

them moving over the heat, then quickly and lightly stir the eggs. Cook to the desired consistency (a creamy center is usually preferred).

Add the cheese and chives across the center of the omelette perpendicular to the handle of the pan. With the handle in one hand and a spatula in the other, tip the pan forward and roll about one-fourth of the omelette onto itself. Invert the pan over a plate and roll the omelette onto the plate with the folded portion underneath. Serve immediately. Serves 1.

Adapted from *Celebrating the Pleasures of Cooking*, by Chuck Williams (Time-Life Books, 1997).

Quiche Lorraine

The northeastern French province of Lorraine gave us this traditional savory tart of eggs, bacon and cheese that seemed to be on every weekend brunch table and ladies' luncheon menu by the mid-1960s. The classic filling ingredients are included here. Some versions add chopped onion or leek that has been sautéed in butter, a nod to the cooking traditions of neighboring Alsace.

To make the pastry, in a bowl, stir together the flour and salt. Add the butter and, using a pastry blender or your fingertips, work the ingredients together quickly until crumbly and the mixture resembles oatmeal. Then, while quickly stirring and tossing with a fork, add the ice water a little at a time just until the dough begins to hold together. Gather into a ball, wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Position a rack in the lower third of an oven and preheat to 425°F.

On a lightly floured work surface, using your hands, flatten the ball of dough into a disk. Dust it with flour and roll out into an 11-inch round. Fit carefully into a 9- or 10-inch tart pan or a 9-inch glass pie dish. If using a tart pan, trim the dough even with the pan rim. If using a pie dish, trim the dough to allow a 1-inch overhang, then fold under the overhang and flute the edges. Prick the dough in several places with fork tines and refrigerate for 10 minutes.

Partially bake the pastry shell until it just begins to color, 10 to 12 minutes. If the pastry puffs up during baking, prick again with a fork to release the steam. Remove from the oven and set aside. Reduce the oven temperature to 375°F.

To make the filling, in a fry pan over medium-high heat, fry the bacon until crisp and golden, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain. When the bacon is cool enough to handle, crumble into small bits. Scatter the crumbled bacon over the bottom of the pastry shell.

In a bowl, combine the cream, milk, eggs and melted butter. Using a whisk or fork, beat until well blended. Stir in the cheese and season with salt, black pepper and cayenne pepper. Pour the mixture into the prepared pastry shell and sprinkle the top lightly with nutmeg.

Bake until the custard is set and the tip of a knife inserted into the center of the custard comes out clean, 25 to 30 minutes. Remove the quiche from the oven and let stand for several minutes before serving. Serves 6 to 8.

Adapted from *Celebrating the Pleasures of Cooking*, by Chuck Williams (Time-Life Books, 1997).

February 28, 2010

Making Omelettes

An omelette is made by cooking beaten eggs until firm, then folding them around a filling. An omelette pan is key to preparing a beautiful omelette. Traditionally an 8-inch round nonstick fry pan, it is the ideal size for making individual omelettes.

Steps for Making a Perfect Omelette

1. Whisk the eggs: Break the eggs into a bowl (generally 2 or 3 for an individual-size omelette). Adding water, milk or cream to the eggs dilutes the protein, making the omelette more tender. Add a pinch of salt and freshly ground pepper. Whisk the ingredients to thoroughly combine them; you do not want to beat in air or your omelette will become very airy (considered a souffléed omelette).

2. Cook the eggs: Heat a nonstick fry pan over medium-high heat and melt the butter. When the foam begins to subside, pour the eggs into the pan. As the eggs begin to set along the edges and bottom of the pan, use a heatproof spatula to carefully push the eggs slightly toward the center. Tilt the pan as needed and work around the edges to allow the uncooked eggs to flow under the cooked portions.

3. Add the filling: When the eggs are thickened in the center and there is no more standing liquid, spoon the prepared filling, if using, over the half of the omelette farthest from you. Be sure meats and vegetables for the filling have already been thoroughly cooked, as they will only be warmed in the omelette. If using vegetables that release water, such as mushrooms and zucchini, cook them until the water has been released and evaporated; otherwise, the omelette will be runny.

4. Fold the omelette: Gently shake the pan to loosen the omelette. Using the spatula, lift up the half without the filling and turn it over the filling to make a half-circle. Let the omelette cook for about 30 seconds more, then gently slide it onto a serving plate.

Note: Chefs differ in their opinions regarding whether or not omelettes should have any golden or browned color; the French generally prefer their omelettes with no color. Another French practice is to brush the finished omelette with melted butter just before serving to create a beautiful sheen.

