

Frumenty

To make frumente. Tak clene whete & braye yt wel in a mortar tyl the holes gon of; sethe it til it breste in water. Nym it vp & lat it cole. Tak good broth & swete mylk of kyn or of almand & tempere it therwith. Nym yelkys of eyren rawe & saffroun & cast therto; salt it; lat it naught boyle after the eyren ben cast therinne. Messe it forth with venesoun or with fat motoun fresch.

(*Curye on Inglysch*, IV. 1).

Serves 6

275 g/10 oz kibbled wheat or bulgur (cracked wheat)

1.1 litres/2 pints/5 cups water

150 ml/5 fl oz/ $\frac{2}{3}$ cup meat or chicken stock or milk (see method)

Salt to taste

Optional

2 egg yolks, beaten

Pinch of dried saffron strands

Frumenty was made primarily from boiled, cracked wheat – a kind of wheat porridge. It was the standard dish eaten with venison by great lords and senior clerics. It was also a symbolic dish in winter, a sign that spring would return.

Plain frumenty is best today as a breakfast porridge.

Rather than trying to hull and pound whole wheat grain, use pre-prepared kibbled or cracked wheat. Kibbled wheat is coarser, rather like coarse oatmeal in appearance, and it makes a tastier, more nutty basic dish. When buying saffron, try to obtain strands (stamens) rather than powder – you can then be sure that you are getting the real thing. Before pounding or soaking saffron strands for use in a recipe, dry them for a few minutes in a low oven (or for a few seconds in a microwave oven): they will then give out their gorgeous regal colour more readily.

Boil the wheat in the water for 15 minutes or until it softens. Remove from the heat and leave to stand for another 15 minutes or until almost all the water is absorbed. Add the stock or milk (depending on whether you

James

will use the frumenty alone as a basic porridge or whether it will be a side dish or standard accompaniment to venison, porpoise or beef). Bring the liquid to the boil, add salt if you wish and stir over low heat for a few minutes longer. This plain frumenty (often made with barley instead of wheat) was what the Saxons usually ate.

For a richer dish, suited to the tastes of their Norman masters, stir into the prepared frumenty 2 beaten egg yolks and a pinch of dried saffron. Stir over low heat without boiling until the egg thickens slightly. It will thicken more if allowed to stand, off the heat, for 5 minutes before serving.



7 Although best today as a breakfast food, frumenty still makes a good side dish to eat with strongly flavoured meat and game dishes. Detail of 'Feasting and Warming, Zodiacal Sign of Aquarius', Workshop of the Master of James IV of Scotland, Flemish, c.1510–20. Tempera colours, gold and ink on parchment. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, MS Ludwig IX 18, f.1v.



II | Detail of 'The Catching of Quails'; *Weltchronik*, from *Lives of Job, Alexander, Ezechias, Eraclius and Nero*, anonymous artist, Regensburg, Germany, c.1400–1410, with addition in 1487. Tempera colours, gold, silver paint and ink on parchment. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, MS 33, f. 80v.

Grilled quail

Quayle rosted. Take a Quayle, and sle him, And serue him as thou doest a partrich in all Degre ...

(As for partrich) roste him as thou doest a ffesaunte in the same wise ...

(As for ffesaunte rosted) ... pull him dry, kutte away his hede and the necke by the body, and the legges by the kne, and putte the kneys in at the vente, and roste him: his sauce is Sugur and mustard.

(*Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books*, Harleian MS 4016, p. 79)

Serves 6

6 prepared quail

Salt and pepper

Melted butter or other fat

Split the birds along the back and beat to flatten them. Thread a wooden kebab skewer through each bird lengthways, then secure the quail in shape by pushing another wooden skewer at right angles to the first one, through the wings and also through the legs. Season the birds well, brush them with melted butter or other fat and grill for 16–20 minutes, turning once or twice.

Golden leeks and onions

To make blaunche porre. Tak whyte lekys & perboyle hem & hewe hem smale with oynouns. Cast it in good broth & sethe it vp with smale bryddys. Coloure it with safferoun; powdur yt with powder douce.

