

# Clafoutis: It's a luscious French dish easier to prepare than pronounce

■ Not quite a pancake nor a quiche, it's classic comfort food

By **Arthi Subramaniam**  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Clafoutis has a luscious yet homey French pedigree.

Pronounced kla-FOO-tee, it requires little muss or fuss to be instantly satisfying. A slightly sweet egg-flour-milk batter is poured over tiny cherries, baked and finished with a dusting of powdered sugar.

It is often likened to other egg batter-based foods. But please don't call it a pancake because it is not flipped and cooked on both sides.

Neither is it a quiche (which has a crust), a flan (which has more flour making it thicker) or a far Breton (a custardy cake from Brittany that has a smooth flan-like texture and is dense). When made with pears, peaches or apples instead of cherries, purists say it is not a clafoutis but a flaugarde.

To confuse matters even more, clafoutis is known by other names within France. In the Auvergne region, it is called millard, and in central France, fans ask for a cacou.

Clafoutis is derived from the word clafir, which means to fill. Typically, small black cherries are laid out on a buttered baking dish, which is then filled with a batter made with eggs, flour, milk and sugar. Some believe the name comes from the Latin expression clavum fingere, which means "to fix a nail," referring to the cherry-studded batter.

The dish's origins can be traced back to the Limousin region in southwest-central France. The French writer, raconteur and prince of gastronomy, Maurice Edmond Sailland, better known as Curnonsky, once said a true clafoutis is made only by people from that area who have beautiful dark blood like the juice of Limousin cherries.

Christiane Larhantec, who lives north of Paris in Coye la Foret, has no connections to Limousin but believes a real clafoutis is made with unpitted tart cherries. Part of the pleasure of eating one is enjoying the fruit with pits intact, she says.

Also if the pits are removed, she says, the cherries will let out more juice, making the custard thinner. But

she offers this warning: "You need to pay attention and not bite into the pit." It might crack your tooth.

Didier Berlioz, an assistant professor at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, says small, unpitted black cherries are ideal. Pits add a complementary flavor to the clafoutis, he says, but the bigger the pit the more tannin it will add to the dish.

"That's why small pits are so much more desirable," the Nice native says.

A perfect clafoutis is delicate, with a crisp edge and top and a creamy interior. The batter should not be over-mixed, Berlioz says. Otherwise it will have a souffle-like feel and end up as almost two layers.

It's important to match the texture of the batter to the filling. If the filling is made with ingredients that tend to release a lot of moisture, add a sufficient amount of flour so that it can absorb the excess liquid. He prefers using a light pastry flour when compared to heavy ones like bread flour.

After mixing, the batter needs to rest for about 20 minutes so that the flour can absorb the liquid. Finally, bake at 350 degrees for around 40 minutes.

The traditional way to serve a clafoutis is piping hot, right out of the oven. But be warned: The hot cherries can burn your tongue. If there are leftovers, consume them at room temperature or cold. Don't ever reheat it, especially in the microwave, because the texture will fall apart.

Clafoutis can have a savory side, too, and there is no limit to the type of filling. It will work just like in a quiche, Berlioz says, and it is mainly about controlling moisture content. He suggests cutting savory versions into little squares and eating them with a toothpick as a snack.

Recently, I came across clafoutis recipes in two cookbooks that featured vegetables and cheese and sounded delicious. With the cherry season long past and farmers markets still selling sweet tomatoes and richly colored bell peppers, I geared up to go

the savory route and took my cues from the two authors.

Diana Henry features a clafoutis with cherry and plum tomatoes, olives and basil in her book, "From the Oven to the Table: Simple Dishes That Look After Themselves." The ingredient list also includes goat and Parmesan cheeses, milk and heavy cream, making the dish rich and luscious.

It also tastes just as homey and satisfying as its sweet counterpart made with cherries.

