

Know Your Ingredients: Quinces!

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History of Quinces

Quinces are considered to have had their origin in the Transcaucasus region, which includes modern day Armenia, Iran, southwestern Russian and Azerbaijan. They are a native plant to western Asia, but they adapt well, and have spread throughout the world.

They are part of the Rosaceae family, which includes other fruits such as apples and pears, and are the sole member of the Cydonia genus. There are quite a lot of varieties of quinces modernly, at least a couple of which allegedly are suitable for eating raw, but the vast majority are too hard, sour and astringent to eat raw. They ripen in the late autumn, generally being harvested just before first frost. ("Quince," 2019)

The modern name originated in the 14th century as a plural of quoyne, via [Old French](#) coquin from [Latin](#) cotoneum malum / cydonium malum, ultimately from [Greek](#) κυδώνιον μήλον, kydonion melon "[Kydonian](#) apple"

In a work by a Greek scholar, Simeon Setbi, pregnant women were counseled to eat many quinces to bear wise children. A Greek physician, Galen, noted that quinces came from Syria to Rome by 3rd century AD. Quinces are first noted in England in 1275, when allegedly Edward I had them planted at the Tower of London.

By the 16th century theory of humors, they are considered to be cold and dry, or melancholic. They were considered to invigorate the heart, strength the stomach and stay fluxes. There was advice to not eat them raw, nor overly greedily before meat as it would 'procure to many cholerick passions'. (Enzinas, 2016)

Quince recipes

A Dish of Quinces

from Apicius, "De re coquinaria (On the Subject of Cooking)" early 5th century Rome

A dish of quinces is made as follows: quinces are cooked with leeks, honey and broth, using hot oil, or they are stewed in honey. ("LacusCurtius • Apicius — De Re Coquinaria," n.d.)

A Recipe for Conserving Quince

from Kitab al-Tabikh "The Book of Dishes", Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq, trans. Nawal Nasrallah, 10th century Baghdad

Quarter and core quince, put it in a pot with honey, and pour water on it. Let the pot come to a boil then drain the quince, return it to the pot and add honey to it. Do not use water this time. Cook the quince again until it is well done.

Safarjaliyya, a Dish Made With Quinces

from An Anonymous Andalusian Cookbook of the Thirteenth Century, trans. Charles Perry, 13th century Spain

This is a good food for the feverish, it excites the appetite, strengthens the stomach and prevents stomach vapors from rising to the head. Take the flesh of a young fat lamb or calf; cut in small pieces and put in the pot with salt, pepper, coriander seed, saffron, oil and a little water; put on a low fire until the meat is done; then take as much as you need of cleaned peeled quince, cut in fourths, and sharp vinegar, juice of unripe grapes [verjuice] or of pressed quince, cook for a while and use. If you wish, cover with eggs and it comes out like muthallath.

Zirbaj with Quince

from Kitāb al-Wusla ilā l-habīb fī wasf al-tayyibāt wa-l-tīb, "Book of the Relation with the Beloved in the Description of the Best Dishes and Spices", probably by Ibn al-'Adīm of Aleppo, 13th century Syria

Take some cooked meat, add some coarsely crushed chickpeas, and cook [some more]; then add the broth of the meat, vinegar, honey or sugar, some saffron, some quinces [cut] into pieces, and some new apples, also cut into pieces. If you like, [put in] some peeled almonds and some jujubes, or else pistachios and mint. Let thicken over the fire and serve.

Another version: follow the same procedure, with a little starch to thicken [the sauce]; the colour remains yellow.

Connates

from The Forme of Cury "The Method of Cooking" 14th century England

Take Connes [quinces] and pare hem. pyke out the best and do hem in a pot of erthe. do þerto whyte grece þat he stewe þer inne. and lye hem up with hony clarified and with rawe yolkes

[yolks] and with a lytell almaund mylke and do þerinne powdour fort and Safron. and loke þat it be yleesshed [sliced].

