

French Cooking

A Boiled Ham Dinner

A classic and authentic French meal by early French settlers to Nova Scotia was a traditional boiled ham dinner. Ingredients include:

- 1 large ham
- White wine or cider
- Pinch of garlic
- 5 to 6 large carrots
- Bread crumbs
- 2 to 3 medium-sized onions
- Parsley
- Herbs "personal choice"

Directions:

Soak and trim the ham. Tie up in a lightly floured, thin cloth. Then, place in a pot slightly larger than the size of the ham and cover with two-parts cold water to one-part white wine or cider. Gradually bring the ham to a boil. Remove any fat that rises to the top. Add carrots, onion, garlic, and some savory herbs. Let it simmer for 2 to 4 hours, depending on the size of the ham. Leave in the pot to cool. Remove the ham, and sprinkle with breadcrumbs and minced parsley.

Maple Syrup Pie

A traditional French dessert was maple syrup pie. It accompanied many evening meals as a cherished dessert. Ingredients include:

- 1 cup maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons flour
- ½ cup water
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 eggs
- 1 pie shell, baked

Directions:

Cook the maple syrup, water, egg yolks, flour, and butter in a boiler. Pour into a baked pastry shell. Cover with a meringue made of the egg whites and sugar. Bake in a moderate oven for 10 minutes.

Soupe Au Chou (Cabbage Soup)

La soupe au chou was normally prepared and served in Acadian communities on Halloween, which was a meatless or "lean" day, the Vigil of All Saints' Day. In contemporary times, it is often made with a beef stock. Ingredients include:

- 3-pound shank of beef
- Herbs to taste
- 2 quarts cold water
- 2 cups chopped onions
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 2 cups diced celery
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup diced carrots
- 1 small cabbage, shredded
- 1 bay leaf

Directions:

Let the beef shank stand in water for 30 minutes. Add seasonings and slowly bring to a boil. Remove fat as it forms on top of the water. Reduce heat and let simmer for 30 minutes.

A Traditional Acadian Meal

Pâté à la Râpure (Rappie Pie)

The most popular of all Acadian dishes is probably pâté à la râpure, commonly called rappie pie. It was served on festive occasions, and in many homes, for Sunday dinner. Ingredients include:

- 1 peck potatoes
- 6 strips bacon
- 2 chickens (3 pounds)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 to 3 large onions
- Poultry seasoning
- ¼ pound butter

Directions:

Cook the chickens in a large pot on top of the stove and add desired seasoning and chopped onions, before you start grating the potatoes, so that the juice of the meat is hot and ready for use. When the chickens are cooked, separate the meat from the bones and cut into pieces. While waiting, peel the potatoes and soak in cold water. Grate about ten potatoes at a time. Place in a cloth bag and squeeze until all the water and starch is removed. Tend to all the potatoes in this fashion. Do not discard the liquid from the potatoes until it has been measured, for an equal amount of the hot chicken broth must be measured to replace the potato liquid. When the potatoes are all squeezed, place them in a large pan, and measure the chicken broth, while stirring slowly. Cover bottom of well-greased pan with ½ the potato mixture. Arrange pieces of chicken, chopped onions, more butter, and a few strips of the bacon. This will help to form the crust. Bake the pie in a 400°F oven for about 2 hours, or until a brown crust is formed.



Pâté à la Râpure (Rappie Pie)

OUT OF OLD SACKVILLE KITCHENS: FRENCH COOKING



The Fultz House Museum Kitchen

*FULTZ HOUSE
MUSEUM*

An Old Sackville Kitchen in the 1800s

In the 1800s, Sackville kitchens were constantly buzzing with activity, as family life revolved around this room and the preparation of meals. Several of the dishes prepared in Sackville kitchens were European in origin, as many settlers in this region had roots in France or Germany. This was an era when an individual's schedule was structured around mealtime. A Sackville resident could not simply pick up take out from the local fast food restaurant if they failed to be home in time for dinner, nor could they reheat a meal in the microwave, as this technology did not yet exist. Meals were to be enjoyed at home in the company of loved ones and friends.

