

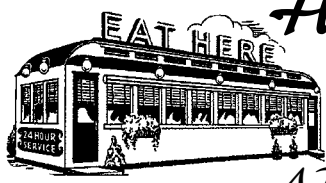


Simple Cooking

ISSUE No. 90

SCRAMBLED EGGS

FIVE DOLLARS



Hanging Out at the No-Name

A Diner Story (with Recipes)

The Story So Far: On a run-down part of Water Street sits a tiny, brightly painted, nameless diner. Alec, our narrator, who owns a used-book store in the row of Victorian commercial buildings that loom beside it, has gradually become a regular, getting to know the Professor (the burly, bearded proprietor and grill cook), Greg (the Gen-X waitron-busboy-dishwasher), and, more recently, the Professor's young daughter, Jess. In the last episode, we left the Professor mulling over pea soup recipes—the perfect task for a chilly, wet midwinter day.

“Hey, Alec, how did the exam go?” The voice was Greg’s. As he spoke he deftly slid a plate heaped with the Professor’s Polish hash, topped with two fried eggs, beneath my glazed and unfocused eyes.

Exam? What exam? Reluctantly, slowly, I lifted my gaze from the plate to his inquiring face. Fortunately, the vinegary aroma of sauerkraut was already penetrating my sinuses and clearing my mind. I didn’t care what he meant. All I wanted was for him to go away so that I could eat in peace. And if this meant flat-out lying, so be it.

“Great!” I answered, in a pathetic attempt at enthusiasm. “It went great!” Turning my face back to my plate, I seized hold of a fork with one hand and, with the other, shoved my coffee cup in Greg’s general direction. “More,” I croaked. “Quickly.”

Polish hash was a recent addition to the breakfast menu, an amalgam of little cubes of smoked kielbasa and potato, fried up with some onion and sauerkraut, then topped with the customer’s choice of eggs.

The thing that lifted it out of the ordinary was the chopped kraut. This the Professor kept on hand as a hot-dog topping, and one day he pulled the wrong plastic tub out of the cool-drawer, and a new delicacy appeared on the menu. The kielbasa was meaty and chewy; the potatoes, soft and smooth; the onions, savory... and the kraut gave the taste buds a slap in the face and made them pay attention to all this goodness.

Mine, in fact, were still sighing with pleasure even after the last bite was discovering its ultimate fate deep down inside my gullet, while I sat in a comfortable haze, nursing my coffee. So when Greg returned to top it up, this time I was happy when he slipped into the seat across

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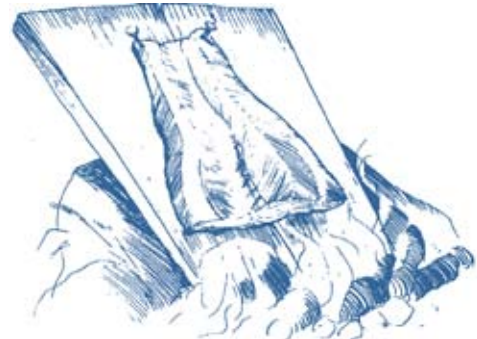
The Plank

This convenient cooking utensil did not need to be washed, or packed and carried from one place to another in a long portage, for after the meal was cooked [this same utensil] was tossed into the camp fire. But when the steak or fish was served to the campers—they thought nothing in the world ever tasted so good! —Mary D. Chambers

I plucked the volume from a bookseller’s cookbook collection because of its name, ONE-PIECE DINNERS; I bought it because of the mysterious title of the third chapter, “Chartreuses, Meat and Maigre,” and because it was priced at only two dollars and seventy-five cents. Then, when I got home, I put it on a shelf crammed with other used-book-store finds and promptly forgot about it. I might never have thought of it again, except that one day I was perusing the shelf, looking for something else, saw it, and remembered those Chartreuses. I took the book down and began leafing through its pages.

Fortunately, I opened it in the middle instead of starting at the beginning. There, the first thing you encounter is a page with two black-and-white photographs—one showing a salad of cream cheese balls the size of oranges, the other a shepherd’s pie with a “crust” of toasted marshmallows. Usually, this sort of thing is a sign to abandon ship as quickly as possible.

On the other hand, if I had seen that photo, I would have been forewarned that the Chartreuses would prove a disappointment. The word itself is a bit of genteel antipapism, taking its name from the supposed monastic practice of concealing meat inside Lenten dishes. The idea is to present your husband with a plate heaped with vegetables for dinner, then watch his dismay turn to... joy? when he discovers bits of beef cleverly tucked away inside. In truth, a Chartreuse is not all that different from a shepherd’s pie... once you replace the toasted marshmallow crust with half a peck of boiled spinach.



There's no doubt that Mary Chambers was a food writer with a mind of her own, and my encounter with *ONE-PIECE DINNERS* does make me curious about her first effort, *A BOOK OF UNUSUAL SOUPS*. "Unusual" is a notion she could pick up and carry a long way.*

The reason I tell you all this is to set the scene. Eight chapters in, Mary Chambers gobsmeaked me but good, which put a quick end to all my snickering. The chapter was entitled "The Plank Comes Into Its Own," and it has revolutionized my oven broiling. Never will I cook a porterhouse, a lamb chop, or a salmon steak the way I once did, on a broiling rack or simply set on foil in a metal pan. Instead, I will slip these things (and more) under the broiler flames on a thick wooden plank.

This idea was not new to Mary Chambers; she simply rescued it from a fad that had gone awry. As she tells it, campers brought the idea home, it caught on, everybody *had* to have a plank, and, consequently (shades of today), the planks became more elaborately carved, were edged around with silver, et cetera, until home cooks used them exclusively to bring food to the table. In their heart, they probably never liked cooking with a plank all that much anyway, because planks catch on fire.

Chambers is very forthright about this. She tells her readers to go back to the cheap, undecorated slabs of maple or oak, and let them burn.

Do not be disturbed if the plank should burn at the edges and there should be a slight smoke in the oven. This will only add to the wild and woody flavor, and should bring the "feel" of the camp into the dining room. But you do not want excess of smoke, only enough to give the wild, gypsy tang to the dinner.

If only it were that simple. But before I get to the particulars, let me explain why this is such a truly splendid way to broil meat. Speaking generally, home oven broiling has two major drawbacks. (1) It creates a lot of smoke, splatter, and mess, and (2) it is almost impossible to successfully broil all but the thickest (by which I mean at least two inches or more) steak.

This is because the meat, even though the flames are above it, is being cooked on *both* sides. If you like your steak well-done, that's no problem. But if, like me, you want a dark, flavorful char on the surface and a rare or medium-rare interior, you quickly discover that you can have one or the other, but not both. Home oven broilers just aren't fierce enough to accomplish this.

Put the same steak on a wooden plank, however, and the underside simply doesn't cook. The wood insulates it from the heat. You can leave both sides under the broiler longer, without cooking out all the juices and igniting the rendered fat. This means that the steak will be juicier when done, and while it broils there is almost no splatter and almost no smoke. The difference really is astonishing. And what works for steak, works just as well for thick cuts of lamb, veal, and fish.

I grasped this concept immediately. What took me some time was getting hold of a plank. Chambers recommends hard wood (oak, birch, ash, and particularly sugar maple), but most wooden cutting boards these days are made by gluing together strips of wood, and I was nervous about using one for this purpose. True, solid maple cutting boards can still be found, but they cost an arm and a leg. So, instead, I decided to use the end of a thick kiln-dried pine plank, rescued from the dumpster at a construction site. After I sawed it to size, I had something

* She weighed in on other topics as well—including *A GUIDE TO LAUNDRY WORK: A MANUAL FOR HOME AND SCHOOL* (1922) and *TEENS & TWENTIES: THE ART OF CULTIVATING CHARACTER, GOOD MANNERS, AND CHEERFULNESS* (1923), a book I could have studied profitably at any age.

that was about thirteen inches long, nine inches wide, and one-and-a-half inches deep.

