



Recípes from the Cévennes

to accompany the novel THE TAPESTRY OF LOVE by Rosy Thornton



The following recipes are based on food cooked and served by the characters in my novel 'The Tapestry of Love'. Here I have lifted the dishes from the pages of fiction and set them out in concrete form, hoping that readers might enjoy their own taste of the Cévennes mountains.

Read, cook, eat – and dream you are in France!

Potage à L'Herbe de Maggi

(Lovage Soup)

Serves 4

This thick, green soup is served to Catherine at the al fresco meal shared by the inhabitants of La Grelaudière in the Mériels' orchard to celebrate the spring transhumance. It has the distinctive, astringent taste of lovage, a herb which in French is formally called 'la livèche' but which is known to many French people as 'l'herbe de Maggi', because it is a key ingredient in bottled stocks produced by the Maggi company since before the war.

If you do not have lovage in your garden (where I promise, once introduced, it will grow like a rampant trifid), then substituting parsley will make for a pleasant (though rather different) herb soup.

1 medium onion, peeled and chopped
3 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed
2 medium potatoes, peeled and cubed
a good colander full of lovage leaves, rinsed and with any tough stalks removed
1½ pints of good chicken stock
1 oz butter
salt and freshly ground black pepper
¼ pint cream (optional)

Melt the butter in a heavy-bottomed saucepan. Add the garlic, onion and potatoes and sweat, stirring, over a low heat until soft but not browned. Add the lovage and pour over the chicken stock, seasoning to taste with salt and pepper. Cover and simmer until all the vegetables are soft, then blend in a food processor or with a hand-held blender. The soup should be smooth and quite thick, but if necessary it can be thinned a little with

more stock, or with milk. If you like, you may add cream to make the soup richer – though that is not how Madame Mériel serves it!

Salade de l'Éclaircissage

(A Salad of Thinnings)

Serves 4-6 as a starter

This salad is also served at the Mériels' feast to mark the spring transhumance. It is a traditional French country recipe, using the vegetable seedlings which are pulled up during the spring in order to thin the rows and allow space for the plants to develop. It is a good example of the reluctance to waste anything which is so typical of peasant cuisines. Any seedlings not used in a salad are fed to the goats!

If you are not a gardener, and do not have your own thinnings, the recipe may be made instead with baby vegetables – as small as you can obtain them.

Take a good handful each of carrot seedlings, turnip seedlings, beetroot seedlings and radish seedlings. Trim off the stringy root ends and any well-grown leaves, but leave on a tuft of new, young leaves. Plunge the seedlings briefly into a pan of boiling, salted water; the aim is just to blanch the vegetables, not to cook them, so less than a minute should suffice. (Other root vegetables such as salsify or parsnips may be used as alternatives. Baby leeks also work well.)

Drain well and leave to cool. Serve cold with aioli (see below).

Aioli

3 egg yolks

4-6 cloves of garlic (according to taste)

the juice of ½ lemon

salt and freshly ground black pepper

5 fl oz extra virgin olive oil

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

a few strands of saffron (optional)

Whisk together all ingredients except for the olive oil in a bowl, or else blend them in a food processor. (If whisking by hand, the garlic will need to be crushed through a garlic press beforehand.) While whisking constantly, gradually add the olive oil, at first in small drops and then a thin drizzle until it is all amalgamated and forms a thick sauce. Saffron may be added, to enhance the colour and flavour.

Devils at Horses' Heels

Serves 4 as a starter

This is a variant on the English savoury, Devils on Horseback, adapted by Catherine using the ingredients available to her in Madame Peysasse's grocery store in St Julien. The bacon is inside the dates, rather than the other way round!

12 large Mejool dates

a strip of good, dry-cured streaky bacon, cut into cubes (ready-cut lardons or cubetti de pancetta will serve instead)

Slit open each date and remove the stone. Place a cube of bacon inside each date, then lay them on a baking tray and place under the grill until the bacon is hot through and melting. Serve at once.

Pain Grillé aux Cèpes

(Mushrooms on Toast)

Serves 2

Patrick prepares this for Catherine the first time she crosses the valley to his house for dinner. It is a version of mushrooms on toast – though, as Catherine notes, the English phrase scarcely does justice to the dish.

The key thing is to use good bread, and good olive oil. Patrick will have used the pain de campagne from Monsieur Folcher's boulangerie in St Julien, made with rough, undyed white flour. Ciabatta may be the closest equivalent available in an English supermarket – or you might try a coarse white soda bread from a good baker.