Ingredients for Quiche Lorraine

For the pastry:

1¼ cups all-purpose flour

½ tsp. salt

8 Tbs. (1 stick) chilled unsalted butter, cut into small cubes

1 to 2 Tbs. ice water

For the filling:

6 lean bacon slices

¾ cup heavy cream, at room temperature

¾ cup milk, at room temperature

3 eggs, at room temperature

1 Tbs. unsalted butter, melted

1 cup shredded Gruyère cheese

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Cayenne pepper, to taste

Freshly grated nutmeg, to taste

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Technique Class: Incredible Eggs

Why Eat Eggs?

One of the most healthful foods, eggs are perfectly proportioned protein powerhouses encased in a handy little package. They are also incredibly versatile, whether used in sweet or savory preparations, eaten on their own or used as the building block for countless fabulous dishes. From creamy mounds of scrambled eggs and fluffy omelettes filled with cheese to delicate quiche with flaky crusts and hearty vegetable-studded frittatas, eggs are one of the most multipurpose ingredients you can find.

On their own, eggs supply a wealthy of vitamins, minerals, protein and fat. In fact, egg whites are among the most healthful foods, being both low in fat and high in protein. And while egg yolks contain most of the fat and cholesterol in an egg, they also provide the most flavor.

The Anatomy of an Egg

There are five basic parts to every egg: shell, membrane, yolk, white and chalazae. The oval shell is one of the strongest shapes found in nature. The inner and outer membranes protect the egg from bacteria and help keep the egg moist. The yolk contains some protein, most of the vitamins and minerals and all of the fat. The white protects the yolk and contains most of the protein, which is one reason it is so good for you and why it whips up so well. The cloudy strings, called the chalazae, hold the yolk in the center of the egg white.

Buying and Storing Eggs

Size: Eggs are sized according to their weight, from small to jumbo. The most popular size is large and is the one used in most recipes.

Peewee	1¼ oz.	Large	2 oz.
Small	1½ oz.	X Large	2¼ oz.
Medium	1¾ oz.	Jumbo	2½ oz.

Freshness: Eggs are graded AA, A and B according to the quality of the shell and the thickness and clarity of the whites. Grade AA eggs have clean, unbroken shells, thick whites and round, bright yolks and are best for frying or poaching, while grade A eggs are fine for blended eggs and egg dishes. Grade B eggs are typically sold to manufacturers.

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Setting Up for Success

Before you get started frying an egg, scrambling some with grated cheese or creating a beautiful omelette, select the appropriate pan. The best pans for cooking eggs are those with a nonstick surface, such as a well-seasoned cast-iron pan or a good-quality heavy nonstick pan with even heat distribution. Use silicone tools with nonstick cookware so you don't scratch the surface.

Adapted from *Eggs*, by Jodi Liano (Weldon Owen, 2010).

Poaching Eggs

Poaching involves cooking food gently in liquid just below the boiling point. For best results, use eggs that are as fresh as possible and a poaching pan.

Steps for Poaching Eggs

- In a large wide fry pan or poaching pan, combine water, 1 to 2 tsp. salt and 1 to 2 Tbs. vinegar (the vinegar helps to set the whites). Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a bare simmer. Break an egg into a small bowl and gently slip the egg into the water. Add more eggs to the simmering water in the same manner; do not overcrowd the pan (it is best to cook 2 or 3 eggs at a time). Alternatively, lightly spray the nonstick poaching cups, crack the eggs into them and lower into the water.
- Cook until the whites are just set and the yolks look glazed but still liquid, about 3 minutes for runny yolks and 5 minutes for set yolks.
- As each egg is done, lift it from the water with a slotted spoon (if using a poaching pan, simply lift out the nonstick insert). Hold each poached egg gently on a kitchen towel to drain and trim the edges with kitchen shears.

Storage: Store eggs in a cold part of the refrigerator where the temperature is below 40°F. Do not leave eggs at room temperature; a day on the countertop ages them as much as a week in the refrigerator. Always store your eggs in the same carton that you bought them in, on a shelf in the refrigerator. The cardboard carton helps eggs retain a proper moisture balance, which adds to their shelf life. Additionally, store eggs with the broad ends up, which is how they are packed. This keeps the yolk centered.

Unbroken eggs refrigerated in their carton will keep for 5 weeks past their sell-by date. As they age, the whites will thin and become more transparent and the yolks will flatten, but the nutritional value of the eggs will not diminish. Use older eggs for baking, reserving the fresher ones for other cooking. Older egg whites are easier to whip up into voluminous meringue than absolutely fresh ones, while fresh eggs are best for emulsified sauces such as hollandaise and mayonnaise.

Recipes will sometimes call for egg whites or egg yolks only, leaving you with leftover parts of eggs. Refrigerate uncooked egg whites in a tightly lidded glass or plastic container for up to 5 days. Place uncooked egg yolks in a glass or plastic container and cover with a little water; cover tightly with a lid and refrigerate for up to 2 days. Uncooked whole eggs removed from the shell can be stored in the same way and for the same length of time as egg yolks, but without the layer of water floated on top.