Raw, untreated pine boards ooze sap when heated, which would give an off flavor to the meat. But because of its time in the kiln, this plank was smooth and dry, and had a faint, clean, sweet smell. I rubbed a porterhouse on both sides with olive oil in which crushed garlic had been mixed, then sprinkled over coarse salt. I laid the meat on the plank and slid it under the broiler.

Almost immediately it burst into flames, and clouds of smoke began pouring out of the oven. After a few seconds of paralyzing panic, I pulled out the oven rack, whisked the steak from the plank, and smothered the flames with the bottom of a skillet. Then I turned on the exhaust fan to full vent, and fainted dead away.

Just joking about that last. But *now* I understood why the plank had so quickly evolved from a broiling implement to a serving platter. Still, eighty-odd years later, I had something on hand Mary Chambers didn't and which immediately solved the problem: plain aluminum foil. Once the woodsmoke had been pumped out of the kitchen and the embers on the board had stopped glowing, I turned it over (charred side down) and wrapped it in foil. I reasoned that, pressed tightly against the cool wood, the foil's extreme thinness would keep it from conducting any significant amount of broiler heat under the meat.

Then I repeated the process above, and this time everything worked perfectly. I was amazed, when I turned the steak over, how barely cooked it was underneath and how little of the meat juices had leaked out. When the surface on both sides was dappled with caramel-colored searing, the interior was medium rare—and this steak was barely an inch thick! It was delicious, the best steak I'd ever cooked in or on my stove. (Lest I raise your expectations too high, I should add that a steak grilled outside over embers of natural charcoal is still superior.)

Furthermore, there was hardly any mess. The first time, of course, I had to scrub out all the smoke smudge, but since then cleanup has been negligible, especially once I devised a way for the rendered fat to drain under the foil (see below). The meat juices remain under the meat and can be scraped directly onto the steak once it's done.

Plank Broiling Basics

THE PLANK ITSELF. The best place to pick up plank ends is from the dumpster at a construction site, where they'll be free, or at a lumber yard, where the price should be nominal. Be sure to explain that you're looking for kiln-dried pine. If necessary, trim the wood to size with a saw. Chambers suggests chiseling out a shallow concavity in the board where the meat juices can collect—a nice idea if you are up to that sort of woodworking.

PREPARING IT FOR THE BROILER. Wrap the plank in aluminum foil. Put the piece of meat to be broiled on the foil and trace around it with the point of a knife. Remove the meat and discard the cutout. Now turn up the very edge of the foil to make a tiny lip that will surround the meat. This will allow any fat rendered while cooking to flow under the foil, thus preventing flare-ups. Set the plank into a broiler pan or place it on a cookie sheet, to catch any spillage. Put the meat back on the plank, fitting it into the space you've cut for it.

THE BROILING ITSELF. Since broiling units differ, as do tastes in doneness, I can't give exact cooking instructions. For best results the meat should be at least one inch thick. If it is thinner than that, better results can be had if the meat goes straight from the refrigerator to the broiler. This also applies if you like your steak rare. Otherwise, have the meat at room temperature. There are various tricks for

judging the doneness of a steak, but when all else fails, just cut into it and look. For medium-rare, a simple rule of thumb for an inch thick steak is to broil it five minutes on each side.

Readers might well wonder whether, had I used a hardwood plank, I would have had the same problems. As someone with a decade of experience dealing with a wood-burning stove, I don't think there would be any difference. Seasoned wood of any sort ignites quickly. However, the question does raise an interesting point. At the campsite, the plank would be freshly cut and the wood green. Not only would it be much less likely to burn, but the heat would vaporize its sap, giving the meat that special flavor all its own campers so fondly remembered.

Quite possibly, too, the planks that Mary Chambers had cut for her were also green enough to char rather than burn, and to season her cooking the same way. In what I offer here there is no magic, merely technique; no wild gypsy tang, just a near perfect oven-broiled steak.

The first time I tried planked fish was out of dire necessity, when I camped out overnight involuntarily due to engine failure. I ate, expecting sustenance only—most especially because I had no salt. But, lo and behold, I not only staved off hunger but enjoyed a most delicious repast.

— Vic Dunaway, FROM HOOK TO TABLE



ONE-PIECE DINNERS offers recipes for the plank cooking of many things, including moose steaks, pan-fried oysters, bacon and eggs, and—the one thing among these that I may try—whole smelts. However, there is something outside her ken that immediately struck me as being ideal for making on a plank: the gyro sandwich.

The gyro (variously pronounced “JEER-oh,” “ZHEER-oh,” or “YEE-roh”) is a sandwich of slices cut from a compacted mass of ground meat (lamb, beef, or a mixture of the two), shaped in casual simulacrum of a leg of lamb and set revolving perpetually on a vertical rotisserie in certain Greek and Middle Eastern restaurants. The cook slices slivers of charred and crispy meat into a folded pita. These strips, if the orders are paced right, are still juicy and tender on the inside, the total effect being such as to make a meat lover dizzy with lust.

Although many have tried, few have succeeded at replicating the gyro at home (think gyro-flavored meat loaf stuck under the broiler, pulled out and its top sliced off, pushed back under the broiler again, and so on, ad infinitum). But with your plank, you can, with a small amount of effort, get very, very close to the real thing.

Planked Gyro

I suggest hand-mincing the meat both for the enhanced texture this produces and to reduce the amount of fat that is added to store-ground meat—especially to lamb.

[SERVES 2 OR 3]

- 1 pound hand-minced lamb, beef, or turkey (dark meat)
- 2 garlic cloves, finely minced • 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon Greek oregano • 1/4 teaspoon allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon crushed coriander seeds
- sprig of mint (lamb) or dill (beef or turkey), minced
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt • black pepper to taste
- Greek (preferably) extra-virgin olive oil, as needed
- 2 or 3 pita loaves, warmed but not split

- Thoroughly mix all the ingredients except the olive oil in a bowl. If using minced turkey, add 1 tablespoon of olive oil to the mixture to keep it from becoming too dry. Cover everything with plastic wrap and let it sit in the refrigerator for half an hour or so, to allow the flavors to mingle and the meat to chill.

- Cover the plank with foil, then grease it lightly with olive oil. Gently flatten the gyro mixture onto this, pressing it out with your fingers. The mixture should be about 1/3- to 1/4-inch thick. Again using your fingers, coat the meat lightly with olive oil, then put the block into the refrigerator for 10 minutes, while the oven broiler heats up. If your stove offers this choice, set the broiler to HIGH.

- Put the plank on a baking sheet and slide it under the broiler. Have the pita and the toppings (see below) waiting and ready. After about 6 minutes, the meat should be seared and crusty on top, but still moist and tender underneath. (Turkey will need slightly more time, but shouldn't be cooked dry.)

- Remove everything from the oven (so as not to risk spilling the meat juices). Cut the meat into strips and set them into the waiting warm pita, douse them with the meat juices, and garnish as is your pleasure.

The usual topping for a gyro is a handful of Greek salad (see SC•82) and a generous slathering of *tzatziki*, a dressing made of yogurt, crushed garlic, and cucumber. The version of this that I make myself is different from most others in two ways. First, I omit the raw garlic. Since there's plenty in the lamb, the taste seems redundant here.

The other difference is that I salt the cucumbers, then squeeze out as much moisture as I can. This intensifies the cucumber's flavor, gives it a pleasing texture, and prevents the *tzatziki* from getting watery.

