to whip the custard a little with a fork prior to folding in the whites. This breaks up the custard a little.

Depending on sweetness of taste, you may wish to alter the amount of sugar. Our family had a sweet tooth, and I've reduced the original quantity as it is.

One of the amazing things about this dessert is that it's so easy to make, and yet tastes so good.

RATING

Difficulty: easy. *Time:* 20 minutes + setting. *Precision:* approximate measurement OK.

CONTRIBUTOR

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TURKEY LEFTOVER SOUP

TURKEY-SOUP – A Hearty winter soup with turkey and wild rice

This is a traditional after-Thanksgiving soup, and a wonderful use of turkey leftovers. It is a hearty winter soup, suitable as a main course, especially when served with fresh bread or biscuits.

INGREDIENTS (Serves 8)

6 cups	<i>clear chicken broth</i>
¼ cup	<i>uncooked white rice</i>
¼ cup	<i>uncooked wild rice</i>
½ cup	<i>green onions, chopped fine</i>
½ cup	<i>butter</i>
¾ cup	<i>flour</i>
½ tsp	<i>salt</i>
¼ tsp	<i>pepper</i>
2 cups	<i>milk (or a mixture of milk and cream)</i>
1 ½ cups	<i>cooked turkey, cubed (or use chicken)</i>
8	<i>bacon slices, cooked crisp and crumbled</i>
3 Tbsp	<i>dry sherry (optional)</i>

PROCEDURE

- (1) In a large sauce pan combine chicken broth, rice and onions. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 40 minutes.
- (2) In a medium sauce pan or skillet melt butter. Stir in the flour, salt, and pepper, cook 1 minute stirring until smooth and bubbly.
- (3) Slowly stir in the milk and cook until slightly thickened.
- (4) Slowly stir the milk mixture into the rice mixture, add remaining ingredients and heat gently, do not boil.

RATING

Difficulty: Easy to moderate. *Time:* 1 hour. *Precision:* approximate measurement OK.

CONTRIBUTOR

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