



Howard Hillman's Great Peasant Dishes of the world

This printout is from the peasant cuisine section of my website ▷

hillmanwonders.com

Cassoulet

France

It originated as a peasant dish. Today, it is a popular national specialty.

Pronunciation:

kahs-soo-lay'

Part 1 Recipe

■ Ingredients

Servings: 8

- **Dried white beans**
900 grams or 2 pounds
- **Duckling**
2 kilogram or 4 pound bird
- **Fresh pork shoulder**
500 grams or 1 pound
- **Chopped white onions**
25 centiliters or 1 cup
- **Minced garlic**
30 milliliters or 2 tablespoons
- **Chopped tomatoes**
25 centiliters or 1 cup
- **Dry white wine**
25 centiliters or 1 cup
- **Lemon juice**
50 milliliters or 3 tablespoons
- **Bay leaves**
2 medium size
- **Thyme**
5 milliliters or 1 teaspoon
- **Ground sage**
5 milliliters or 1 teaspoon
- **Ground cloves**
1 milliliter or 1/4 teaspoon
- **Chopped fresh parsley**
12 centiliters or 1/2 cup
- **Ground black pepper**
2 milliliters or 1/2 teaspoon

- **Unseasoned chicken stock**
5 deciliters or 2 cups
- **Pork sausage**
Firm and garlicky
500 grams or 1 pound
- **Smoked boneless ham**
5 deciliters or 2 cups
- **Fatback**
250 grams or 1/2 pound
- **Unsalted butter**
30 milliliters or 2 tablespoons
- **Bread crumbs**
Coarse and unseasoned
25 centiliters or 1 cup
- **Salt to taste**
See step 12

■ Steps

- 1** Spread the beans, one layer at a time, on a large, flat platter. Look for and remove any foreign substances, such as stones.
- 2** Place the beans in a large stainless steel, glass, or enamel bowl. Add enough cold tap water to cover them by 5 to 8 centimeters (or 2 to 3 inches). Soak overnight, changing the water at least once.
- 3** Cut up the duckling into eight pieces and the pork into 1 1/2 centimeter (or 1/2 inch) cubes. Cut up the excess fat of the duckling and pork and render it in a 7 to 8 liter (or 7 to 8 quart) casserole over moderate heat. In several batches, sauté the duckling and pork for about 5 minutes, or until each piece is lightly brown. Transfer the pieces to a warm platter.
- 4** Add the onions to the pan and reduce the heat to low to moderate. Sauté the onions for 2 minutes, stirring frequently.

- 5** Add the garlic and sauté for 1 minute.
- 6** Add the tomatoes, wine, lemon juice, bay leaves, thyme, sage, cloves, parsley, and pepper. Stir well. Gently simmer the mixture, uncovered, for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- 7** Preheat your oven to 150°C or 300°F.
- 8** Discard the bay leaves. Drain the beans and add them to the pot. Also add the duckling and pork from the platter, as well as the chicken stock.
- 9** Slice the sausage into 1/2 centimeter or 1/4 inch thick rounds. Cut the ham into 1 1/2 centimeter (or 1/2 inch) cubes and the fatback into 1 centimeter or 1/4 inch cubes. Stir these ingredients into the casserole.
- 10** Cover the casserole and bake it in the middle of the oven for 2 1/2 hours. Stir the preparation every hour.
- 11** Melt the butter in a medium-sized skillet over low to moderate heat. When the foam of the butter begins to subside, add the bread crumbs. Sauté them for 3 minutes, or until they become lightly brown.
- 12** Remove the casserole from the oven. Stir the ingredients. Taste for salt. Stir in the needed salt (the quantity you add will mainly depend upon the inherent saltiness of the sausage and ham - you'll probably need about 2 milliliters or 1/2 teaspoon). Layer the bread crumbs over the top. Return the casserole to the oven, raise the

temperature to 160°C or 325°F and bake, uncovered, for 30 minutes.

13 Remove the casserole from the oven. Push the crust down into the bean and meat mixture. Serve promptly.

Part 2

Cooking tips

■ Pointers

- **Soaking** - The beans will double in volume when soaked, so be sure to use a large enough bowl and sufficient water.
- **Water** - By changing the water in step 2, you minimize the flatulent effect of the beans.
- **Confit** - If you can make your own confit d'oie or confit de canard, by all means substitute it for the duckling in this recipe.
- **Garlic** - To help prevent it from burning and thereby becoming bitter, proceed promptly from step 5 to step 6.
- **Tomatoes** - If fresh vine-ripened tomatoes are unavailable, substitute canned imported Italian plum tomatoes.
- **Cooking pot** - The traditional one is earthenware.
- **Sausage** - Select a garlicky sausage, such as kielbasa.
- **Salt** - Should you add the salt at the beginning of the recipe, the bean skins will unnecessarily toughen.

■ Serving suggestions

- **Side dish** - A cassoulet can be a meal all by itself, but a green salad on the side does the "pride of Languedoc" justice.
- **Beverage** - Serve a medium-bodied red wine with some acidity - Languedoc, the wine of the region, complements its gastronomic compatriot admirably.

■ Variations

- **Meats** - Experiment with other meats. How about fresh lamb or mutton, fresh or smoked goose or game birds, calves' feet, veal or pork breast, pork rind, smoked pig's cheek, or ham hocks?
- **Crust** - After pushing the crust into the bean and meat mixture, return the casserole to the oven and let a new crust form. Repeat this cycle two or three times.

■ Leftovers

- **Plan ahead** - A cassoulet is a natural leftover dish, as its flavor improves each time it is stored and reheated. Therefore, make more than you plan to eat the first day.
- **Pot sizes** - As the quantity of the cassoulet dwindles, transfer it to a smaller casserole.

Part 3

Travelog

Languedoc, the home of cassoulet! In southwestern France the independent-minded peasants created a bean dish worthy of the highest epicurean honors.

Several years ago I realized a suppressed desire: I drove through the back roads of rural Languedoc in search of the perfect cassoulet.

My itinerary also took me through the crowded streets of Toulouse, Castelnaudary, and Carcassonne because these three cities are touted as having the finest urban cassoulets in Languedoc. My taste buds discovered an even better source of the citified cassoulet: Villefranche de Lauragais. It lies in the cassoulet corridor between Toulouse and Castelnaudary. Please keep it a secret.

Farmhouse cassoulets are even more exciting, perhaps because these renditions are less codified. Each cook has his own cast of ingredients - in some pots smoked pork is the star, but in others it may be goose, duck, lamb, mutton, sausages, or another meat.

Many armchair gourmets insist that if the dish is to be accorded the appellation cassoulet, it must contain confit d'oie (preserved goose). Not so. Though many cassoulets in Languedoc contained this ingredient, I came across several equally authentic and ambrosial versions prepared without it. This is fortunate for foreign cooks, because quality confit d'oie is usually hard to come by outside of France. When it is available, confit d'oie is usually canned and, as such, is apt to degrade more than improve your dish. It's also ridiculously expensive.

What's essential to a good cassoulet is slow cooking. Should the liquid boil, the beans will burst and begin to lose their skins.

TABASCO® is the official sponsor of my cuisine web pages in hillmanwonders.com