(*Curie on Inglysch*, IV. 2)

Serves 6

1 teaspoon dried saffron strands
2 tablespoons boiling water
6 medium leeks (white part only)
3 medium onions
575 ml/1 pint/2½ cups chicken stock
⅓ teaspoon soft light brown sugar
Good pinch each of ground white pepper, cinnamon and cloves
Yellow food colouring (optional)

The summoner in Chaucer's company loved onions and leeks, so he would have enjoyed this dish, even without 'smale bryddys' (blackbirds or finches) in the pot.

First, soak the saffron strands in the boiling water until the water is deep gold. Prepare the leeks by trimming the root ends and slicing the white stems into thin rings; they should not need parboiling. Peel and chop the onions. Put all the ingredients in a large pan and cook gently, uncovered, for 6-8 minutes.

Drain off most of the stock if you want to serve the vegetables as a side dish; to make sure your dish is really golden, add a drop of food colouring. Alternatively, double the quantity of stock for the cooking – do not drain – and serve as a 'running' pottage.



15 | A stout cook in his kitchen, surrounded by cooking utensils and baskets filled with vegetables. Hans Weiditz, Strasbourg, France, 1530. Woodcut print (book illustration), 7.3 x 11.3 cm. British Museum, Gg.4H.36.

Lombard chicken pasties

Chickens be set in a pasty on their backs with the breast upward and large slices of bacon on the breast, and then covered. Item in the Lombard manner, when the chickens be plucked and prepared, take beaten eggs (to wit yolks and whites) with verjuice and spice powder and dip your chickens therein; then set them in the pasty with strips of bacon as above.

(*The Goodman of Paris*)

Serves 6

350 g/12 oz shortcrust or puff pastry

2 eggs, beaten

2 tablespoons verjuice or lemon juice (see page 23)

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground ginger

450 g/1 lb chicken or turkey breast meat, in small thin slices

3 large rashers streaky or back bacon, trimmed of fat and cut in half

No doubt the franklin (a landowner of free but not noble birth) in Chaucer's group who kept such a grandiose table would have served a splendid double-sized, two-crust pie at home; but small ones are better for eating on the road. In either case he would surely have told his cooks to bone the birds. Hunting for meat (or fish) bones under a pastry crust is frustrating.

Roll out the pastry and cut it into six large circles each 16 cm/6 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. across. 'Rest' it while making the filling. Pre-heat the oven to 220°C/425°F/Gas Mark 7.

Mix the beaten egg with the verjuice or lemon juice, pepper and ginger. Dip the slices of poultry meat in the mixture, then divide them between the pastry circles, placing them on one side of the round, but not right up to the edge. Lay a piece of bacon on each pile. Brush the edge of the pastry with any remaining egg mixture; if necessary, use a third egg. Fold the bare half of each pastry round over the meat and match the two pastry edges. Pinch the edges together, fluting them, or press with a fork. Prick the pastry in several places.

Bake the pasties on a baking sheet for 15 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 190°C/375°F/Gas Mark 5 and cook for another 20–25 minutes. Serve hot or cold.



17 | A pasty for an intimate supper. Detail of 'The Banquet of the Rich Man with Lazarus Outside Attacked by Dogs', from *Barlaam und Josaphat*, follower of Hans Schilling from the Workshop of Diebold Lauber, German, 1469. Ink, coloured washes and tempera colours on paper. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, MS Ludwig XV 9, f. 85.

Fried fig pastries

Tourteletes in Frytour. Take figus & grynde hem smal; do therin saffron & powdur fort. Close hem in foyles of dowe, & frye hem in oyle. Clarifye hony & flamme hem therwyte; ete hem hote or colde.

(Curie on Inglysch, IV. 157)

Serves 6

450 g/1 lb dried figs, soaked, drained and minced (reserve the soaking liquid)

Powder fort mixture made with ½ teaspoon each ground ginger and cloves, and a pinch of black pepper

¼ teaspoon dried saffron strands moistened with fig soaking liquid

¼ teaspoon salt

1 egg, separated, and 1 egg white

6–7 sheets filo or strudel pastry

Oil for frying

About 225 ml/8 fl oz/

1 cup warmed clear honey (optional)

Apothecaries made up and sold a number of spice mixtures ready for use. There were no set recipes for these mixtures, so each practitioner could suit his own taste; but the general style and strength of the 'mix' was reflected by its name. Powder fort almost always contained black pepper, ginger, cloves or cumin and other strong spices. Powder douce (see page 90) contained milder, sweeter spices such as cinnamon and sugar.