Tzatziki (Cucumber Dressing)

[MAKES 1 1/2 CUPS]

4 Kirby (pickling) cucumbers

kosher salt as needed

1 cup plain (unflavored) whole milk yogurt (see note)

3 tablespoons chopped fresh dill (see note)

1 tablespoon minced fresh chives (optional)

ground hot red chile and black pepper to taste

- Grate the cucumber, using the large holes on a four-sided grater. Put the result into a sieve. Sprinkle with salt and let drip for half an hour. Now gently press the cucumber to squeeze out a good amount of moisture, then spread it onto a paper towel for a few minutes to dry.

- If using Greek yogurt skip this step. If not, while the cucumbers drain, turn out the yogurt onto a clean dish towel. Lift up its ends, tie them together, and hook over the kitchen faucet. Let the yogurt drip for half an hour.

- Combine the grated cucumber and strained yogurt, then stir in the remaining herbs and seasonings. Go easy with the ground chile and generous with the black pepper. Taste for salt. Store in the refrigerator for at least half an hour to let the flavors mingle; stir it up again before serving.

• **COOK'S NOTES: YOGURT.** Authentic Greek yogurt is increasingly available here. It is thicker and richer-tasting than American yogurt, and it should be your first choice. Otherwise, look for Brown Cow plain “Cream Top” yogurt. **DILL.** If you dislike it, substitute flat-leaf parsley. **MINCED GARLIC.** You want to add it? Go ahead. Greeks add it with abandon, but I'd start out easy—just a clove or two. Mince it finely and stir it in with the herbs and seasonings. ♦



Scrambled Eggs

Every time we get a new cook in the kitchen, we always ask them to make scrambled eggs. And if they can make the perfect scrambled egg, you know they know how to cook properly.
— Gordon Ramsay, celebrity chef

This is the thing about scrambled eggs: there's nothing easier to cook. I'm not talking about just eggs; I'm talking about *anything*. Hard boiling an egg is practically rocket science in comparison. And fried eggs, while they have the same advantage as scrambled eggs—you can see how things are going—have the disadvantage of requiring a certain deftness, a touch of rough-hewn technique. To make scrambled eggs, you just break the things into a pan, toss in a chunk of butter, and shove them around until they're cooked to your liking.

Cooking scrambled eggs only becomes challenging—at least enough to make Gordon Ramsay's statement worth considering—when you make them for *someone else*. Eggs are one of the everyday foods we eat that we insist come to table wrapped in appetite's best quality silk sheets, and with scrambled eggs, they also have to be tucked in just so.

Consequently when scrambled eggs are perfect, eating them can be near to sublime. The omelet is often billed as *the* egg dish to prepare for one's beloved, but, in fact, there's nothing especially intimate about an omelet. Making one turns the spotlight on you, the show-offy swain. Scrambled eggs are all about the person they've been made for. If you get them right, he or she will feel uniquely, specially understood—so much so that the first mouthful will make them swoony.

Get them wrong, and *you*, at least, will never forget your sin. The first time I made scrambled eggs, I was barely a teenager and the recipient was Nana, my maternal grandmother. This may be the first time I cooked anything in my life, and it was certainly the first time I cooked something for someone else. I wanted these scrambled eggs to be special. After mulling it over, I decided a dash of Worcestershire sauce would be just the thing.

Thrilled by my creative genius, I was almost shivering with excitement by the time I fed them to her (she was all but paralyzed by arthritis and could only move her arms a few inches). Nana's response was everything I could have hoped for. However, the lavishness of her praise turned out to be the sugar coating to a bitter pill, once I sat down to my own portion and found it less than captivating. The little bit I nibbled from the pan had been savory enough, but the pleasure soon shriveled as I downed a plateful. It was even possible—although I couldn't quite admit it at the time—that they were pretty awful.

I made them like this one other time, just for myself, years later, hoping I had been wrong. I hadn't been, but I wasn't ready to absorb the lesson that fact might have taught me. I was having people over for brunch, and I planned to serve scrambled eggs in Pepperidge Farm puff-pastry shells, a novelty at the time. I wanted the scrambled eggs to rise to this occasion.



THE RUMINATIVE COOK

Smoked salmon had not yet reached the outlying parts of New England, and so, with Worcestershire now out of the running, I had to make do with heavy cream and bits of cheese and chive. It never occurred to me that carefully prepared scrambles, plain, especially made with farm-laid eggs, would have opened my guests' eyes more than the gourmet coffee I had carefully brewed for them in my spiffy Chemex carafe.*

Ambitious scrambled eggs—these remained my trademark when I made them for other people. Strangely, though, when I make them for myself, I never take that kind of trouble. On the contrary. "My" scrambled eggs are a perfect example of how the solitary cook can create something modestly pleasurable while paring away anything requiring more than minimal attention while cooking it and minimal effort when cleaning up afterwards.

Muddled Eggs in a Wrap

Safety note: This dish came about using a nonstick skillet, which allows for a minimal amount of cooking fat, no more than can be absorbed by the eggs. The dish *can* be made using cast iron or any other sort of skillet but will require more fat to keep the eggs from sticking. This in turn makes inverting the skillet a dubious proposition: you don't want hot fat dribbling onto your arm. In such a case, *be sure to follow the alternative method* described below.

[SERVES 1]

1 teaspoon or so butter, olive oil, or savory fat

2 eggs • salt and pepper to taste

1 wheat tortilla, hand stretched by preference

optional enhancements: cheese • ham • 1 or 2 breakfast sausages or strips of bacon • avocado chunks • fried onions • scallion shreds

• Put the (preferably nonstick) skillet over low heat. If you plan to utilize any breakfast meats that will render a little fat, cook these first, then remove them from the skillet and pour off all but a teaspoon or so of the grease.

• When the fat is hot (but not sizzling), break in the eggs and muddle them so that the yolks are pretty much mixed in with the whites. Cook gently over low heat (we're not making an omelet here!) for 5 minutes or so (this is when I do my morning stretches and get the tea brewing). By then the eggs should be cooked underneath and mostly but not completely set on top. Loosen them with a spatula if they're at all stuck to the pan, so they move easily.

• Sprinkle the eggs with whatever optional enhancements you've chosen. Now, lay the wheat tortilla on top of all this. Spread out your fingers, place them on the tortilla, and invert the pan. Put the pan down on the stove again and slip the tortilla back in, this time with the eggs on top of it. (**Alternative method:** Put the tortilla on a plate. Lift up the mass of eggs with a wide spatula and gently flip it over onto the tortilla. Slip this, egg-side-up, back into the skillet.)

• Turn up the flame under the skillet to medium. Push the egg-topped tortilla around to scour the skillet clean of any slick of remaining grease, then let it cook undisturbed for another minute. Now the eggs should be completely done and the bottom of the tortilla hot and flaky. Brown scorch marks are okay, but don't let it burn.

• Slide the tortilla onto a waiting plate, roll it up, and place

* These heavy, handsome, hand-blown carafes were, in the sixties, at least, a brewing apparatus known only to the fanatical few. The coffee was delicious, but it was a devil of a task keeping it hot. I was astonished to discover that they're still being made. But their new glass-handle series—especially the pint-size one—might make me a believer all over again. [HTTP://TINYURL.COM/2MUKJD](http://tinyurl.com/2mukjd)

it seam-side-down so it doesn't immediately unroll again. Slice it into three or four pieces. Eat at once.

• **VARIATIONS.** If you're in a Tex-Mex mood, you can spoon some warm salsa over the eggs just before you roll them up. I find a handful of spring salad greens a tasty alternative, if any are on hand. I sometimes add minced fresh chives to the butter when I start cooking, so that they get mixed up into the eggs. Your options, in short, are endless.



