

History of Cooking with Belgian Beer: La Cuisine À La Bière

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Most of the ancient Belgian dishes were the result of little accidents or folkloric experiments by people using whatever they had, and with what was considered good in their community to cook with.

Dishes like *Carbonade Flamande* (or Flemish beef stew) date back to medieval times. The beef was originally cooked with water, onions and thyme. Then the addition of wine in cooking took over until it probably became not so easily obtainable. Beer, with its earthy taste, and easy availability, lent itself very well to the stewing of beef. It also proved a better tenderizer than wine.

The addition of fruit, such as apples and prunes, in cooking came later to enhance the taste of the food. It helped to take away some of the bitterness that would come from using the strong local beer. Brown sugar or gingerbread was also sometimes used instead of fruit to both thicken and sweeten at the same time.

The true *cuisine a la biere* (or beer cuisine) really took off in the mid-19th century with the boom of Belgian brewers and the creation of specialty beers such as Kriek (cherry beer) and gueuze lambic. Dishes like *lapin a la kriek* (rabbit in cherry beer) became famous and took their place in the Belgian *repertoire de cuisine*.

Cuisine a la biere is a tradition of using beer as a marinade, tenderizer, to baste or glaze meat, as a base for soup, sauces, stews and mustards, and to leaven souffles and bread dough.

The variety of Belgian beers, which are so distinctive in taste and character, lend themselves perfectly to this concept of cooking. Today this method is more popular than ever and is further enhanced by the inspiration of Belgium's newer, more eccentric breweries.

It is only a matter of time before *cuisine a la biere* finds its well-deserved permanent place on the menus of the world's best tables.

CARBONADE FLAMANDE

(Flemish Beef Stew)

Serves 6

3 lbs. chuck steak cut into 2 inch chunks
20 ozs. Oud Bruin Ale or Flemish Red Ale (*Liefman's Goudenband, Rodenbach, Duchess de Borgogne, La Folie*)
2 T. peanut oil
2 T. butter
2 T. brown sugar
1 T. nutmeg
S & P
3 T. flour
2 T. tomato puree
4 oz. Pitted prunes, sliced
16 oz. Veal stock
1 bouquet garni
2 T. Dijon mustard
2 Granny Smith apples

1. Marinate the meat in 12 ozs. Of the beer for 36 hours.
2. Remove meat reserving the marinade.
3. Heat oil and butter in large, heavy frying pan.
4. Add meat, sugar and nutmeg and cook over medium-high heat, stirring frequently until the meat is well-browned.
5. Transfer browned meat to a flame-proof casserole and season with S & P.
6. Stir flour into the hot oil/butter in the same frying pan and cook until well-browned.
7. Stir in tomato puree, prunes, veal stock, bouquet garni and beer marinade.
8. Bring to a boil then pour over the meat in the casserole.
9. Simmer very gently until the meat is tender, about 2 hours.
10. Stir in the remaining beer and the mustard, then taste and adjust the seasoning.
11. Peel, core and quarter the apples and add to the casserole and cook for 10 minutes until tender.
12. Serve with a glass of the same beer used in recipe.

WATERZOOI AUX POISSONS

(Mixed Fish In A Cream Sauce)

Serves 4

12 ozs. Carrots julienned
12 ozs. Celeriac julienned
12 ozs. Leeks julienned
16 ozs. Fish stock
8 ozs. Belgian Wit Beer (*Hoegaarden, Blanche de Chambly*)
8 ozs. Heavy cream
12 new potatoes
4- 3 oz. Salmon fillet pieces
4- 3 oz. Halibut fillet pieces
4- 3 oz. Red Snapper fillet pieces
2 t. tomato puree
12 mussels, well scrubbed and cleaned
12 crayfish
S & P
Chopped fresh parsley for garnish

- 1 Blanch all julienned vegetables separately in salted boiling water for 2 minutes each.
- 2 Drain and refresh under cold running water.
- 3 Put the fish stock and beer in a saucepan and boil to reduce by half.
- 4 Reduce the heat to simmer, add the potatoes and cook for 10-15 minutes, until nearly tender.
- 5 Add the fish and simmer for a further 5 minutes.
- 6 Add the the tomato puree and mussels and boil for 2 minutes.
- 7 Add the crayfish and vegetables and cook for 2-3 minutes.
- 8 Season with the S & P and serve in soup plates with parsley garnish.
- 9 Serve with a glass of the same beer used in the recipe.

MOULES À LA GUEUZE
(Mussels cooked in Gueuze)

Serves 4

4 ½ lbs. mussels, cleaned and scrubbed
4 T. butter
3 stalks celery, diced
6 shallots, or 2 onions, diced
12 ozs. Gueuze

1. Melt butter in a large flame-proof casserole and soften the celery and shallots over gentle heat for about 5 minutes.
2. add the beer and bring to a boil, then immediately add the mussels and cover the casserole.
3. cook for 5-7 minutes, stirring or shaking the pan a few times, until most of the mussels open.
4. discard any that remain closed and serve at once, with plenty of bread to mop up the juices. A large plate of french fries (frites) is a traditional accompaniment.
5. Serve with a glass of the same beer used in recipe.