Figs were eaten all through Lent but particularly in the week before Easter to commemorate Christ's last ride into Jerusalem. They were a special treat for monks and nuns.

In a food processor combine the minced figs, spices and saffron, salt and egg yolk.

Beat the egg whites until liquid. Lightly brush the top sheet of pastry with egg white. Mark the short side of the pastry sheet at 7.5-cm/3-inch intervals. Then cut the sheet into strips 7.5 cm/3 inches wide. Put a dab of fig mixture on the end of one sheet and roll the strip up like a mini Swiss roll. Pinch the ends to seal in the fig mixture.

Repeat this process until you have used all the fig mixture; remember to brush every pastry sheet with egg white before cutting it into strips.

Fry the rolls, a few at a time, in deep or shallow oil as you prefer. Serve them with warmed honey spooned over if you like a very sweet sauce. (The old recipe tells you to baste the rolls with the honey, so you may be meant to finish processing the rolls like Crêpe Suzette.)



26 | Figs in pastries made for a delicious medieval snack. 'Poppy Anemones, Caterpillar, Fig and Quince', from *Mira calligraphiae monumenta*, Joris Hoefnagel, Vienna, Austria, 1591–96. Watercolours, gold and silver paint and ink on parchment. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, MS 20, f. 39.

The first part of his book is a manual of moral behaviour and deportment which repeats the precepts and the usual exemplary stories of the day; Chaucer did the same in *The Canterbury Tales*. Indeed these two books, written at the same time by two mature men of the same social class, are excellent glosses on each other. But the Goodman, instead of relying on ironical description and tales, prudish or coarse, as Chaucer did, provides his girl-wife with practical instructions. He details how to handle servants and tradesmen, including the farm labourers on his estate; and how to cope with the garden and to use its products, with lists of plants for different purposes. He also describes grand dinners and suppers (to be admired but not copied) and explains how to shop in the Paris markets for pre-prepared 'goodies' – for white breads and wafers, spice mixtures and ready-made sauces. Not content with this, he also provides a detailed and remarkably modern collection of recipes copied from other books in his library.

In these recipes he features, first, thin and thickened pottages – that is, pot-boiled foods – many of them plain vegetable dishes, others complex and colourful. But he gives due attention to fresh-water and sea fish, to butcher's meats, poultry and game, to fruit mixtures for Lent, and to flans, jellies, rissoles and pancakes. He has a section, too, on pottages and beverages for the sick, and another on preserves of nuts, vegetables and orange peel, which could be candied in honey from St John's Day (nuts) to All Saints' Day (turnips and carrots).

He can be superstitious, our Goodman, and a scrap pompous at times. But his sturdy common sense shows in his shrewd suggestions for small kitchen economies; and his directions to his wife for the care of her maids, her livestock and even wild birds are wise and humane.

Overall, he gives us the most vivid and valuable commentary on the domestic life and folk at the end of the fourteenth century which we could hope to find.

Cabbage chowder

Caboches in potage. Take caboches and quarter hem, and seeth hem in gode broth with oynouns ymynced and the whyte of lekes yslyt and ycorue smale. And do therto safroun & salt, and force it with powdour douce.

(Curie on Inglysch, IV. 6)

Serves 6

600 g/1¼ lb firm-hearted cabbage or 700 g/1½ lb open-hearted cabbage or spring greens
225 g/8 oz onions, peeled and finely chopped
225 g/8 oz white part of leeks, thinly sliced into rings
teaspoon dried saffron strands
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon each ground coriander, cinnamon and sugar
850 ml/1½ pints/3¼ cups chicken or vegetable stock

The Goodman of Paris had quite a lot to say about cabbages, from the small spring sprouts for salads to the frostbitten winter leaves; only his recommendation to boil cabbages all morning is best ignored when using modern vegetables.

This recipe will make a main-course soup for supper if you add sippets of toast and small strips of fried bacon – both well-known medieval additions.

