

Cooking Terms

...a la King - A dish of diced food, usually chicken or turkey, in a cream sauce containing mushrooms, pimentos, green peppers, and sometimes sherry.

Agnolotti - The name for a dish of small half moon-shaped pasta shells filled (usually) with tortellini stuffing. It is boiled and served in a broth or in a sauce.

Ambrosia - "Ambrosia" means "immortality" and was the food of the gods on Mount Olympus. Today, it refers to a dessert of chilled fruit mixed with coconut. The fruits used are normally oranges and bananas.

Au Gratin - A French phrase that refers to food that is topped with grated cheese or breadcrumbs mixed with bits of butter. This food is then broiled until brown and crisp.

Au Jus - The French phrase that refers to meat served in its own natural juices.

Blanch - To plunge food briefly into boiling water, then into cold water to stop the cooking process. This process is performed to firm the flesh, loosen skins, and to heighten and set the color and flavor of foods.

Bleach - To make white or colorless by means of chemicals or the sun's rays.

Blintz - A very thin pancake that is rolled up to encase either sweet or savory fillings. The most common fillings are cottage or ricotta cheese, fruits, and meat mixtures. Often sautéed and served with sour cream.

Buñuelo - A thin, deep-fried Mexican pastry. It is normally sprinkled with a cinnamon and sugar mixture.

Cacciatore - The Italian word for "hunter." Refers to food prepared "hunter-style." That is, with mushrooms, onions, tomatoes, various herbs, and sometimes wine. Chicken cacciatore is the most popular type of cacciatore.

Caffeine - A slightly bitter alkaloid found in coffee, tea, and many other foods and beverages. Caffeine is stimulating to the heart and nervous system. It is toxic in large doses.

Cajun - A form of cooking that is a combination of French and Southern cuisines uses a dark roux and animal (usually pork) fat. Creole cooking emphasizes the use of butter and cream. Cajun food is very spicy and makes good use of filé powder.

Caliente - This is the Spanish word for "hot," and it refers to temperature. "Picante" means "pepper hot."

Cantonese - A type of Chinese cuisine that is famous for its meat roasting and grilling,

fried rice, bird's nest soup, and shark fin soup.

Caramel - Caramel is a mixture produced when sugar has been cooked until it melts to become a thick clear liquid ranging in color from gold to brown. Caramel is used to flavor soups, stocks, desserts, and sauces.

Carbonara - An Italian term that refers to a pasta dish of spaghetti or other noodles with a sauce of cream, eggs, Parmesan cheese, and bits of bacon. Fresh green peas are sometimes used to add flavor and color.

Clingstone - A term that refers to a fruit with a pit to which the flesh clings tenaciously. The best known fruits of this type are "cling peaches" or "clingstone peaches." The term with the opposite meaning is "freestone."

Cooking Wine - Generally a wine that should not be used as a beverage. Some experts recommend only using wines that you would drink as a cooking wine.

Cordon Bleu - French for "blue ribbon." A dish in which a thin scallop (usually chicken or veal) is topped with a thin slice of prosciutto and Gruyère cheese, then with another meat scallop. This is then breaded and sautéed until brown.

Creole - A style of cooking that features a spicy sauce or dish made especially with tomatoes, peppers, onion, celery, and seasoning. Creole cuisine is often served over rice.

Crêpe - The French word for "pancake." Available in various flavors and filled with savory or dessert fillings.

Croquette - A mixture of minced meats or vegetables, a thick white sauce and seasonings that is formed into small cylinders, ovals or rounds, dipped in beaten egg and breadcrumbs, then deep-fried until crisp and brown.

Curd - When milk coagulates, it separates into two parts--the curds and the whey. The curd is the semisolid formed by this separation. Cheese is made from the curd. The whey is the watery liquid.

Dim Sum - This Chinese name, which means "heart's delight," includes a variety of snacks such as steamed dumplings, shrimp balls, pastries, and spring rolls.