This is the most delicate and refined preparation for eggs, regardless of the garnish that accompanies them. It would also seem to be the simplest, but like many things that are thought to be simple, it calls for extreme care to succeed: in other words, you must obtain a mass that is creamy and smooth, where the yolks and whites mingle intimately, with sufficient consistency to be taken up on the fork, but no more.

— LA BONNE CUISINE DE MADAME E. SAINT-ANGE

Muddled eggs, you might think, are barely worthy of scrambled egg status at all.* But consider: scrambled eggs are meant to be cooked the way you enjoy them, even if it's not how someone else insists they ought to be made. For this very reason, most recipes for scrambled eggs in cookbooks are rarely helpful. Usually, the author offers their own method, which, however carefully spelled out, can only take you so far.

Eggs "scramble" because egg whites solidify at a slightly lower temperature than egg yolks† (something illustrated by a properly fried egg). Consequently, when you mix the yolks and whites together, the result can yield subtle shadings of taste and texture, all the way from the molten, custardy slurry preferred by French chefs (see SC•70 for a recipe) to the tender, moist rubble of egg that most American scrambled egg lovers consider heaven.

Some of these shades can seem trivial or even nonexistent to the uninitiated; for them, scrambled eggs are made interesting by what you might mix in with them, from the aforementioned smoked salmon to... well, anything.‡ But for the purist, the eggs themselves are the only consideration. You start by snatching them from under the hen, and every subsequent decision that affects them must necessarily weigh heavily on the soul, and you must make up your mind about each of these as I did, one by one.

Some insist that adding any cream or milk is a scandal because it mutes the eggs' taste, and that a splash of water is no better because it dilutes it. Others decry beating them before they go into the pan ignorant and unspeakable. You think I jest? Call up the short video of master chef Gordon Ramsay demonstrating how he scrambles eggs on YouTube (<http://tinyurl.com/jkhon>). He breaks the eggs straight into a thick-bottomed saucepan, tosses in a chunk of butter, puts the pan on the range over high heat, then starts churning up the eggs with a spatula,

*I recently came across a recipe for something just like them in an old (1914) edition of Fannie Farmer, where they were called "country scrambled eggs." Country cooks would snort in reply, "What city folks know about country cooking could be put in a thimble, with plenty of room left for your finger. 'Camp eggs' would be more like it."

†To be exact, 144°F for whites, and 154°F for yolks. This being so, the simplest way to make "perfect" scrambled eggs is to grease the interior of a ziplock sandwich bag with a little butter, beat up two or three eggs, season with salt and pepper, and seal these in the bag. Bring a pot of water up to about 145°F (monitoring this with a thermometer), put the bag in and cook the eggs for ten minutes, flipping them over every two, watching so that the water never rises above 150°F. Slip the contents out onto a piece of buttered toast and enjoy.

‡In 10,000 SNACKS: A COOKBOOK (Farrar & Rinehart, 1937), Cora, Rose, and Bob Brown offer twenty-nine variations: à la Fanchonette, à la Havana, Creole, Caracas, bonne bouche, Arabian style, etc., etc.

while moving the pan on and off the flame to keep them from cooking too quickly. Not only does Ramsay forbid beating the eggs before they're put in the pan, he won't even allow any seasoning until they're all but set, warning that "if you put the salt in now, watch what happens: it breaks down the eggs, they start turning into something sort of very watery...."

Well, setting aside this "watery" business—it's not even wrong, it's nuts—consider the fact that when he finally *does* add salt, he also stirs in a dollop of crème fraîche, as well as some minced chives, to make the eggs "sexy." The lesson that I think we should take from this is that purism is all about how you *cook* the eggs. How you make them *desirable* is something else again, all the more so if you're preparing them—as he is—for your spouse.

My own spouse does not want crème fraîche or anything like it in her scrambled eggs. All that she asks is that they be made of the freshest possible eggs and be perfectly cooked, by which she means at some hard-to-define point between soup and curd. She adores scrambles when they're made the way she likes, while I love rising to a challenge the result of which will make her happy.

If this sounds suspiciously sentimental, consider. Recently I was invited over to breakfast by a friend, who made the two of us scrambled eggs. He followed what might be called the half-Ramsay method, cooking them quickly in a small amount of butter in a stainless steel frying pan until they were feathery dry. But they were tender and tasty, and I ate them without complaint.

Are my Matt-inspired scrambled eggs better than his? I honestly don't know. Questions like this make cooking into something it isn't, or shouldn't be—a quest for perfection instead of happiness. And, as you get along in years, you find that true happiness always contains a quotient of surprise.

This being said, let me tell you how I make scrambled eggs for Matt and myself.



The beauty of the scrambled egg is that the whites and yolks are delicately blended. The practice of beating the yolks and whites thoroughly together, as for an omelette, before scrambling the eggs, is to be condemned as against the best ethics of Creole cookery. There is no comparison in the taste of the scrambled egg cooked according to the [Creole] method and the eggs in which the yolks and whites have been previously beaten together.

— THE PICAYUNE CREOLE COOKBOOK (1901)

To look through a pile of cookbooks ranging over several countries and more than a hundred years is to learn how much can be said about scrambling eggs. Few of these cooks agreed with each other, and some of the disagreements were far from trivial. For example, Maria Parloa, in her *NEW COOKBOOK AND MARKETING GUIDE* (1880), directed that the eggs be cooked for one minute over a hot fire. At the other end of the spectrum, Rex Stout's gastronomic detective, Nero Wolfe, opined

that forty was more minutes than you could expect a housewife to spend exclusively on scrambling eggs, but... that it was impossible to do it to perfection in less with each and every particle exquisitely firm, soft, and moist.

More interesting to me—since I had never heard of such thing—were the cooks who scorned the very idea of beating the eggs. Most of these melded yolk and white in the pan while they cooked (some not even bothering to melt the butter first), but a splinter faction, including the above quoted anonymous author(s) of *THE PICAYUNE*

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

from me. I even smiled as I read the slogan imprinted across his T-shirt: HEAVILY MEDICATED FOR YOUR PROTECTION.

I began to open my mouth to speak, but Greg beat me to it. "Alec," he said, "I was only *joking*." He spoke the word slowly and clearly, as if addressing a new customer who had asked why the menu was mostly scribbled illegibly on little paper plates hung on a piece of string that stretched over the grill.

"When I came to get your order," he went on, "you looked like someone your age who unwisely had tried to pull an all-nighter, chugging down the joe while studying for..." and here he made a futile gesture with his hand that signaled, "Who the hell knows what."

"The civil service exam for mid-level second-hand booksellers," I suggested, "hoping to achieve antiquarian status, and, of course, the powers and salary raises thereof."

"Words out of my mouth," Greg agreed. "So? How far off was I?"

"Close enough." The very thought of the endless struggle of the night before made me groan. "I was getting my book collection online. Four thousand books."

"Exactly? Wow!" Greg said.

I gave him a baleful glance. "At four thousand and one, AbeBooks.com's monthly fee goes up," I explained. "Originally, I was going to do only my Civil War books—less than five hundred. But I figured it would make more sense to list as many books as I could, no matter their subject, since any sale would help offset the monthly fee."

"I thought you had your own website," Greg asked. "Didn't that work out?"

"Yes and no, like all things in this world," I answered. "It drew in business, but I kept seeing books at AbeBooks sell at prices higher than what I was charging. A lot of buyers just don't do any comparison shopping. They want, they see, they buy. And I'm missing those sales."

Greg nodded sagely. "I know just what you're talking about. I've been preparing a little marketing blitz for the No-Name Diner Great Split-Pea-Soup Face-Off."

That was a surprise. I didn't think the Professor ever spent a cent on advertising. "Newspaper ads?" I asked.

Greg shook his head. "I want local radio," he said. "Can I give you a demo?"

"Yes, of course," I replied.