If using a firm-hearted cabbage cut it into eight segments, and remove the centre core. If using an open-hearted cabbage or greens, cut off the stalks and cut the leaves into strips. Put into a large pan with the prepared onions and leeks. Stir the saffron, salt and spices into the stock, adjusting the quantity of salt if required, then pour the mixture over the vegetables. Cook gently, covered, for about 20 minutes or until segments of firm cabbage are tender.

Capon or chicken crowned with eggs

Capouns in cuncy. Take capouns and rost hem right hoot, that they be not half ynough, and hewe hem to gobbettes, and cast hem in a pot; do therto clene broth. Seeth hem that they be tendre. Take brede and the self broth and draw it up yfere; take strong powdour and safroun and salt and cast therto. Take ayren and seeth hem harde; take out the yolkes and hew the whyte, take the pot fro the fyre and cast the whyte therinne. Messe the dysshes therwith, and lay the yolkes aboue hool and flour it with clowes.

(Curie on Inglysch, IV. 24)

Serves 6

1 x 2.3–2.7 kg/5–6 lb capon
or large roasting chicken
chicken fat or butter for
greasing

850 ml/1½ pints/3¾ cups
chicken stock

¼ teaspoon dried saffron
strands

125 g/4 oz soft-grain white
breadcrumbs

Sea salt to taste

¼–½ teaspoon each ground
black pepper, cinnamon and
ginger

⅛ teaspoon ground cloves

6 eggs, hard-boiled

The Goodman said stoutly that stuffing and tinting chickens was too difficult for a commoner's cook. Perhaps he decided this dish was easier.

Pre-heat the oven to 220°C/425°F/Gas Mark 7. Grease the breast of the bird with fat and roast it for 15–20 minutes or until browned. Cool it slightly, then cut the flesh off the bones, removing the skin if you wish. Cut the meat into bite-sized pieces. Put them in a pan with the stock, cover the pan and cook gently for 25 minutes or until the meat is cooked. While cooking transfer 3 or 4 tablespoons of stock to a bowl and steep the saffron in it.

Strain the stock from the cooked chicken into a clean pan and add the saffron-tinted stock. Keep the meat warm in a covered dish while you make the sauce. Mix the breadcrumbs with the salt and ground spices, then stir the mixture into the stock. Simmer it

for a few minutes, stirring it occasionally to make a thickened sauce. Separate the egg yolks and whites without breaking the yolks. Chop the whites finely. Mix the chicken meat into the hot sauce and turn it on to a warmed serving platter. Edge the dish with chopped egg white and crown it with the whole golden yolks.



29 | Collecting the eggs to crown the dish. Albrecht Dürer, German, 1497. Print (engraving), 10.7 x 7.7 cm. British Museum, 1895,0915.352.



32 | 'Mushrooms of one night are the best'. 'Centipede, Wood Cranesbill and Mushroom'; from *Mira calligraphiae monumenta*, Joris Hoefnagel, Vienna, Austria, 1591–96. Watercolours, gold and silver paint and ink on parchment. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, MS 20, f. 44.

Mushroom pasties

Mushrooms of one night are the best, if they are small, red inside, and closed at the top: and they should be peeled and then washed in hot water and parboiled, and if you wish to put them in a pasty add oil, cheese and spice powder.

(*The Goodman of Paris*, trans. E. Power)

Serves 6

450 g/1 lb home-made or bought shortcrust pastry, thawed if frozen

450 g/1 lb button mushrooms

Salt

2 tablespoons olive oil

50 g/2 oz Cheddar cheese, grated

½ teaspoon salt

⅓ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

¼ teaspoon dry mustard powder

1 egg, beaten

Use two-thirds of the pastry to line small, deep pans. Chill while making the filling. Pre-heat the oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6.

Trim off the bottoms of the mushroom stems; then dip the mushrooms in boiling salted water, holding them in a sieve. Drain them, pat dry, then chop or slice them. Put them in a bowl and mix them with the oil, cheese and seasonings. Fill the mixture into the pastry cases. Roll out the remaining pastry and use it to make lids for the pasties. Seal the lids with beaten egg. Decorate the tops with pastry trimmings and brush with the remaining egg. Make a small cross-cut in the centre of each lid.

Bake the little pies in the oven for 15–18 minutes. Serve warm.