Distillation - The process of separating the components in a liquid by heating it to its vapor point, then condensing the vapor into a purified and/or concentrated form.

Divinity - A fluffy, creamy candy made from sugar, corn syrup, and beaten egg whites. Nuts, chocolate, and other flavorings are often added to the mixture.

Escallope - The French term for a very thin, usually flattened slice of meat or fish. Americans call this cut a "scallop."

Fortune Cookie - This Chinese-American invention is a plain, griddle-baked wafer which is wrapped around a strip of paper and allowed to cool. The paper provides a written "fortune."

Fractioned - To separate chemically into fractions by distillation, crystallization, etc.

Freestone - A term that refers to a fruit with a pit to which the flesh does not cling. The opposite term is called "clingstone."

Freeze-Dry - To subject foods to quick-freezing followed by drying under high vacuum at low temperature. This process helps foods keep for long periods at normal room temperatures.

French Fries - Raw potatoes that have been cut into strips, soaked in water, then deep fried until golden brown.

Fruitcake - A traditional winter holiday cake of candied fruit, fruit rinds, nuts, and spice. Fruitcakes are often soaked in some sort of liquor or brandy.

Halvah - A middle East confection made from ground sesame seeds and honey. Sometimes prepared with chopped, dried fruit and pistachios.

Homogenize - To create an emulsion by reducing all the particles to the same size. In milk and salad dressings, for instance, all the fat globules are mechanically broken down until they are evenly distributed throughout the liquid.

Hydrogenate - The process of hardening an unsaturated oil into a semisolid by transforming it into a saturated fat.

Iodize - To combine or impregnate with iodine. Iodine is a chemical element that is used to help prevent thyroid disorders.

Jambalaya - A Creole dish that combines cooked rice with tomatoes, onion, green peppers, and almost any kind of meat, poultry, or shellfish.

Jardinière - A French term that refers to dishes garnished with vegetables.

Julienne - Foods that have been cut into thin strips approximately the size of match sticks of various lengths. Julienne foods are often used as a garnish.

Kosher - Derived from the Hebrew word "kasher," which means "proper" or "pure." Kosher foods conform to strict Jewish biblical laws pertaining to the type of food eaten, the kinds of foods combined in one meal, and how an animal is killed.

Ladyfinger - A light and delicate sponge cake that is shaped somewhat like a large, fat

finger. Often used as an accompaniment to ice cream, puddings, and other desserts.

Lasagna - A wide, flat pasta noodle with a ruffled or plain edge. Also a dish prepared using the lasagna noodle with various cheeses, and a tomato sauce. A meat is sometimes included. The plural of "lasagna" is "lasagne."

Mandarin - A cooking style which, in Chinese, means "Chinese official." Mandarin cooking is an aristocratic cuisine that takes the very finest elements from all the Chinese regions.

Mesquite - A hardwood tree indigenous to the American Southwest. Mesquite is used in barbecuing and smoking foods. It imparts a slightly sweet flavor to the meats.

Mousse - A rich, airy dish that can be sweet or savory and served hot or cold. The fluffiness comes from whipped cream or beaten egg whites. Mousses are made with meat, fish, vegetables, cheese, chocolate, and fruit purees.

Muesli - The German word for "mixture." Muesli was developed as a health food by a Swiss nutritionist near the end of the 19th century. Now a popular type of cereal. Often labeled "granola."

Organic Food - Technically, anything that contains at least 1 atom of carbon. In common usage, "organic" refers to foods cultivated and processed without fertilizers, insecticides, artificial coloring, artificial flavorings, or additives.

Paella - Named after the two-handled pan that it is prepared in, Paella is a combination of saffron-flavored rice, a variety of meats, garlic, onions, peas, artichoke hearts and tomatoes.

Parfait - An American parfait consists of ice cream layered with flavored syrups and whipped cream, then topped with chopped nuts and a maraschino cherry. A French parfait is a frozen custard with egg yolks, sugar, whipped cream and flavorings.