Greg hunched down as if speaking into a microphone and intoned in a deep, fruity voice, "What color is *your* pea? Yellow? Green? Find out for sure this week at the No-Name Diner's Great Split-Pea-Soup Face-Off."

I looked at him in astonishment. "I take it that the Professor hasn't exactly signed off on this yet."

Greg looked at me. "No," he admitted. "I want to get it polished up first. Do you think I could use the word 'p-e-a' as a verb?"

"You mean as in 'pea-ing' contest?" I asked, following his drift. "Aren't you worried that this campaign might get both you *and* the Professor tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail?"

Greg's eyes brightened. "Wow!" he said. "That might put us on the *CBS Evening News with Katie Couric*."

"I dunno," I replied. "On the other hand, I can almost *guarantee* you Conan O'Brien."

Greg opened his mouth to reply, suddenly closed it again, and began sliding out of his seat. "Don't give me away on this," he muttered, and was already bussing the next booth when the professor arrived, bearing a slice of pie.



"What were you two talking about?" he asked, as he took my empty plate, passed it on to Greg, then set the slice of pie before me, handing me a clean fork as he did so.

The question was addressed to both of us, but I was the one who replied: "Conan O'Brien."

The Professor groaned. "No wonder you're both so wiped out this morning," he said. "I go to bed at nine."

Greg picked up the bussing tub and put it on his shoulder. "My excuse is feckless youth," he replied. "Alec, how come *you* don't go to bed at nine?" He then headed off to the kitchen, not waiting to hear my reply.

The Professor had no interest in it either, having other things on his mind. "When Claude Laflamme told me he was going to get his *gran' mère* to share her pea soup recipe," he said, picking up a conversation we had last week, "I thought he was going to fire off a letter to Quebec. Turns out she lives over in Placer's Falls, two towns away. She dropped by yesterday afternoon and we had quite a chat."

"*Vous parlez français?*" I asked.

He snorted. "Her English is better than yours, buster. She's a retired school teacher. Anyway, I served her up a slice of my pecan pie, and that got us onto the subject of a traditional French-Canadian one, *tarte au sucre*, or plain old 'sugar pie.' And that's just what the filling is made of—sugar, usually brown sugar, mixed with heavy cream. Take a taste."

If he hadn't invited me to do so I might have had to strike out on my own. An inviting scent of hot caramel had been teasing my nostrils ever since he set the slice down. The filling was warm, with a rich sugary flavor that tapped into the pure, primal sweetness from which all desserts have sprung. Its texture was soft but with a burr of sugar granules that, as soon as you noticed them, melted away in your mouth. The flaky, slightly savory crust broke the edge of the sweetness and provided a delicious contrast of textures.

"Wow!" I said at last. "That's scary stuff."

I took another forkful, slid it around in my mouth. Unexpectedly, it was summoning up a taste from my childhood. Finally I placed it: "Warm penuche fudge—in a crust."

The Professor's eyebrows went up. He stuck out a finger, scooped up a bit of the filling from my plate, and put it in his mouth. "By God, you're right!" he said. "Penuche fudge! Now that's something I haven't tasted for a long, long time."

The Professor turned to go. However, a thought came to him and he turned back. "Let's see if you can bat this one out of the park: What would you serve on that pie?"

I let another bite of pie linger in my mouth. Reluctantly swallowing it, I said, "Well, unsweetened whipped cream would be good, but the thing that calls out to me right now is a swig of black coffee."

"In a little shot glass alongside the pie?" He laughed, then patted me on the shoulder. "You just go right on watching late night TV. It's good for your brain."



CONCLUDED ON PAGE 8



TABLE TALK

Terrors of Technology. For over a decade now, printing our subscriber labels with our Macintosh computer has required increasingly complicated work-arounds, since no manufacturer offers a dot-matrix printer meant to use with one. Struggling with esoteric dongles and outdated software programs was bad enough, but when we brought the last issue to the post office, their count of issues we actually mailed revealed that random addresses were vanishing en route from computer to printer. This had to change. Fortunately, a new label printer, using heat-printing technology had come onto the market, with software designed to work with the current Apple Macintosh operating system. So, with luck, this problem should now end. Here are descriptions of the last three issues. If you failed to receive any of them, please send us a postcard or an email, and we'll send you that issue right away.

SC•87. Food Book Review Issue. Reviews and recipe samplings from *THE COOK'S CANON*, *THE BREATH OF A WOK*, *A TASTE OF CUBA*, and other new cookbooks.

SC•88. Economy Gastronomy. Shrimp ceviche, zucchini stuffed with savory rice, etc., plus a new No-Name episode, with a recipe for Hen-House Hash.

SC•89. Simple Cooking Then and Now. Our 25th Anniversary issue: a look back at what we've learned (and failed to learn) about "simple cooking" over that time.

Needless to say, we're very sorry this has happened. Recently, **Simple Cooking** has not been coming out as frequently as we want it to (see below), and to miss an issue is to make the time between them seem infinite.

Not Fade Away. Where is **Simple Cooking**? The dearth of issues recently is partly explained by the huge amount of work and time required to put together and then respond to editing queries about our upcoming book, *MOUTH WIDE OPEN* (due this November from North Point Press). However, it's also the case that for the last few years I've been writing less. This isn't because of a lack of ideas but because my mental stamina isn't what it was. The quality, I think, is much the same; it just takes me longer, sometimes *much* longer, to attain it. I'm working on strategies to get the most I can out of my writing time, so that the delays won't be so long. Meanwhile, remember that your subscription is actually based on a set number of issues, and not on how many you get in any particular year.

How to Fry an Egg (continued). As I detailed in "Go Fry An Egg" (**SC•83**), the trick to master in egg frying is to get the egg white cooked while keeping the yolk runny. An excellent way to do this—which I failed to mention, because I didn't know about it—is to fold the individual egg over on itself once the white has set enough to allow this, forming a pocket, or purse, with the yolk inside. The runny whites are thus sandwiched in-between and firm up almost instantly. It does require a bit of deftness, but I managed it on my first try, and, in terms of simplicity, it can't be beat. Furthermore, if you like, you can flip the purse over and get both sides nice and crispy. This method is Chinese, and the dish there is called "coin purse eggs," the yolk being the gold coin. It is dressed with a dribble of oyster sauce or a simple concoction made with (for two eggs) a tablespoon of light soy sauce mixed with half a tablespoon each of sugar and rice vinegar. For Westerners, obviously, this is quite optional.

Jar Master. A year or so ago, Matt and I encountered some Trader Joe jars that simply refused to open. They defeated every trick we knew (heating the lid, tapping around the edges, gripping it with a rubber mat). In desperation, I bought an oil-filter wrench from an auto supply store. This did work, but it gouged my flesh every time I used it. Then I discovered the Lee Valley Jar Opener, which is simple in concept, easy to use, and has defeated every stubborn lid that's come our way. It works like a crow-bar. You hook one end under the lid and press gently down, breaking the vacuum seal. Presto!—the lid easily unscrews. One end of the opener is for thin lids, the other handles thicker ones. It's made of nickel-plated steel and costs \$7.50. They offer other nifty gadgets for cooks, so do browse their collection, but go there for this. Lee Valley Tools Ltd., P.O. Box 1780, Ogdensburg NY 13669-6780 • (800) 267-8735 (7AM to 7PM) • WWW.LEEVALLEY.COM.

Department of No Comment. "The American schoolkids who received one billion dollars worth of nutrition education this year don't eat any better than they used to, says a review of fifty-seven such programs. In fact, kids in the programs now hate fruit and vegetables even more than they did before." — *The Week* (7/20/07). ♣ "Marijuana possession should remain a crime in Indonesia, but chefs who use it to season curries should not be arrested, said Yusuf Kalla, the country's vice-president. Cooks in Aceh province and other regions in Sumatra say they use tiny amounts of crushed marijuana leaves or seeds as a spice in certain dishes." — [Sydney] *Daily Telegraph* (6/27/07).

