

Six Ancient Roman Recipes



Here's a reconstructed Roman kitchen. | [Source](#)

There was a lot more to Ancient Roman food than exotic dishes served by slaves. Lavish feasts were commonplace among the rich, but ordinary people ate ordinary meals, not very different from what we eat today.

The Romans dined on roast pork in spicy sauces, snacked on cheese with dates and nuts, ate omelettes with mushrooms, and enjoyed desserts like cheesecake and figs in custard.

Apicius, a popular Roman chef, produced an ancient cookbook that can still be used today, allowing any of us to throw together a meal very much like what was eaten by Rome's ordinary people—the plebeians. If you're feeling adventurous in the kitchen, you can also reproduce the more exotic offerings that once graced the table of emperors.



Ova Spongia ex Lacte (Eggs With Honey) | Source

Ova Spongia ex Lacte (Eggs With Honey)

Do you remember ova spongia ex lacte from school days? Here's the full recipe from Apicius's *De Re Coquinaria*.

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoon honey
- 4 eggs
- 275ml milk
- 25g butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Good pinch of black pepper

Instructions

1. Beat together the eggs, milk, and oil.
2. Pour a little olive oil into a frying pan and heat. When this is sizzling, add the omelette mixture.
3. Whisk with a fork until the mix starts to solidify (this will make for a lighter omelette).
4. When thoroughly cooked on one side, turn the omelette over and cook on the other side. Fold in half and turn out onto a plate.
5. Warm the honey and pour over the omelette. Fold this over once more and cut into thick slices.
6. Sprinkle with black pepper and serve.



Dormouse (Marinated Chicken Drumsticks) | Source

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In Ancient Roman times, the dormouse was a delicacy, but these days it's one of the greatest threats to native British woodland.

These rodents strip bark from trees, destroy fruit crops, and, incidentally, chew through the electrical wiring in homes.

A dormouse is hard to come by these days, so in this recipe, I marinate chicken drumsticks overnight and call them dormouse (*Gliris*).

However, it's listed as an [invasive threat](#), so no one would mind if you cooked a few.

Apicius's Version: 'Pound with pepper, caraway, cumin, bay leaves, dates, honey, vinegar, wine, liquamen and olive oil, then roast.'

Ingredients

- 8 chicken drumsticks
- 1 cup plain all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds
- 2 teaspoons caraway seeds
- 2 teaspoons sweet paprika powder
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 2 bay leaves
- A little vegetable oil

Instructions

1. Crush the cumin seeds using a mortar and pestle or equivalent.
2. Put the flour in a plastic bag with the crushed cumin, bay leaves, caraway, and paprika.
3. Lightly dab some vegetable oil on the drumsticks and toss them in the bag with the flour.
4. Drop the honey into the bag. Give it a swirl around and leave the bag in the fridge overnight so the flavours sink in.
5. Place the drumsticks in a lightly oiled baking pan and bake for 20-30 mins or until a skewer pushed into the thickest part releases only clear juice.



Thynnus (Tuna) | Source

Thynnus (Tuna)

I based this recipe on Patrick Faas's [Around the Roman Table: Food and Feasting in Ancient Rome](#).

What the Romans called the ingredients: Ius in cordula assa: piper, ligustcum, mentam, cepam, aceti modicum et oleum.

What we call the ingredients: sauce for roast tuna: pepper, lovage, mint, onion, a little vinegar and oil.

Ingredients

- 2 large tuna steaks and ingredients for the vinaigrette
- 3 tablespoons strong vinegar
- 2 tablespoons garum (or vinegar mixed with a little anchovy paste)
- One cup olive oil
- 4 finely chopped shallots
- 1 teaspoon pepper (Allspice)
- 1 teaspoon lovage seeds (or celery seeds)
- 1 bunch fresh mint
- olives to garnish

Instructions

1. Brush your tuna fillets with oil, pepper, and salt.
2. Grill them on one side over a hot barbecue.
3. Turn them and brush the roasted side with the vinaigrette. Repeat.
4. Don't let tuna overcook; the flesh should be pink inside.
5. Serve with the remains of the vinaigrette.
6. Garnish with a few olives.



Isicia Omentata (Hamburgers) | Source

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Ingredients

- 500g minced meat
- 1 French roll, soaked in white wine (you can use non-alcoholic cider or water if serving to kids)
- 1/2 tsp freshly ground pepper
- 50ml Liquamen (can use a little white wine with a pinch of salt or orange juice for kids)
- some pine nuts and green peppercorns (go easy if serving to kids)
- a little Caroenum (optional)

Instructions

1. Mix minced meat with the soaked French roll. Grind up the pine nuts and peppercorns, mix into the meat.
2. Form small balls with your hands. Put them in a little packet of foil and add a splash of Caroenum. Close the packet.
3. Bake for 10-15 mins.



Globuli (Sweet Fried Curd Cheese) | Source

Globuli (Sweet Fried Curd Cheese)

Curd cheese is similar to cream cheese but with a lower fat content and a light flavour, colour, and texture.

I use ricotta or sometimes bocconcini for this delightful sweet food.

Ingredients

- 500g (about 1lb) curd cheese
- 1 cup semolina
- honey
- olive oil

Instructions

1. Drain the curd cheese. Use a sieve or colander, let it hang in cheesecloth, or squash excess moisture out.
2. Mix with the semolina into a loose dough and let it sit for a few hours. (Have a sip of *Vino Caroenum* while you wait).
3. With wet hands, form the mixture into dumplings.
4. Quickly fry dumplings in olive oil for a few minutes.
5. Drain and roll in honey.



Libum (Ancient Roman Cheesecake) | Source

Libum (Ancient Roman Cheesecake)

Libum was a sacrificial cake offered to the household spirits, but the Romans ate it as well!

The following recipe is from the book *De Agri Cultura* by Cato, who was a consul, statesman, and soldier. I'm sure he got the recipe from his cook.

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup plain all-purpose flour
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- 1 egg, beaten
- bay leaves
- 1/2 cup clear honey

Instructions

1. Sift the flour in a mixing bowl.
2. Beat the cheese until soft, stir into the flour.
3. Add the beaten egg to the flour/cheese mixture, forming a soft dough.
4. Divide the dough into four and shape each piece into a bun.
5. Place on a greased baking tray with a fresh bay leaf underneath.
6. Heat the oven to 375F/190C. Bake for 35-40 minutes until golden brown.
7. Warm the honey, pour into a flat plate, and place the buns on it to rest until the honey is absorbed.