In "Dinner in French: My Recipes by Way of France," New York Times food writer Melissa Clark suggests pouring egg batter made with whole milk, creme fraiche, basil, white cheddar cheese and sliced ham over cooked red and yellow peppers redolent with garlic. The clafoutis is finished with more cheddar and Parmesan cheese.

However, the goodness does not end there. It gets a good squirt of fresh lemon juice and a sprinkling of crushed red pepper flakes, before a table (dinner's ready).

The clafoutis is simply French comfort food with a lot of style.

## SWEET PEPPER AND CHEDDAR CLAFOUTIS

The pepper and garlic mixture can be cooked ahead of time and refrigerated. When it is time to make the clafoutis, warm vegetables in a skillet before adding to the egg mixture and baking it. If you cannot find creme fraiche, sour cream can work as a substitute.

**3/4 cup whole milk**  
**1/2 cup creme fraiche**  
**4 large eggs**  
**2 1/2 tablespoons all-purpose flour**  
**1/4 cup chopped fresh basil leaves**  
**3/4 teaspoon fine sea salt, divided, plus more as needed**  
**1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**  
**1 cup coarsely grated sharp white cheddar cheese, divided**  
**2 ounces sliced ham, chopped**

**2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil**  
**1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar**  
**1/2 teaspoon sea salt**  
**1 1/2 tablespoons fresh mint, finely chopped**

**FOR THE CHICKEN:**  
**4 1/2-to-5-pound chicken**  
**1/2 of a lemon**  
**2 sprigs fresh rosemary**

Place your oven-safe skillet on the middle rack of your oven; preheat oven to 450 degrees.

Make the compound butter by placing all the ingredients in a small bowl and stirring well to incorporate; set aside.

Rinse the grapes, shaking off excess water, then place



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Melissa Clark features a savory clafouti, made with sweet pepper and cheddar cheese, in her book, "Dinner in French." After taking it out of the oven, it is topped with fresh lemon juice and a sprinkle of crushed red pepper flakes.

**2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**  
**3 sweet bell peppers, preferably red, yellow and orange, seeded and sliced into 1/4-inch-wide strips**  
**2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced**  
**1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese**  
**Fresh lemon juice, for serving**  
**Crushed red pepper flakes, for serving**

Heat the oven to 375 degrees.

In a large bowl, whisk together milk, creme fraiche, eggs, flour, basil, 1/2 teaspoon salt and pepper.

Stir in 3/4 cup of the cheddar and the ham.

In a 9-inch ovenproof skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Stir in peppers and cook until they are softened and golden at the edges, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in garlic and remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt and cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes.

Scrape the egg mixture into the skillet and top it with the remaining 1/4 cup cheddar and Parmesan. (For a more elegant presentation, scrape the vegetables into a gratin or casserole dish and add the egg mixture and cheese to that.)

Bake until the eggs are set, 35 to 40 minutes. Cool slightly,

then top with lemon juice and red pepper flakes.  
Serves 4 to 6.

— "Dinner in French: My Recipes By Way of France" by Melissa Clark (Clarkson Potter; March 2020)

## TOMATO, GOAT CHEESE & OLIVE CLAFOUTIS WITH BASIL

The tomatoes, olives and goat cheese all come together in harmony when baked with the egg custard. Don't forget to top with fresh basil at the end.

**1 pound mixed cherry and plum tomatoes, halved or quartered, depending on size**  
**1 1/2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**  
**Sea salt flakes and freshly ground pepper**  
**4 large eggs, plus 2 large egg yolks**  
**1/3 cup all-purpose flour**  
**Scant 1 cup whole milk**  
**1 1/4 cups heavy cream**  
**1/2 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese**  
**1 garlic clove, finely grated**  
**2 tablespoons chopped, pitted black olives**  
**7 ounces soft goat**

**cheese, crumbled**  
**1/3 cup basil leaves, torn**

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place tomatoes into a gratin dish with the olive oil and season them. Turn them over so the surfaces are all coated in oil.