4-6 chunky slices of good bread

8 oz of fresh cèpe (porcini) mushrooms

a good, fat clove of garlic

extra virgin olive oil, for drizzling

salt and freshly ground black pepper

Cut the bread into slices and lay on a baking tray. Turn the oven to 200°C, and place the baking tray in the oven immediately, as the oven heats. This will dry the bread out. Once the oven is almost to heat, remove the baking tray. Peel the clove of garlic and cut it in half. Rub the garlic all over the slices of bread, which should be dry and semi-toasted. Wash and dry the cèpes, then slice them and lay them on the slices of bread. Season with salt and pepper, drizzle liberally with olive oil, return to the hot oven and cook for ten minutes.

Best eaten with the fingers!

Potée Lozérienne
(Wild Boar Stew)

This is the main course that Patrick Castagnol cooks for Catherine the first time she dines at his house. A local variant on the potée auvergnate, the dish encapsulates perfectly the flavours of the forests of Mont Lozère.

1 saucisson dur, 8 oz approx (this is a garlicky, dry French pork sausage; chorizo or any similar dry sausage will serve as an alternative)

6 oz of dry-cured bacon, cubed

2 medium onions, peeled and sliced

1 whole head of garlic, peeled and chopped

1 lb of wild boar meat (stewing pork can be used as a substitute; chump end is good for the dish)

4 oz dried white beans (haricot or cannellini are good)

2 pints good quality chicken or pork stock

12 oz peeled chestnuts

2 medium potatoes

1 medium carrot

3-4 good handfuls of greens (Patrick uses wild greens from the woods, but you can use any good, dark greens with a little substance, such as spring greens, Swiss chard or cavolo nero)

1 sprig rosemary

1 sprig thyme

4 bay leaves

salt and freshly ground black pepper

You may be able to buy chestnuts ready-peeled and vacuum packed. If buying fresh ones, you can make them easier to peel by slitting the shells with a knife and plunging them in boiling water for a minute or so before peeling.

Place the bacon and onions in a good-sized, heavy pot or casserole dish. Cook over a medium for 10 minutes, stirring to prevent sticking. Add the garlic and wild boar or pork, cover and cook for a further 10 minutes, again ensuring that the meat does not stick.

Add the beans and chestnuts and enough of the stock to cover. Add the rosemary, thyme and bay leaves, and season with pepper. Cover the pot and bring to the boil and then place pot in the oven at 180°C for one hour. Check from time to time and add more stock or water if the beans and chestnuts seem in danger of drying out.

Peel and quarter the potatoes, and slice the carrots. Slice the saucisson. When the beans and chestnuts are soft, season with salt, and add the saucisson, carrot and potatoes, and a little more stock or water if necessary. Replace the lid and put back in the oven for a further 30 minutes. Finally, add the greens (rinsed and coarsely shredded), give the pot a stir, replace the lid and return to the oven for a final 15 minutes.

[Note: These cooking times are the fastest that it is possible to prepare the potée. However, if you have time the dish will be even better for reducing the oven temperature and cooking for a correspondingly longer period. The slower the better!]

Tourte Cévenole
(Cévenol Picnic Pie)
Serves 6-8

The tourte cévenole is designed to be carried out into the fields by herdsmen and farmers; it is solid, peasant fare, intended to stand by you through a day's work. Madame Mériel brings a tourte to share on the spring transhumance, and she and Catherine and Madame vaillant eat it, picnic-style, on the mountainside.

The pastry for the pie should really be a homemade flaky or 'rough puff' pastry. However, here I suggest cheating and using a packet of bought puff pastry.

1 packet puff pastry
1½ lbs potatoes
2 large onions
4 cloves garlic
12 oz fromage frais
½ pint full fat milk
a good handful of fresh thyme
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Line a deep pie dish (at least 2½ inches deep) with half of the puff pastry. Peel and slice very finely the potatoes and onions. Peel and crush the garlic. Rinse the thyme and strip the leaves from the stems. Place a layer of potatoes in the bottom of the pastry case, and season with salt and pepper. Add a fine layer of onion slices. Then dot the surface

generously with knobs of the fromage frais; you may wish to spread it around a little with a knife. Add a little of the garlic and sprinkle over some thyme leaves. Then repeat the process, starting with another layer of potatoes, and layer the filling up until the pastry case is full, ending with a layer of potatoes. Pour over the milk.