During this period, the preparation of food demanded a great deal of time and devotion from each family member living in an Old Sackville household, as these meals were 100% natural and made entirely from scratch. There were no large grocery stores from which the bulk of ingredients could be purchased. It was the responsibility of each family member to provide the items required to complete each dish.

It was often the women who would wake up early and start the meal preparation process. They would begin by building a fire in the hearth over which they would prepare the food. In addition to the fire, the women would also use mortars and pestles to grind up spices, such as salt and pepper, and seasonings, like cinnamon, which would later be used to add flavor to the dishes. Milk was also collected to produce butter and cheese, while berries and fruits were picked to accompany the main dishes. Most of the women's work took place either inside or near the home, while the men's efforts occurred outside of the home.



Cinnamon and Pepper
Currently on display in the kitchen of the Fultz
House Museum

The men were also responsible for the livestock and the butchering of the meat and poultry. This usually involved the entire community, as neighbours joined forces to ensure that a sufficient supply of meat was preserved for the winter months. The men would also provide for the kitchen by hunting in the surrounding woods and fishing in the local streams.

In the 1800s, the preparation of meals in Sackville kitchens were both a family affair and a social event, as the community banded together to ensure that a household did not go hungry and that a family could enjoy their meals in the company of loved ones.

The Arrival of French Cooking in Nova Scotia

In the years before Johann Fultz arrived in Halifax, French colonists founded Port Royal, a settlement situated on the banks of the Annapolis Basin. Among these colonists was Samuel de Champlain, an explorer who would later become known as "The Father of New France." Port Royal was the first successful French settlement in North America. It was along these banks that the settlers learned how to survive in an unfamiliar land. This settlement marked the beginning of French cooking in Nova Scotia, a tradition that would soon influence cooking styles in many old Sackville kitchens.

During the winter months the settlers living in Port Royal participated in "L'Ordre du Bon Temps" (i.e., the Order of the Good Time), a social club that was established to protect the people from starvation during the winter. It was the host's duty to provide food for the festivities. There was always an abundance of food offered by this club, as roasts of moose or caribou were served alongside such wild game as porcupine and beaver. Birds, such as waterfowl and partridge, and fish and seafood, such as trout, cod, and lobster, would also be presented at these feasts.

This feast ensured that those living in Port Royal did not go hungry. Unfortunately, this club did not include the peasants who struggled to satisfy their hunger during the long winter months. In time, however, the French settlers would learn how to survive off the land.

Between 1633-38, French colonists established settlements in Nova Scotia, strategically locating them near rivers where the soil was rich and fertile. They grew a variety of vegetables, as well as wheat, rye, and barley. They raised chickens, sheep, and pigs, and the meat produced from these animals was often salted and preserved for use in the winter. There were also cattle on their farms – though they were of a small breed and could only provide a limited supply of milk to make butter and cheese.

The French settlers also gathered food from the surrounding land, as they scoured the woods to pick fruits and berries and hunted for wild game. Fish, such as shad, were collected from the streams near their farms. The Mi'kmaq also served as advisors to the settlers, as they provided the French with the knowledge needed to successfully use the land for their survival. For example, the Mi'kmaq showed the French how to make maple sugar and syrup, which was used as a sweetener in such desserts as maple syrup pie.

French cooking is known for its delicious soups, stews, and chowders. These were dishes that were often present in old Sackville kitchens. In these kitchens, French families would usually prepare their meals over an open hearth, using an iron kettle to heat the liquid contents. These dishes were often paired with bread, which was prepared in a brick oven located outside the home and used by the entire community. If you were served soup, stew, or chowder with a dessert sweetened with maple sugar in an old Sackville kitchen you could bet your taste buds you were indulging in some fine French cooking.



Maple Syrup Pie