Roast for 20 to 30 minutes or until the tomatoes are soft and slightly shrunken. Take out of the oven and leave to sit on a work surface.

Reduce the oven temperature to 375 degrees.

Place the eggs, egg yolks, flour, milk and cream into a food processor, season well and give it a whiz. Stir in the Parmesan and garlic.

Scatter the olives over the tomatoes and crumble on goat cheese.

Pour the batter over the tomatoes, olives and cheese. Bake for 30 minutes until the custard is puffed, golden and just set in the middle.

Leave it for 5 minutes to settle. It will sink a little. Scatter over the basil and serve.  
Serves 6.

— Adapted from "From the Oven to the Table: Simple Dishes That Look After Themselves" by Diana Henry (Mitchell Beazley; October 2019)

## CHICKEN

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I left a few grapes on the vines just for the photos; I suggest you take them all off the vine when you make the recipe.

As for trussing the chicken — which involves tying the wings and legs close to the body — skip it if you like, but it helps keep the breasts from overcooking by limiting the amount of air circulating into the breast cavity.

Afraid to truss? Here's an amusing video on trussing from Chef Brian Polcyn, a butchery expert:

For guidance on how long to roast chickens, I rely on Julia Child's expertise to determine roasting time: In a 450-degree oven, start with 45 minutes and add 7 minutes for each pound. You'll need a 10- to 12-inch heavy skillet (preferably cast iron, although my cast iron is only 8 inches, so I used my commercial grade Calphalon skillet).

Another pro tip: Preheat your skillet. Doing so not only shortens the cooking time, but it gives the thighs a little more heat, so they start cooking immediately. Just wait until you hear that sizzle the

moment the chicken makes contact with the hot pan — it's a beautiful sound!

## ROSEMARY ROASTED CHICKEN WITH RED GRAPES

For best results, allow the chicken to rest on the counter 30 minutes prior to starting the recipe. A too-cold chicken going into a hot oven will render uneven cooking throughout. If trussing the chicken, you'll need kitchen twine. There are plenty of videos on YouTube with trussing how-tos if you are unsure how to truss a chicken. Or you can simply tie the legs together. Makes 6-8 servings

**FOR THE COMPOUND BUTTER:**  
**3 tablespoons butter, room temperature**  
**1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt**  
**1/4 teaspoon ground cumin**  
**1/2 teaspoon freshly grated black pepper**  
**1 1/2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh rosemary**  
**1 clove garlic, minced**  
**Zest from one medium lemon**

**FOR THE GRAPES:**  
**1 1/2 pounds red seedless grapes**

in a bowl. Drizzle the olive oil and vinegar over the grapes. Sprinkle with the salt and the chopped mint; toss to coat and set aside.

Rinse then pat the chicken dry, including the cavity, with several sheets of paper towels. Place the chicken on a work surface with the cavity facing you. Carefully slide two fingers between the skin and breast meat to create pockets to fill with the compound butter, taking care not to tear the skin. Massage a quarter of the butter directly onto each breast under the skin. Slice the lemon in half and place both halves into the chicken's cavity along with the two sprigs of rosemary. Truss the chicken

or tie the legs together with kitchen twine. Massage the remaining butter all over the chicken.

Carefully pull the hot pan out of the oven and onto the stove. Lay the chicken in the center (chicken will sizzle) and surround the chicken with the grapes, making sure to scrape out the olive oil and mint from the bowl with a rubber spatula. Return skillet to the oven and roast for 70-80 minutes, until the temperature in the thickest part of the leg reaches 162 degrees. Remove the chicken from the oven. It will continue to cook and will hit the 165-degree safe zone while resting. Let it rest for at least 15 minutes before carving.

Serve the chicken with the grapes and some of the pan juices on the side. Brown rice, green beans, broccoli or a green salad make excellent sides.

Debone the completely cooled leftover chicken before storing it in the refrigerator. Save the carcass to make a killer homemade bone broth.

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