Roll out the other half of the puff pastry to make a lid, sealing it down carefully at the edges with a little brushed milk. Lightly brush the top of the pie with some more milk, and cut a small hole in the pastry lid to allow steam to escape. Bake at 180°C for 1-1½ hours, until the potatoes feel soft through when pierced with a knife.

Serve cold. The pie is also rather better for being kept a day or so before eating.

Spatchcocked Guinea Fowl with Rosemary

Serves 4

A simple main course, which Catherine prepares and serves to Patrick and Bryony. Being boned before cooking allows the birds to cook rapidly, without drying out.

2 guinea fowl

a good handful of rosemary sprigs

4 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil

salt and freshly ground black pepper

To spatchcock the guinea fowl, place them breast downwards on a chopping board. With poultry scissors (or, if you don't have them, good kitchen scissors) cut carefully through the flesh and bone along both sides of the backbone from tail to head and completely remove the backbone. Then turn over and press down hard to crack the breastbone and flatten out the birds. Rub the spatchcocked fowl all over with the olive oil and crushed garlic, season well, and stud liberally with rosemary sprigs, which you have previously crushed slightly with the flat of a broad knife blade to release the flavour.

Pre-heat the oven to 200°C. At the same time, pre-heat a large griddle pan on the hob. (If you don't have a griddle, a large, heavy-bottomed frying pan will do.) Remove the rosemary sprigs from the guinea fowl. Place the birds one at a time on the griddle and brown them on both sides (2 minutes per side should suffice). When browned, transfer them to a roasting tray, breast upwards. (You can tuck the rosemary sprigs back

around the birds at this point, if you wish.) Roast for 35-40 minutes (until the juices run clear when a skewer is inserted), basting once after 15 minutes.

Catherine serves her guinea fowl with baby shallots, which she roasts alongside them in the oven, and accompanied by carrots and black cévenol cabbage.

Navarin of Lamb

Serves 4

When Catherine returns from England, towards the end of the novel, she finds that Madame Bouschet has kindly left her a navarin of lamb in the larder cupboard.

2½ lbs lamb (neck fillet is best), cut into 2-3 in cubes

1½ tablespoons of plain flour

4 dessertspoons of olive oil

1 large onion, peeled and chopped

1 stick celery

1 whole head of garlic

12 fl oz white wine

one 10½ oz tin of chopped tomatoes

a handful each of fresh thyme and rosemary leave, stripped from the stalks

salt and freshly ground black pepper

Sprinkle the flour onto a plate and season with salt and pepper. Dredge the lamb cubes in the seasoned flour until completely coated. Heat three dessertspoons of the olive oil in a large, heavy-bottomed casserole over a medium heat. Add the lamb cubes and cook, stirring, until they are golden-brown all over. Remove the lamb from the pan with a slotted spoon and set it aside on a plate.

Add the remaining dessertspoon of oil to the casserole pan the lamb was cooked in and heat again over a medium heat. Cut the head of garlic in half horizontally, leaving it unpeeled. Chop the celery, and peel and chop the onion. Add the celery, onion and garlic to the casserole pan and fry for 5 minutes or so until golden-brown.

Add the wine, bring the mixture to a simmer, and cook for 6-8 minutes until the volume of liquid has reduced by about a half. Then add the tomatoes and herbs and stir well. Simmer for a further 4-5 minutes, or

until the volume of liquid has reduced by half. Add the stock and the reserved browned lamb pieces, making sure that the meat is all covered (you can add a little water here if necessary). Cover the pan and simmer gently for 1½ hours, stirring from time to time, until the sauce has thickened and the lamb is tender.

Madame Bouschet, I like to imagine, serves her navarin with creamy mashed potatoes, or perhaps with buttered noodles.

Truite Meunière

(Pan Fried Trout)

Serves 2

In chapter 19, Patrick cooks for Catherine and himself a pair of brown trout which he has caught that morning in the stream just below La Grelaudière. History does not record how he prepares them, but I have eaten them cooked in this simple way when on holiday in the Cévennes.

2 fresh whole trout, cleaned and de-scaled

4 oz plain flour, seasoned with salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 oz unsalted butter

the juice of 1 lemon

Spread the flour on a large plate and season well with salt and pepper. Heat enough butter in a heavy frying pan to coat the bottom thoroughly – about an ounce or a little more should do it. Roll the fish in the seasoned flour, shaking off any excess, and fry in the butter until it is crisp and brown. (This should take about five or six minutes per side, depending on the size of the fish.)