MOULES À LA BIERÈ ET AUX LARDONS
(Mussels With Beer and Bacon)

Serves 2

2 ¼ lbs. mussels, cleaned and scrubbed
½ stalk celery, chopped
1 small onion, chopped
2 ozs. Smoked bacon, cut into large dice
4 ozs. Belgian blond-colored ale (Leffe Blonde, Piraat, Hoegaarden)
bouquet garni
beurre manié (2 t. softened butter mashed with 2 t. flour until smooth
S & P

1. put the mussels in a flame-proof casserole with the onion, celery and 1 cup water.
2. over high heat, bring to boil and cook until mussels have opened, stirring frequently.
3. strain cooking liquid through fine sieve into bowl, leaving behind any solids discarding any unopened mussels.
4. return the cooked mussels to the casserole.
5. to make the sauce, fry bacon over a very low heat until lightly browned.
6. drain off any excess fat, add the beer, bouquet garni and 4 ozs. Pof the strained mussel cooking liquid.
7. bring to boil and whisk in the beurre manié to thicken the sauce slightly.
8. season to taste, pour over the mussels, bring back to a boil and serve.
9. Serve with a glass of the same beer used in the recipe.

Variation of above:

Mussels With Trappist Ale

Omit the bacon and replace the blond ale with any Trappist ale (*Chimay*)

ORVAL CRÈME BRÛLÉE

Serves 4

- 1 Bottle Orval (11.2 ozs.)
- 1 Cup whole milk
- 3 Large egg yolks
- ¼ Cup granulated sugar
- 1 T. granulated sugar
- 2 T. cornstarch

1. Heat milk and beer in separate pots.
2. beat yolks with ¼ cup sugar until they are a creamy color.
3. add the cornstarch and continue whisking until the mixture is fully blended.
4. add the hot milk a little at a time and then the beer. Continue to stir.
5. Pour into a pan and heat.
6. remove from the heat just after it begins to boil.
7. pour into four oven-proof shallow ramekins or one large shallow casserole.
8. put casserole(s) into rimmed cookie sheet and add ½ inch boiling water (water bath) into cookie sheet to surround casserole(s).
9. bake at 300 degrees for 50 – 60 minutes until custard is firm.
10. remove from oven, leaving it in water bath until cooled to room temperature.
11. Chill for at least two hours or preferably overnight.
12. Sprinkle ¼ T. sugar evenly over each ramekin and burn with blow torch or place under broiler monitoring carefully.
13. Serve immediately.

Belgian Beer & Food Pairing Suggestions

| <u>TYPE OF BEER</u> | <u>BRAND</u> | <u>COLOR</u> | <u>COOKING</u> |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <u>USES</u> | <u>FOOD PAIRING</u> | | |
| Pilsner Batter Shellfish | Stella Artois | Pale Yellow | Mussels, Fry |
| Wit Beer Sauce | Hoegaarden Seafood | White/Cloudy | Fish |
| Gueuze / Lambic Mussels | Cantillon Soft Cheese | Champagne Gold | Stews, |
| Fruit Beer / Lambic Dessert | Lindemans Wild Game | Fruit color | Wild Game / |
| Pale Ale Stews | DeKonick Steaks | Copper | |
| Golden Ale Sauce | Duvel Freshwater Fish | Golden | Fish |
| Old Brown Ale Stews | Liefmans Rabbit / Chocolate | Dark Brown | Dessert / |
| Flemish Red Ale Fowl | Duchess Shrimp / Lobster | Dark Red | Wild Game / |
| Saison Meat Grilled meats | Fantome | Orange | Pork / Grilled |
| Trappist Sauces | Chimay Wild Mushrooms | Copper/Dark | Stews / |
| Abbey Ale Sauce | Lefte Seafood | Gold/Dark | Fish |

COOKING WITH BEER

- (1) **Marinating** : Use bottled marinades such as Walkerswood Jerk paste or any curry paste and add beer until the paste becomes the consistency of runny ketchup. Put meats such as pork or chicken in a ziplock with enough marinade to cover and leave from 2 hours to overnight. Variation: add plain yogurt to the paste and beer for a tenderizing effect.
- (2) **Jambalaya**: Substitute half of chicken stock with a medium body pale for a spicy addition.
- (3) **Chili**: Substitute one pint of beef stock with a full bodied porter.
- (4) **Cornbread**: Use ½ light pale beer to ½ milk for liquid portion of recipe.
- (5) **French Food**: Substitute Triple Bock for 1/3 of red wine in Coq Au Vin.
- (6) **Hash**: Use grill leftovers (meats and vegetables) with sautéed onions and potatoes. Deglaze pan with Pale or Brown ale.
- (7) **Poaching Fish**: Use a Pale or light beer with onions, carrots, garlic and spices to poach a white firm flesh fish. Bring liquid to boil with all but fish then add fish for one minute. Turn off burner, cover pan and let fish finish in this liquid. Will take roughly 10-20 minutes depending on fish.
- (8) **Soups**: Add one pint beer to very end of thick soup to add tangy flavor. Soup can be bean, cream or stock based.