Parmigiana - This term refers to foods that have been cooked with Parmesan cheese.

Pasteurize - To kill bacteria by heating milk (or other liquids) to a moderately high temperature for a brief period. Milk is a beverage that benefits from this process. Pasteurization was discovered by the French scientist, Louis Pasteur.

Pâté - A well-seasoned French preparation using a meat or fish paste filling. Sometimes a fruit or vegetable mixture is used. Can be smooth or coarsely textured. Pâtés may be served hot or cold, usually as a first course or appetizer.

Picatta - A classic Italian dish that consists of veal or chicken that has been seasoned and floured, sautéed, and served with a sauce made from the pan drippings, lemon juice, and parsley.

Pierogi - A Polish specialty consisting of half-moon-shaped noodle dumplings filled with a mixture, often of pork, onions, cottage cheese, and seasonings. Served as a first course or side dish.

Pilaf - A dish that starts with browned rice or bulgur and adds cooked vegetables, meat, seafood, or poultry. It originated in the Near East and is called know as "Pilau."

Poach - To cook food gently in a liquid at or just below its boiling point. Meats are normally poached in stock, eggs in lightly salted water, fruit in light sugar syrup.

Potted Meat - A meat that has been cooked and ground to a fine paste, lightly seasoned, and packed.

Primavera - Italian word for "spring style." Culinarily, it refers to the use of fresh vegetables as a garnish to various dishes--often pasta. The vegetables are most often raw or blanched.

Puff Pastry - A delicate French pastry with hundreds of layers of dough and butter. The French call it "pâte feuilletée." When baked, the butter creates steam which creates the "puff." Used to create croissants, napoleons, and allumettes.

Quiche - This dish originated in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France. It is a pastry shell filled with a savory custard of eggs, cream, onions, mushrooms, meats, shellfish, and seasonings. Quiche Lorraine includes crisp bacon.

Ragoût - A thick, rich, highly-seasoned stew of fish, poultry, or meat that can be prepared with or without vegetables.

Ratatouille - A dish that combines eggplant, tomatoes, onions, bell peppers, zucchini, and a variety of seasonings, including garlic--all simmered in olive oil.

Ravioli - An Italian dish made with small square or round noodles stuffed with meat, cheese, and/or vegetable mixtures. These noodles are boiled then baked with a cream, cheese, or tomato sauce.

Reuben Sandwich - A sandwich composed of corned beef, Swiss cheese, and sauerkraut on sourdough rye bread.

Risotto - An Italian dish made by stirring hot stock into a mixture of rice that has been sautéed in butter. The rice often contains chopped onions and is flavored with cheese, chicken, shellfish, sausage, vegetables, or white wine and herbs.

Scallop - To prepare food by layering slices with cream or cream sauce in a casserole. These foods are often topped with bread or cracker crumbs before being baked. "Scallop" also refers to forming a decorative edge in the rim of pie dough.

Sliver - To cut foods into thin strips.

Soufflé - A light, airy mixture that is normally made by taking an egg yolk-based sauce that has been lightened by adding stiffly beaten egg whites. Soufflés may be sweet or savory and served cold or hot.

Stir-Fry - Any dish that has been prepared by stir-frying. That is, the food is chopped into small pieces and cooked very quickly over high heat in a large pan for a short period of time while briskly stirring the food.

Stuffing - A mixture of seasoned breadcrumbs, cornbread, rice, potatoes, or other food item used to stuff fish, meat, poultry, shellfish, and sometimes, vegetables.

Tempura - A Japanese specialty prepared by deep frying fish and vegetables that have been dipped in tempura batter. The resulting batter is light, thin, and crispy. Usually served with rice and soy sauce.

Torte - A rich multi-layered cake made with little or no flour, but with ground nuts, breadcrumbs, eggs, sugar, and flavorings. The word "torte" is also used to describe some tart-like preparations.