Remove the fish to a serving dish and cover to keep warm. Pour off the burnt butter from the pan. Add the rest of the butter to the frying pan. When it starts to froth, squeeze the lemon in, swirl it around, and pour it over the fish.

Tarte aux Mirabelles

(Mirabelle Tart)

Serves 6-8

Catherine makes this dessert for Patrick and Bryony during the latter's first visit to Les Fenils, at Thanksgiving. She uses the mirabelles (a variety of small, round yellow plum) from the tree in the terraced orchard which she inherited from Madame Sauzet. If you don't have any plum-flavoured eau de vie (Catherine has some given to her by Patrick, who distils his own!) then Kirsch would be a decent substitute.

For the pastry:

4 oz unsalted butter
2 oz plain flour
cold water to mix

For the filling:

2 lbs mirabelles
4 oz caster sugar
1 egg
3 oz plain flour (or half-and-half flour and ground almonds)
½ pint of full fat milk (or you may prefer to use single cream, for a richer filling)
1 oz unsalted butter, melted
2 tablespoons of eau de vie de prunes

Make the pastry by cutting the butter into cubes and adding to the flour in a bowl, then rubbing it in with your fingers until the texture resembles breadcrumbs. Add just sufficient cold water for the mixture to amalgamate to a firm dough. Roll the dough into a ball, wrap it in cling film and chill it in the fridge for 10 minutes.

Pre-heat the oven to 200°C. Roll out the pastry to line a 10-inch flan dish and prick the bottom several times with a fork. Blind bake the pastry case by placing it in the hot oven for 5 minutes until just firm to the touch.

Wash the mirabelles, cut them in half and remove the stones. Place them skin side down in the pastry case. Sprinkle the fruit with two tablespoons of the sugar. Beat the rest of the sugar with the egg. Stir in the flour and mix until the paste is completely smooth. Then stir in the milk or cream, melted butter, and eau de vie. Pour the batter mixture over the plums and bake at 200°C for 45 minutes. Serve either warm or cold.

Figues au Miel

(Honeyed Figs)

These Catherine also serves to Patrick and Bryony at their mock-Thanksgiving dinner. Patrick remarks upon the attachment of the English to their desserts. 'Les puddings,' he says. 'Why, indeed, should one confine oneself to just one?'

2-3 ripe black figs per person
a few tablespoons of honey
a handful of fresh thyme sprigs

Lay the figs on a serving dish, and snip off the hard stalks. Slit each fruit twice with a knife, at right angles, as if marking them with a cross. Strip the leaves from the thyme and sprinkle them into the slit figs. Drizzle liberally with honey.

This dish is best prepared (as Catherine does) several hours before you wish to eat it, to allow the flavours of honey and herb to be absorbed into the fruit. It is excellent served (again, as Catherine does) alongside a mild, creamy goat's cheese.

Raspberries in Liqueur

This minimalist but glorious dessert is served to Catherine by Patrick to follow the wild boar stew.

A handful each of fresh raspberries
raspberry liqueur

Place a handful of raspberries in a wineglass for each person. Splash generously with the raspberry liqueur.

Nothing simpler – or more delicious!

A NOTE ON MEASUREMENTS:

All my measurements in these recipes are English and imperial (pints and pounds and ounces, with the odd tablespoon thrown in) since that is the system in which I was brought up. I hope that American and European readers (and younger English ones!) will be able to find charts

to convert my quantities into the relevant number of cups, or grammes and millilitres and suchlike, without too much difficulty. Conversely, my cooking temperatures are metric (in centigrade) since I have grown used to that system with my own oven. Again, I hope American readers will be able to convert them to fahrenheit. If in doubt, guess! A woodburning range in a cévenol farmhouse kitchen isn't that accurate as to temperature anyway!

I hope you have enjoyed reading these recipes – and, I also hope, trying some of them for yourself. If it has made you hungry for a further taste of the Cévennes mountains, and you have not yet read my novel, 'The Tapestry of Love', you can order a copy of it here:

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Tapestry-Love-Rosy-Thornton/dp/0755345576/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1284117565&sr=1-1

Or visit me at my website here:

<http://www.rosythornton.com>

Thank you for reading!

Rosy

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