At home, no doubt, the Goodman, who kept a well-furnished table, would serve a large double-crust pasty or plate pie – but on his journeys to and from the farm, small ones probably seemed more suitable. Make a 23-cm/9-inch plate pie if you prefer.

Green pea pottage

Perrey of pesoun. Take pesoun and seeth hem fast, and couere hem, til thei berst; thenne take hem vp and cole hem thurgh a cloth. Take oynouns and mynce hem, and seeth hem in the same sewe, and oile therwith; cast therto sugur, salt, and safroun, and seeth hem wel thereafter, and serue hem forth.

(Curie on Inglysch, IV. 71)

Serves 6

1.1 litres/2 pints/5 cups water
700 g/1½ lb garden peas,
shelled

350 g/12 oz onions, peeled
and finely chopped

1½ tablespoons oil

¼ teaspoon pulverized dried
saffron strands, steeped
in 4 tablespoons boiling
water (optional)

1–1½ teaspoons soft light
brown sugar

1 teaspoon sea salt or to
taste

This vegetable purée was probably most often served in Lent when the last dried white peas of the winter store were being used. This is a fair guess because onions were used to flavour and saffron to colour the dish. However, it could also be made in summer, using fresh green peas, although more floury than ours. (Using modern green peas, the saffron can be omitted.)

Bring the water to the boil and tip in the peas. Add the chopped onions and the soaked saffron if used. Cook gently until the peas are quite soft. Sieve both the liquid and solids into a clean pan, or purée them together in batches in an electric blender. Return the purée to the pan, and simmer for 6–7 minutes or until the soup is the consistency you want; season before serving. Remember that, in the Middle Ages, the thicker a purée was, the better its quality was thought to be.



36 | Pottage is served. Detail of 'The Romans Feast in an Encampment While the Goths Starve', from *Des cas des nobles hommes et femmes*, anonymous artist, Paris, France, c.1413–15. Tempera colours, gold leaf, gold paint and ink on parchment. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, MS 63, f. 268.



37 | A trip to the market: two villagers, one holding cheese, the other holding eggs. Hans Weiditz, Bavaria, Germany, 1521. Woodcut print, 28.5 x 21.9 cm. British Museum, 1845.0809.1693.

Lasagne layered with cheese

Losyns. Take good broth and do in an erthen pot. Take flour of paynedemayn and make therof past with water, and make therof thynne foyles as paper with a roller; drye it harde and seeth it in broth. Take chese ruayn grated and lay it in disshes with powdour douce, and lay theron loseyns isode as hoole as thou myght, and above powdour and chese; and so twyse or thryse, & serue it forth.

(*Curye on Inglysch*, IV. 50)

Serves 6

9–10 sheets lasagne (broad noodles) made with white flour

1.7 litres/3 pints/7½ cups meat or chicken stock or water

Butter for greasing

Ground mace and cardamom or cinnamon and a little white pepper for spicing

About 175 g/6 oz full-fat hard cheese (such as Cheddar), grated

This would have been thought (by some) an ideal dish as a last course, to 'seal in' the alcohol so often taken in too freely by the young. You can, if you wish, prepare your own lasagne as the medieval cooks did. But commercially produced dried pasta makes an equally simple and comforting dish for meatless meals.

Choose a square or oblong baking dish which will hold the pasta in three layers. If you pile it higher in a smaller dish, it may be difficult to slice and serve six helpings.

Bring the stock or water to the boil in a fairly big pan and boil the lasagne in three or four batches until all the sheets are cooked. As each batch is done, remove the sheets with tongs or a pair of forks to a warmed, damp tea towel on a flat worktop and lay them flat side by side.

Grease the inside of your chosen dish with butter. Sprinkle the bottom lightly with spices and a quarter of the cheese. Cover with a layer of pasta, trimmed to fit the dish if required. Repeat the layers of spice, cheese and pasta twice, and end with a last layer of spice and cheese. Re-heat until the cheese is melted.

Pork rolls

Tartlettes. Take pork ysode and grynde it small with safronn, medle it with ayren and raisons of coraunce, and powdor fort, and salt; and make a /bile of dowhg and close the fars thereinne. Cast the tartlettes in a pan with faire water boillyng and salt, take of the clene flesh without ayren, and boile it in gode broth. Cast thereto powdor-douce and salt, and messe the tartletes in disches, and helde the sewe theronne.