New at our Website: Extra Content for our Print Readers. Several years ago, we began offering an electronic subscription to **Simple Cooking** in a format that could be downloaded from the Internet. The two versions are identical except that the electronic edition contains color photographs and, occasionally, expanded content (when I've written more than I can squeeze into the print version). In our last, 25th Anniversary, issue, however, I prepared a special supplement about our kitchens over the years, which included both color photographs and explanatory text, neither of which could be included in the print version.

This seemed unfair. So, I did immediately post the supplement at our website for all to see: [HTTP://TINYURL.COM/3692MX](http://TINYURL.COM/3692MX). (Tinyurl.com is a free service that shortens URLs to make them easier to share or just copy. I use it often and recommend it highly.) Matt and I also decided that from now on we'll give print subscribers Internet access to any extra *printed* content in the electronic version. The link will appear at the bottom of this page just above the masthead. It will take you to a PDF which can be read online or downloaded to your computer.

This Issue Online. Print subscribers (i.e., you), go to [HTTP://TINYURL.COM/24VSDX](http://TINYURL.COM/24VSDX) to download a PDF containing recipes for scrambled eggs from around the world, as well as one for No-Name Polish Hash and, just for the hell of it, one for Chartreuse Maigre. And some other things.

Simple Cooking 90 © 2007 John Thorne and Matt Lewis Thorne. All rights reserved. ○ The subscription price is \$25 for five issues or \$45 for ten. ○ Unless you state otherwise, we assume letters to us are meant for publication and can be edited accordingly. ○ P.O. Box 778, Northampton MA 01061 ○ JOHNANDMATT@OUTLAWCOOK.COM. Visit our award-winning Internet site at: [HTTP://WWW.OUTLAWCOOK.COM](http://WWW.OUTLAWCOOK.COM).

CREOLE COOKBOOK, emulsified the raw eggs by working them through a sieve.

I didn't end up adopting this procedure, but I recommend that you at least try it. What it does is filter out the chalazae,* thus further, if subtly, concentrating the flavor and thickening the texture of the cooked eggs. I rejected it because it was a step beyond what we needed to get the scrambled eggs we wanted.

Then (I don't dare say "finally"), there were the many different opinions about how the eggs should be stirred. The most unusual of these, perhaps, was Lidia Bastianich's method, given in *LIDIA'S ITALY*, where, as the eggs set at the bottom of the pan, they are gently pushed to the center, letting them fold up against themselves to form a ruffle—which grows larger and larger as the next layer of ribboned egg is pushed against it. In the end, you have all ruffle, each ribbon separated from the next by a coating of soft, almost liquid egg. An interesting conceit, for sure, but not one ever to be attempted by me.

Mostly, I wasn't looking for new tricks; I needed to get rid of the ones I already had. For example, I was still habitually adding a splash of milk to the eggs. Before that I had used heavy cream. Again and again I faced the fact that this might have "improved" the scrambled eggs, but it didn't make them better, just richer and blander.

I replaced the milk with a splash of seltzer. I justified using that instead of plain tap water because of the latter's lingering whisper of the water treatment plant. But, really, this was just that "dash-of-Worcestershire" impulse ("the seltzer will make them mysteriously light and airy!")—which had proven too slippery and persistent for me to stamp out—see Tabasco sauce in recipe below. I didn't want the eggs to speak for themselves; I wanted them to be *mine*. It was only when making them for Matt that I learned that once you accomplish the first of these, the second part takes care of itself.

Scrambled Eggs

If you're having these for breakfast, turn on the oven to its lowest setting and warm two plates. Have the other person start making the toast the moment the eggs go into the pan. If the toast is ready before the eggs, it can wait in the oven on the plates. The skillet should be heavy enough not to form hot spots. If it is nonstick, everything will be easier. If it is not nonstick, double the amount of butter or olive oil. A 10-inch skillet is perfect for six eggs. If you choose to make the dish with fewer, use a smaller skillet. Otherwise, the eggs will be spread too thin to have the proper texture.

[SERVES 2 GENEROUSLY]

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter or your best olive oil
- 6 eggs, as farm-fresh as you can manage
- salt and black pepper to taste
- a dash of Tabasco sauce (optional)

- Preheat the oven to its lowest setting. When ready to start making the eggs, put in two plates and turn it off.

- * Heat the butter or olive oil in a nonstick 10-inch skillet over a relatively low flame. Break the eggs into a small bowl. Puncture the yolks with a fork, then beat the eggs with its tines for 25 strokes (for scrambled eggs that are delicately mottled yellow and white) to 50 strokes (to completely amalgamate them)—but no more. They shouldn't be frothy.

- Pour the beaten eggs into the center of the melted butter or olive oil. Let them cook undisturbed for 1 minute. Then, with a flexible spatula, begin to gently free any cooked egg

*The clear, ropy bands of tissue that suspend the yolk in the center of the white and rotate it when the egg is turned, so that the chick doesn't end up lying upside down. The longer the egg ages, the more the tissue eventually breaks down into slippery goo.

No-Name Sugar Pie

The Professor says, "A true *tarte au sucre* contains neither flour nor eggs. This means that the pie tastes of nothing but its magical distillation of sugar and cream. However, a thickener-free pie requires your complete attention to get it right (and not burn yourself in the process). So, follow the directions carefully. I also recommend using a 10-inch nonstick skillet so that the filling is shallower than it would be in a regular pie pan. This helps the pie bake better and makes for a more satisfying ratio of filling to crust. Finally, even when it has cooled, the filling will ooze a bit when you cut into it. But let the pie rest at room temperature for a day to firm up, and it will be easier to serve and, I think, even more delicious."

[MAKES 1 PIE]

1 9-inch unbaked pie crust

- 1 1/2 tablespoons butter, plus 1 teaspoon for greasing
- 2 cups heavy cream • a generous pinch of salt

- 2 cups raw sugar (crystallized sugarcane juice—see note)
- Preheat oven to 350°F. Fit the pie crust into a buttered 10-inch nonstick skillet.

- Heat 1 cup of the cream in a medium-size saucepan over low heat. Once it is hot, add the salt and the lump of butter, then, when that has melted, the raw sugar, bit by bit. Continue to cook, stirring, until the sugar has completely dissolved.

- Turn up the flame under the pot to medium-high and let the mixture heat to 212°F, periodically running a flexible spatula along the bottom and around the sides, to insure that there are no burnt spots. The mixture has reached the right temperature when it is bubbling around the edges and the top is slightly aquiver. At this point, immediately move the pan off the heat *before* the entire surface starts to bubble. Otherwise, it will boil over.

- Pour the pie filling into the unbaked crust and put it into the oven. Bake it for about 35 minutes, or until the edges of the crust are golden brown. The filling will still be bubbling. Let the pie cool on a rack for at least an hour before serving (see above). Meanwhile, whip the remaining cup of cream, unsweetened, and put a dollop on each slice.

☛ **COOK'S NOTE: RAW SUGAR.** Traditional recipes call for either white or brown sugar. But crystallized sugarcane juice (raw sugar) delivers a rich sugar taste without the overpowering sweetness of the one or the molasses overtones of the other. Domino organic sugar is perfect for the job. ♦

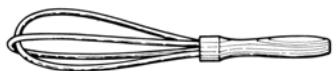
from the sides and bottom of the skillet. At first, this will happen slowly, but then the pace will pick up. At this point, the stirring should be constant. Be careful not to let the eggs clump together. If they do, break the lump apart.