Freezing Eggs: Remove whole eggs from their shells and place in a rigid container. (Never freeze eggs in the shell.) Stir lightly to break the yolks; do not stir briskly or air bubbles may be incorporated. Cover, leaving only ½ inch of headroom, and freeze for up to 9 months.

To freeze egg whites only, combine them in a rigid container, cover and freeze for up to 1 year. To freeze egg yolks only, combine them, as with whole eggs, add a pinch of salt or sugar, seal and freeze for up to 9 months.

When thawed to room temperature, frozen egg whites will whip up more easily than fresh ones. Use thawed, frozen whole eggs and egg yolks as you would fresh, for baking or omelettes.

Understanding Egg Carton Labels

Purchasing the best-quality eggs from a humane source is often confusing because of the many labels found on cartons. While colorful eggs from local farms are always a treat and probably the freshest you'll find, that's not an option for most of us. Certified organic eggs means that the hens are fed an organic vegetarian diet with no antibiotics or pesticides, per official USDA guidelines. The hens are uncaged, often with access to the outdoors. Free-range hens are uncaged and have some access to the outdoors, but there are no official USDA standards, and this label does not describe the hens' diet. Certified humane and cage-free labels mean the birds are uncaged indoors but do not often have access to the outside.

Adapted from *Eggs*, by Jodi Liano (Weldon Owen, 2010).

Classic Eggs Benedict

This well-known brunch dish never goes out of style. When tomatoes are in season, consider topping the ham with a broiled tomato slice before crowning it with the egg and the hollandaise.

Preheat a broiler.

To make the hollandaise sauce, in a small, heavy saucepan over low heat, whisk the egg yolks, lemon juice, lime juice and water constantly until the mixture begins to thicken and continue whisking for about 1 minute more, but remove the pan from the heat as soon as the mixture thickens. Transfer the mixture to a blender, add the salt, white pepper and cayenne pepper and blend until smooth. Let cool for 1 minute. With the motor running, slowly pour in the melted butter in a thin stream until incorporated. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Transfer the sauce to a saucepan and keep warm over very low heat.

Lightly spread the cut sides of each muffin or the tops of each crumpet with 1 tsp. of the butter and broil until golden, 3 to 5 minutes. Turn off the broiler, cover the muffins or crumpets with aluminum foil and keep warm in the oven.

Meanwhile, in a small sauté pan over medium-high heat, melt the remaining 1 tsp. butter. Add the ham and cook until golden, about 2 minutes per side. Keep warm.

Fill an egg-poaching pan with ½ inch water, set the pan over medium heat and bring to a simmer. Lightly coat the poaching cups with nonstick cooking spray and crack an egg into each cup. Cover and cook until the whites are firm and the yolks are glazed over but still soft, about 3 minutes, or until done to your liking. Transfer the eggs to a warmed plate and repeat with the remaining eggs.

Place 2 muffin halves or 2 crumpets on each of 4 warmed individual plates. Top each muffin half or crumpet with a slice of ham, an egg and some of the sauce. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Lifestyles Series, *Brunch Entertaining*, by Janeen Sarlin (Time-Life Books, 1999).

Chuck’s Favorite Omelette

Chuck Williams says that making an omelette seems to be a rite of passage for anyone interested in French cooking. His advice is to use a good omelette pan with shallow, sloping sides that will allow you to fold and slide out the eggs easily. His other piece of advice is to take your time. With a little practice, you’ll get the technique down for folding the omelette, and even your mistakes will taste good. You’ll also learn how you like your omelette cooked—with a solid center or a soft and creamy one.

In a bowl, combine the eggs, salt, pepper and water. Beat lightly with a fork until blended.

In an 8-inch fry pan over medium-high heat, melt the butter and swirl in the pan until it foams. When the foam subsides, add the eggs, shaking the pan to keep

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Ingredients for Classic Eggs Benedict

For the hollandaise sauce:

4 egg yolks

2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice

2 Tbs. fresh lime juice

1 Tbs. water

⅓ tsp. salt

2 pinches of freshly ground white pepper

Pinch of cayenne pepper

16 Tbs. (2 sticks) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly

4 English muffins, split, or 8 crumpets

3 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature

8 slices baked ham, each ¼ inch thick and cut to fit English muffins or crumpets

8 eggs

3 Tbs. unsalted butter

1 tsp. salt

1 tsp. white pepper

1 tsp. cayenne pepper

1 tsp. fresh lemon juice

1 tsp. fresh lime juice

1 Tbs. water

1 Tbs. salt

2 Tbs. unsalted butter

2 Tbs. freshly ground white pepper

Pinch of cayenne pepper

16 Tbs. (2 sticks) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly

4 English muffins, split, or 8 crumpets

3 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature

8 slices baked ham, each ¼ inch thick and cut to fit English muffins or crumpets

8 eggs

3 Tbs. unsalted butter