(*Antiquitates Culinariae*, 50)

Serves 6 (about 24 snacks)

700 g/1½ lb lean cooked pork without skin or bone
½ teaspoon salt

40 g/1½ oz currants

Powder fort mixture made with ⅓ teaspoon ground cumin; ⅛ teaspoon each ground black pepper and ground ginger

1 egg, separated, and 1 egg white

6–8 sheets filo or strudel pastry

Sauce

575 ml/1 pint/2½ cups strong chicken stock

Powder douce mixture made with ⅛ teaspoon ground coriander; pinch each of ground cinnamon and brown sugar or to taste

Mince the pork and set 225 g/8 oz aside. Put the remaining 450 g/1 lb in a bowl and add the salt, currants and powder fort mixture. Beat the egg yolk and use it to bind the mixture.

Stack the pastry sheets in a pile, making sure that they separate easily. They are usually 45–50 cm/18–20 inches long. Beat the egg whites and use to brush the top sheet of pastry lightly. Starting from one short side, cut it into long strips 7.5 cm/3 inches wide. Place a small teaspoon of the pork mixture on the end of one strip and roll the pastry up like a Swiss roll. Press the ends to seal in the meat.

Repeat this procedure, using the other top sheet strips, then brush the next sheet and continue rolling up the mini-rolls until all the mixture is used.

Drop the rolls, a few at a time, into gently boiling salted water and cook for 5–7 minutes; then drain on kitchen paper. Alternatively, you can place the rolls side by side on a baking sheet, brush them with egg white and bake them in a pre-heated oven at 200°C/400°F/ Gas Mark 6 for 10–12 minutes; then serve

them as snacks, without sauce. Boiled rolls, which have a slightly flabby texture, need sauce; they are best served as a starter or main course.

To make the sauce, heat the stock and add the reserved meat and powder douce mixture. Simmer for several minutes to heat the meat through. Serve over the boiled rolls, re-heated if necessary.



38 | Waiting for the snacks. Detail of 'Feasting; Zodiacal Sign of Aquarius', from a book of hours, Workshop of the Bedford Master, Paris, France, c. 1440–50. Tempera colours, gold leaf, gold paint and ink on parchment. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, MS Ludwig IX 6, f. 1.

Cream custard tart

Doucetes. Take Creme a gode cupfulle, & put it on a straynour, thanne take yolkes of Eyroun, and put ther-to, & a lytel mylke; then strayne it throw a straynour in-to a bolle; then take Sugre y-now, put ther-to, or ellys hony forde faute of Sugre, than coloure it with Safroun; than take thin cofyns, & put it in the ovynne letre, & tat hem ben hardyd; than take a dyssche y-fastenyd on the pelys ende, & pore thin comade in-to the dyssche, & fro the dyssche in-to the cofyns; & whan they don a-ryse wet, teke hem out, ee serue hem forth.

Serves 6

(Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books, Harleian MS 279, p.50)

Pulverized dried saffron strands

Shortcrust pastry made with 225 g/8 oz flour, 65 g/2½ oz butter, 40 g/1½ oz lard, and cold water to mix

6 egg yolks

350 ml/12 fl oz/1½ cups double cream

125 ml/4 fl oz/½ cup milk

65 g/2½ oz white sugar

¼ teaspoon sea salt

Soak the saffron in 2 tablespoons water until the water is deep gold in colour. Use the pastry to make a case 5 cm/2 inches deep in a 20-cm/8-inch pie plate or cake tin with a loose bottom. Bake 'blind' in a pre-heated oven at 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6 for 15–20 minutes, then remove the filling of dried beans and return the case to the oven at about 160°C/325°F/Gas Mark 3 for 6–8 minutes until dried out and firm. Remember a cake tin is deeper than a pie plate so the case in it may need longer baking than usual.

Beat the egg yolks lightly in a bowl, then beat in the cream, milk, sugar, saffron water and salt. Pour the custard into the pastry case. Bake it at 160°C/325°F/Gas Mark 3 for about 45 minutes or until it is just set in the centre. Serve warm.

Make small tarts if you prefer. The full recipe quantity of pastry will make 36 tarts, using a 7.5-cm/3-inch cutter. You will need two thirds of the filling for them.