- After 3 or so minutes, the eggs will be more set than liquid, but the set part should be made up of loose pieces that can be easily stirred. Turn off the heat under the pan. If the toast isn't ready, hurl a few imprecations at the guilty party. Keep stirring, because the eggs are still cooking. To have them the way we like them, serve them before the mass is set enough to be lifted with a spatula, but when it is cooked enough not to drip through a slotted spoon.

☛ **VARIATIONS.** As I wrote in the last issue, Matt and I often have these scrambled eggs, for dinner, served over a medley of sautéed vegetables and rice. There will be more about these in the next "random receipt" issue.

How I love these scrambled eggs! And how unlikely it is that I ever would have made them just for myself. I have many venial sins as a cook, but sloth is often foremost when I'm alone. Give me an appreciative audience, though, especially of one, and I'm transformed. Scrambled eggs might seem a rather humble offering, unless you—the eater—also take pleasure in what they bring out in the cook. ♦

Scrambled Eggs, A Miscellany



Scrambled Eggs ~ Oeufs Brouillés

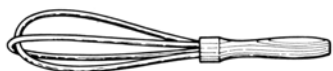
From The Picayune Creole Cook Book (1901)

[SERVES 2 OR 3]

6 fresh eggs
a tablespoonful of butter
salt and pepper to taste

• Break the eggs into a saucer, one by one, and then transfer to a bowl. Season well with salt and pepper. Have the frying pan very hot. Put into it the butter, and add immediately the eggs, and keep stirring around and around and across for about three or four minutes, judging by the consistency of the eggs, which must be like a thick mush as you take it from the fire. Keep stirring a few seconds longer after you have taken the pan off the fire, and put the eggs into a hot dish, and garnish with parsley and serve immediately with buttered toast or broiled ham.

• The beauty of the scrambled egg is that the whites and yolks are delicately blended. The practice of beating the yolks and whites thoroughly together, as for an omelette, before scrambling the eggs, is to be condemned as against the best ethics of Creole cookery. There is no comparison in the taste of the scrambled egg cooked according to the above method and the eggs in which the yolks and whites have been previously beaten together.



Scrambled Eggs ~ Oeufs Brouillés

Adapted from ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PRACTICAL GASTRONOMY, by Ali-Bab

"Ali-Bab" was the pseudonym of Henri Babinsky, a French mining engineer and amateur cook, who first published his classic culinary work, *GASTRONOMIE PRATIQUE* in 1907; a partial English translation appeared in 1974. Here is the classic French version, voluptuously, velvety rich.

[SERVES 4]

1/2 cup (1 stick unsalted) butter
1/2 cup heavy cream
8 fresh eggs
salt and pepper to taste

• Break the eggs and strain them to remove any membrane that might spoil the looks of the final dish, but do not beat them.

• Using a deep saucepan in which the food will be two or three inches deep, butter it and put in the eggs. Cook them over a very low flame or over boiling water, stirring constantly. As soon as they begin to set, add the cream, then the remaining butter, cut up into small pieces. Add salt and pepper to taste. Complete the cooking and serve immediately, on hot plates.

☛ **VARIATION: FRANCIS PICABIA'S EGGS.** The version of this dish that the artist gave to Alice B. Toklas (who published it in her *ALICE B. TOKLAS COOKBOOK*) omits the cream and doubles the amount of butter—"not a speck less, rather more if you can bring yourself to do it." Again, the eggs are placed over low heat and stirred with a fork, the butter added in tiny bits over the span of half an hour. This produces "a suave consistency that perhaps only gourmets will appreciate."

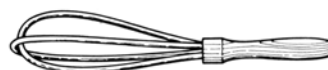
SC•90 Supplement

Scrambled Eggs

From Horace Kephart's *CAMPING AND WOODCRAFT* (1916)

I include this recipe as an excellent example of the many mansions that are contained in the words "scrambled eggs." Kephart was an experienced outdoors cook—one of his earlier books is *CAMP COOKERY* (1910)—and this method may have evolved to keep any possible mess to a minimum (no bowl, no mixing spoon, and not a lot of egg stuck to the skillet). Even so, the result sounds good to me.

• **Scrambled Eggs.**—Put into a well-greased pan as many eggs as it will hold separately, each yolk being whole. When the whites have begun to set, stir from bottom of pan until done (buttery, not leathery). Add a piece of butter, pepper, and salt.



Kippers with scrambled eggs

Adapted from Jane Grigson's *GOOD THINGS*

Smoked fish makes a terrific flavor match with scrambled eggs, although the "kippers" that Jane Grigson was thinking of were not the tins of kippered snacks to be found stacked in my cupboard. Although these, too, are made of herring and actually smoked over wood (i.e., not merely seasoned with "natural wood flavoring"). But the real thing is an actual fish, sold with head, tail, and backbone attached, and full of its own fat. Still, even with the canned herring snacks, this version turns out to be pretty delicious. (Grigson says that it was Escoffier's idea to press the tines of a fork into a garlic clove, then use it to stir the eggs. It's a nice notion: it works, and, afterwards, you still have the garlic clove to put to some other purpose.)

[SERVES 4]

1 3.24-ounce can naturally smoked kipper snacks
6 eggs
1 large garlic clove impaled on the tines of a fork
salt and black pepper to taste
6 tablespoons butter
serve with: buttered toast

• Remove the kipper snacks from the can, discarding the liquid. Crumble the fish into large flakes. Beat the eggs for a few minutes with the garlic-impaled fork. Season to taste with salt (lightly—remember that the kippers are salty) and plenty of black pepper. Melt the butter in a thick pan over a low heat, pour in the eggs through a strainer, and cook as slowly as possible, stirring from time to time. When the eggs are beginning to solidify, but are still fairly liquid, add the flaked kippered herring. Keep stirring until the eggs are set to your taste. Serve on buttered toast.



Scrambled Eggs à la Robert

Adapted from *EGGS & CHEESE*, Richard Olney (ed.)

This recipe dates back to 1755, where it appears in Menon's *LES SOUPERS DE LA COUR OU L'ART DE TRAVAILLER TOUTES SORTES D'ALIMENTS POUR SERVIR LES MEILLEURS TABLES SUIVANT LES QUATRE SAISONS*, a volume translated (and augmented) into English in 1776 as *THE PROFESSED COOK; OR, THE MODERN ART OF COOKERY, PASTRY, AND CONFECTIONARY, MADE PLAIN AND EASY*.*

* A facsimile of the entire (686-page) volume is available as a free download in various electronic formats at <http://tinyurl.com/32jgpx>.

There, the recipe consists of these terse instructions: “done with Onions fried in Butter, and served with Mustard, as a *Sauce Robert*.” *Sauce Robert* is a brown sauce enhanced with sautéed onions and mustard, and takes two hours to make from scratch. Menon (who used the single word as his name) seems to be saying that this preparation can be used as a sort of “instant” *Sauce Robert*; in *EGGS & CHEESE* (part of *The Good Cook* series), Richard Olney transformed this phrase into a recipe for scrambled eggs with just a hint of beef, to be enjoyed entirely on its own.

[SERVES 4]

4 tablespoons butter

1 medium-size onion, chopped

8 eggs, beaten

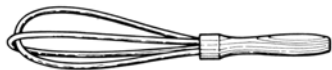
1/4 cup degreased meat juices from a roast, or 2/3 cup of low-salt beef broth reduced to 1/4 cup, then cooled

salt and black pepper to taste

1 or 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

- Melt half the butter in a skillet. When it is hot, stir in the chopped onions and, stirring, cook them until soft and translucent. Cut the remaining butter into little cubes and stir it into the eggs, along with the meat juices or beef broth and the sautéed onion, and season this with the salt and black pepper.

- Pour this mixture into a heavy saucepan and cook over very low heat, stirring gently with a flexible spatula or wooden spoon. When the eggs have almost reached the desired creamy consistency, stir in the mustard, adding it bit by bit until the flavor is to your taste. The bite of the mustard should balance but not overpower the creamy, slightly meaty taste of the eggs.