Cotignac, or Quince Jelly Candies

(also translated as quince marmalade)

from Le Ménagier de Paris "The Parisian Household Book" from France, 1393

To make Cotignac, take quinces and peel them, then cut in quarters and take out the core and seeds, then cook them in good red wine and then put through a seive: then take some honey and boil it for a long time, and skim it, then put in your quinces and stir very well; boil long enough that the honey is reduces by at least a half; then throw in hippocras powder, and stir untill it is completely cold; then cut into pieces and store.

Quinces in Pastry

from Du Fait de Cuisine by Chiquart, 1420 France

Again, quinces in pastry: and to give understanding to him who should prepare them let him arrange that he has his fair and good quinces and then let him clean them well and properly and then make a narrow hole on top and remove the seeds and what they are wrapped in, and let him take care that he does not break through on the bottom or anywhere else; and, this being done, put them to boil in a fair and clean cauldron or pot in fair water and, being thus cooked, take them out onto fair and clean boards to drain and put them upside down without cutting them up. And then let him go to the pastry-cooks and order from them the little crusts of the said pastries to put into each of the said little crusts three quinces or four or more. And when the said little crusts are made fill the holes in the said quinces with very good sugar, then arrange them in the said little crusts and cover and put to cook in the oven; and, being cooked enough, let them be served.

Quince Pie

Redacted by Penn de Moranza

I decided to bake something using Quince because most people have never tried this interesting fruit. After a lot of searching I found a promising recipe, my source is in bold and my commentary and variations are not.

Translation from: **The Opera of Bartolomeo Scappi (1570)**

The Art and Craft of a Master Cook

Translated with commentary by Terence Scully

The Lorenzo Da Ponte Italian Library

Recipe 123: To prepare a quince tourte without cheese

Get a whole quince and, without peeling it, put it on a spit with enough paper, greased with fresh butter, around it to cover it.

I do not have a spit-roast so I oven roasted quinces instead. As per the Lent alternatives I brushed it with almond oil instead of butter to make it dairy-free.

Turn it slowly the way roasts are turned for two hours, more or less, depending on its size.

Baked at 350 it took perhaps an hour to go completely soft and ready for peeling.

When it is done, remove the paper from it, peel it, take the best part of it and grind it in a mortar.

I ended up using about 10 small quinces in two batches to reach a pound of flesh.

For every pound of quince get four ounces of marzipan paste, an ounce and a half of fine mostaccioli, three ounces of sugar, three fresh eggs and two ounces of fresh butter.

I made my own marzipan using almond flour, powdered sugar, almond extract and rosewater. Mostaccioli in modern day refers to a pasta, with the assistance of others I found a recipe for a period version that consists of flour, vino cotto, and sugar. Vino cotto is a very specific type of Italian red wine that is heated and condensed. Instead of the mostaccioli I substituted some almond cookies and a tablespoon or so of sherry. The butter I substituted with more almond oil as per the Lent variation again.

When the mixture has been made up and strained in several passes, put it into a tourte pan that is lined with a sheet of dough that is not too thin, made of fine flour, egg yolks, sugar and butter.

I tried straining it and that was not fun, so I defaulted to a food processor. For the dough I followed the recipe from the Lent variation, using almond milk instead of pine-nut milk because that's what I had. With no amounts specified I eyeballed amounts and went for a pie-crust texture.

Cover the tourte with the same dough made like shutter louvres or in other ways.

I used my best guess of shutters to cover it. I may have just achieved 'other ways' as I'm not certain whether they intended there to be gaps in the crust or not.

Bake it in an oven or braise it, making its glazing of sugar and rosewater.

Baked at 350F for 70 minutes until it looked done, glazing before I started with a rosewater-sugar mixture.

Serve it hot or cold as you wish.

I'm serving it cold for practicality.

In Lent instead of butter put in sweet-almond oil and, instead of eggs, breadcrumb cooked in almond milk; the dough will be made of pine nut milk, salt, almond oil and flour.

This is where the dairy-free modifications come from so that my wife can try some too.

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