40 | A milkman carries two pails over his shoulder. Both sheep's and goat's milk were used throughout medieval times. Print (engraving), Giovanni Antonio da Brescia, Italian, provenance unknown, 1510–20, 18.5 x 12.3 cm. British Museum, 1845,0825.719.

Roast pheasant

Fesaunt rost. Lete a fesaunt blode in the mouth, and lete hym blede to deth; & pulle hym, and draw hym, & kutt a-vey the necke by the body, & the legges by the kne, and perbuille hym, and larde hym, and putt the knese in the vent: and rost hym, & reise hym vpp, hys legges & hys wynges as off an henne; and no sauce butt salt.

(Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books, Douce 55.)

Serves 6

2 young pheasants
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 small shallots, peeled
2 rashers streaky bacon
A little seasoned flour for dredging
Sea salt

We are more humane than our ancestors where slaughtering pheasants is concerned, but the preparation of the birds for plain roasting is probably much the same.

Pre-heat the oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6. Put half the butter and a shallot inside each pheasant and cover the breast with a rasher of bacon. Wrap each bird in a separate piece of foil. Then put them side by side on a rack in a roasting-tin and roast in the oven for 30 minutes. Remove them from the oven, take off the foil and dredge with seasoned flour, baste and return to the oven for another 10 minutes, by which time they should be golden-brown. Serve with coarse sea salt in small ramekins or egg cups as a condiment or sauce.

42 Pheasants were kept enclosed like domestic fowls and fattened for table. Detail of 'The Last Supper', from the Prayer Book of Charles the Bold, Lieven van Lathem, Flemish, Ghent, Belgium, 1469. Tempera colours, gold leaf, gold paint, silver paint and ink on parchment. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, MS 37, f. 23v.

Flavourings for game birds

Other 'sauces' were sometimes offered with game birds. One for pheasant consisted of white sugar with mustard powder, blended with vinegar until semi-liquid. Another, for a roasted crane, was made by combining ground black pepper, ground ginger, mustard powder, salt and vinegar. A 'sauce' of minced parsley and onions with ground garlic and vinegar was suitable for pigeons.

All these and several others may have been ways of flavouring leftovers or meat cooked for expediency – for example, needing short-term preserving – because the flesh was almost always minced before the strong 'sauce' was mixed in.



Golden steamed custard

Letelorye. Take ayren and wryng hem thurgh a straynour, and do therto cowe mylke, with butter and safroun and salt. Seeth it wel; leshe it, and loke that it be stondyng, and serue it forth.

(*Curye on Inglysch*, IV. 83)

Serves 6

575 ml/1 pint/2½ cups milk

Good pinch of dried
saffron strands

4 eggs

¼ teaspoon sea salt

1–2 teaspoons butter

Medieval aristocrats may have enjoyed custard with pools of melted butter on top, but modern diners usually do not. Therefore the butter suggested in the old recipe is kept to a minimum here.

Warm the milk to hand-hot and sprinkle in the saffron. Beat the eggs until liquid and frothy, adding the salt while beating. Then stir in the milk. Use the butter to grease a 1-litre/1¾-pint/4½-cup soufflé dish or similar square dish and pour in the custard. Cover the dish tightly with doubled greased foil. Place it in a saucepan and pour into the pan enough scalding-hot water to come halfway up the sides of the dish. Place the pan over low heat so that the water barely bubbles; cover the pan and steam the custard for 1–1½ hours or until fairly firm in the middle. Let it cool completely, when it should be firm enough to cut in wedges or slices. It can be served with a savoury topping, such as crumbled fried cod's roe or sliced leeks, either as a starter or a light supper dish. Alternatively it makes a pleasant mild dessert when topped with a fresh fruit purée.

If you prefer, you can bake the custard. Stand the dish in a roasting-pan and add enough hot water to 'jacket' the bottom half

of the dish. Bake at 150°C/300°F/Gas Mark 2 for 45 minutes, then raise the heat to 160°C/325°F/Gas Mark 3 until the custard is set.



45 | A farmer delivers some eggs. Leonhard Beck, German, provenance unknown, c.1514–16. Woodcut print (book illustration), 22.1 x 19.8 cm. British Museum, 1837,0616.272.