Scrambled Eggs à la Caracas

FROM THE BOSTON COOKING-SCHOOL COOK BOOK BY FANNIE FARMER (1946)

[SERVES 4]

2 ounces dried (chipped) beef

1 cup strained chopped canned tomatoes

1/4 cup grated cheese

Few drops onion juice (see note)

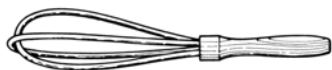
A small pinch each of cinnamon and cayenne

2 tablespoons butter

3 eggs, well beaten

Pick over beef and chop fine, add tomatoes, cheese, onion juice, cinnamon, and cayenne. Melt butter, add mixture, and when heated add eggs. Cook like plain scrambled eggs.

☛ **COOK'S NOTES: ONION JUICE.** Ever since I was a boy, a bottle of onion juice was a cupboard staple in the Yankee kitchen, and you can still buy the stuff, although I haven't tried it for decades. If you don't have any handy, you can either (1) throw caution to the wind and add a tablespoon of minced onion or (2) keep your breath and passions tamed by taking some chopped onion, putting it in a garlic press, and squeezing out a few (repeat, *few*) drops into the egg mixture.



Akooori

This Indian dish of scrambled eggs is too familiar to be limited to a single citation—you can find versions in a number of cookbooks and this recipe has borrowed from

several, but especially *THE BOMBAY PALACE COOKBOOK* by “Stendhal” (the pen name of a New York restaurant reviewer, not the author of *THE RED AND THE BLACK*.)

[SERVES 4]

6 to 8 eggs

salt and black pepper to taste

2 tablespoons butter

1 bunch (6 to 8) scallions, trimmed of ragged ends, then finely chopped

3 or more small red or green (or a mix) hot chiles, cored, seeded, and chopped

1-inch peeled ginger root, finely minced

1/4 teaspoon ground turmeric

1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

1/4 cup chopped fresh coriander leaves

1 ripe tomato, peeled and diced

serve with:

Chapatis or parathas, or warmed wheat tortillas

- Beat the eggs until they are well mixed, then season them to taste with salt and pepper.

- Melt the butter over medium heat in a skillet. Turn in the chopped scallions, chopped chiles, and minced ginger and sauté until soft. Stir in the turmeric, cumin, chopped coriander leaves, and diced tomato and cook until these are hot.

- Lower the heat under the skillet and pour in the eggs. Cook these over low heat, using a spatula to scrape them away as they set on the bottom and sides of the pan. As soon as they are the consistency that you like, serve them up.



Peking Runny Scrambled Egg

Adapted from Kenneth Lo's *CHINESE REGIONAL COOKING*

This is a fascinating recipe, if perhaps not in the sense that you're going to want to run into the kitchen to make it. It's not every day that you come across a scrambled egg recipe that calls for lard, vegetable oil, and chicken fat—almost a half cup's worth, in total. Lo pairs this recipe with one for (I kid you not) “Tri-Coloured Chicken Soufflé,” and explains why: “Diners normally ladle spoonfuls of the egg mixture into their rice and eat them together. ‘Peking Runny Scrambled Egg’ is intended for big rice-eaters, unlike the previous recipe which is for more delicate helpings.” Well, I know which of the two I am. Please pass the bowl of rice.

[SERVES 4]

6 eggs

2 tablespoons cornstarch

2 teaspoons salt

1 cup chicken broth boiled down to half that amount

4 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 tablespoons lard

2 tablespoons green peas

1 tablespoon chicken fat (substitute butter if preferred)

2 tablespoons chopped ham

To be eaten with: an abundance of cooked white rice

- Beat the eggs until well mixed. Thoroughly mix the cornstarch and salt into the half cup of chicken broth, then stir this slurry into the beaten eggs.

• Heat the oil and lard in a frying pan. Pour in the egg and broth mixture. Stir continually over medium heat for about 5 minutes, until the eggs are thick but not quite set. Add the peas and chicken fat. Stir once more and transfer the contents into a dish. Sprinkle with the chopped ham and serve. ♦

Random Receipts: Chartreuse Maigre

— From Mary D. Chambers' ONE-PIECE DINNERS (1924)

This chartreuse is one which could be legitimately used by the monks of the great abbey, or by any one else for a maigre day dinner.

Some time when you have spinach for dinner, cook a whole peck instead of the half-peck that you usually allow for four persons, and save half the quantity after cooking. Two or three days after, when the family appetites are ready for spinach again (the cooked spinach will keep for three or four days in the refrigerator), prepare the following just after breakfast.

Line each of four pretty bowls with spinach, well seasoned with extra pepper and paprika. Into each nest of spinach place one half a cupful of cold, flaked fish, and with a spoon press into this a little cup-shaped hollow. Into this nest within a nest drop one raw egg. Cover the tops of the bowls with cold mashed potato, or rice, or hominy; lay a saucer over each, and in each saucer a little slice of fruit cake, moistened with water or fruit syrup, and sprinkled liberally with grated cheese. Cover the bowls with a large dish or a cloth, and let them stand until shortly before dinner. Then place in a dishpan, pour in hot water enough to reach nearly to the top of the bowls, cover the whole, place over a quick fire, and cook for twenty or thirty minutes after the water begins to boil. Or the dinner may be cooked in a steamer. Serve piping hot, a bowl to every one. This convenient and very interesting dinner provides a hot dessert and gives the lady of the house a whole free day from breakfast to a short time before dinner.

The Literary Feast: The Original Gyro

— From Robin Howe's GREEK COOKING (1960)

This form of kebab is not made at home. Instead, a cook is hired to come and prepare these kebabs in your garden for a special occasion. The meat, always lamb, highly flavoured with garlic, herbs and spices, is cut from the rump into long strips and then wound round the spit (or skewer). This is fixed in a vertical position a few inches from a vertical charcoal fire with its opening in front instead of at the top. The spit revolves all the time the lamb is cooking—hence its name. The meat is carved off vertically in thin slices with a very sharp knife and as it is carved it drops into a small tin pan with a handle. An exact portion is carved, leaving the raw under layer of meat now exposed to the fire and it in turn is nicely grilled. Each portion of the kebab is laid on a 'bed' of finely sliced onion, chopped parsley and lightly sprinkled with red pepper. The kebab—which started in the morning the shape of an enormous carrot—the usual spit is about three feet high, the width of the meat across the top ten inches and at the base about three inches—gets smaller and smaller. In the evening, as a general rule, there is nothing left but the spit and the dying embers of the fire."



No-Name Polish Hash

[serves 2]

- 1 tablespoon butter • 1/2 onion, minced
- 1 boiled yellow potato, cut into small cubes
- 1/4 pound smoked kielbasa, cut into small cubes
- 1/4 cup sauerkraut (or to taste), moisture squeezed out before measuring
- 4 eggs • salt and black pepper to taste

• Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. When it is hot and bubbling, stir in the onion, potato, and kielbasa. Stir well so that everything is buttery, and let it cook for five minutes. Then slip a spatula under as much as you can and flip it over, repeating until everything is turned. Five minutes later, repeat this.

• Meanwhile, coarsely chop the sauerkraut. Mix this into the hash just before you flip everything over for the second time. At this point, the potatoes, onions, and kielbasa should be starting to brown. Reduce the time between turns to four minutes.

• **THE PROFESSOR SAYS:** "When the hash is getting browned to your liking, cook the eggs. Depending on your own preference, you can poach them or fry them separately. When I make the dish for myself, I make holes in the hash and break the eggs into these. When the bottoms have set, flip them over easy to let the whites finish cooking (a minute will do it), and serve everything up on warmed plates."

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