

Unraveling the Mysteries of Cooking Competitions

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Competition is a word that many people find intimidating. We live in a society that thrives upon competition, most notably the tournaments in which our next Sovereign is chosen. Those that find competitions intimidating often deny themselves an opportunity for an experience only a competition can give.

Reasons for entering a Competition

Fortunately, there are many reasons for entering a cooking competition in the West Kingdom.

- Compete to win a cooking award
 - Wooden Spoon – West Kingdom
 - Silver Spoon – Principality of the Mists
 - Copper Spoon – Principality of Cynagua
- Explore an area of cooking that you have not explored before
 - The cooking competitions usually have a category for the purpose of the competition. This gives you an opportunity to try something you may not have tried before.
- Learn from the judges
 - The judging sheets were redesigned to allow for the judges to give a greater amount of feedback to the participants.
 - The judges place their names on the judging sheet. If you have a question or would like further insight from the judge, you can talk to them. Judges like to share their knowledge.

Note: Oertha does not have an award for cooking competitions, it has the Order of the Silver Ulu for outstanding cooks.

Preparation for a Competition

Now that you've decided to enter a competition, the next thing is to come up with an entry for the competition. The following steps should aid you in coming up with an appropriate entry.

1. Confirm the category for the competition.

This will aid you in selecting the type of recipe you will use for your entry. You want to make sure that you choose a recipe that is appropriate to the category. To do this, you must make a decision on what does the category mean. Sometimes the categories are rather vague, and open to broad interpretation. Make sure you justify why you choose the entry for this category. The judges will consider the appropriateness of your entry under the Authenticity section on the judging form.

For example, the category for the Wooden Spoon competition for June Crown A.S. XXIX was "from the field". Some people took this to be a cultivated field; some took it to be a wild field. Either of these interpretations is a valid interpretation. A dish made of grains is appropriate for the interpretation of a cultivated field. A dish made of rabbit is appropriate for the interpretation of a wild field. But you would not want to serve a rabbit dish if your interpretation is for a cultivated field.

2. Research a recipe.

Now that you have a good understanding of the category, you now have a general idea of what type of recipe you may like to enter into the competition. You may have several recipe ideas based on the competition category. There are many collections of recipes in publication that cover the time span covered by the SCA. Some competition categories may restrict the recipe to a certain time or a certain area. It may be more difficult to find recipes when the category imposes such restrictions, but it is not impossible. Many of the existing collection of recipes are available on the internet. The West Kingdom Cookerie Guild website has links to many of these collections (<http://westcooks.dracowolf.com>).

Many people also like to try to use a familiar ethnic recipe to enter in a competition, or may be given a category that precludes finding a recipe collection. You can try to “reverse-engineer” these recipes by using collection of recipes from nearby areas or time periods. To reverse-engineer a recipe is far more difficult to do than finding a recipe from an available collection.

3. Write first draft of your documentation.

It is best to start your documentation as early as possible. With a chosen recipe, and the research you’ve done for the competition, you have a basis for your documentation. Documentation is the second category on which your entry is judged. Work out a preliminary interpretation of your recipe. If you are uncertain of quantities to use, you might want to consult a modern cookbook for a rough estimate on quantities. Your documentation should have the following elements:

- Name of entry
- Background on why the entry was chosen for the category
- Recipe in original text
- Recipe translated into modern English
- Your interpretation of the recipe (ingredients, amounts and how it was prepared)
- Notes of any changes you made from the original recipe
- Source of recipe
- Bibliography

4. Test your recipe.

Prepare your recipe according to the initial interpretation you’ve already written in your rough draft of your documentation. This is critical when cooking an unfamiliar recipe for the first time. This gives you the opportunity to evaluate your recipe and adjust it as you find necessary. The appearance and taste of your food are two categories that the judges evaluate on your entry. You want to make sure that your entry looks like what the recipe indicates it should look like and that it should taste good. If the recipe is essentially unappealing, this gives you the chance to try another recipe.

5. Finalize your documentation.

Make sure that your documentation reflects the changes that you made in the preparation of your recipe based upon your testing. You may want to note any special insights you had in creating your recipe. Review your documentation to make sure that you have not forgotten anything. Make five copies of your documentation for the judges.

6. Prepare your entry for the competition.

Cook the recipe according to your documentation. Serve your recipe in a manner that is appropriate for the entry. Try to serve the entry in a dish that would have been used in the region and time that is indicated by the collection from which you found the recipe. Contrasting colors make the entry stand out, as well as garnish.

7. Enter the competition.

This might seem like a given, but be certain of the time and place that the entries are due for the competition. The Wooden Spoon competitions are due at 11am at the Arts & Sciences Pavilion on the Saturday of a Crown event, except for Twelfth Night. At Twelfth Night it is traditionally held at or near the table for the Cookerie Guild display. You can contact the Minister of the Wooden Spoon for confirmation, or Ministers for the Silver or Copper Spoons for their respective competitions. For other competitions, contact the autocrat.

Example of Documentation

Quail

Submitted by Euriol of Lothian
Wooden Spoon Competition, March Crown AS. XXXII

Original Recipe taken from Cookery Book II Harleian MS. 4016, ab. 1450 A.D. (Page 75), from Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books, edited by Thomas Austin, found in A Collection of Medieval and Renaissance Cookbooks compiled by Duke Cariadoc of the Bow and Duchessa Diana Alena:

Quayle roasted. ¶ Take a Quayle, and sle him, And serue him as thou doest a partrich in all Degre. His Sauce is sauce gamelyne.

Partrich roasted. ¶ Take a partrich, and sle him in þe nape of the hede with a fethur; dight him, larde him, and roste hime as þou doest a ffesaunte in the same wise, And serue him forth;

Sauce gamelyne. ¶ Take faire brede, and kutte it, and take vinegre and wyne, & stepe þe brede therein, and drawe hit thorgh a streynour with powder of canel, and drawe hit twies or thries til hit be smoth; and þen take pouder of ginger, Sugur, and powder of cloues, and cast þerto a litul saffron and lete hit be thik ynogh, and thenne serue hit forthe.

Translation:

Quail roasted. Take a quail, and slay him, And serve him as you do a partridge in all degree. His sauce is sauce gamelyne.

Partridge roasted. Take a partridge, and slay him in the nape of the head with a feather; prepare him, lard him, and roast him as you do a pheasant in the same way, And serve him forth;

Sauce gamelyne. Take fair bread, and cut it, and take vinegar and wine, and seethe the bread therein, and draw it through a strainer with powder of cinnamon, and draw it twice or thrice until it be smooth; and then take powder of ginger, Sugar, and powder of cloves, and cast thereto a little saffron and let it be thick enough and then serve it forth.

Interpretation:

Quail

1 tsp. lard or butter

Gamelyne sauce

Rub lard or butter over quail, roast the quail in 350°F over until the juices run clear.

Serve with Gamelyne sauce.

Gamelyne Sauce:

2 Tbs. fine bread crumbs

1/4 cup wine

1/4 cup vinegar

1 tsp. ground cinnamon

1 Tbs. Sugar

1 tsp. powdered ginger

1/2 tsp. ground cloves

15 threads of saffron

Combine bread crumbs with wine and vinegar and let stand for 5-10 minutes to soften the bread crumbs. Mix in remaining ingredients, blend until smooth.

Notes:

The original recipe for the partridge calls for lard to be used on the bird prior to roasting, this is mainly to help keep the moisture inside the flesh during cooking. Butter can easily be used for this same purpose.

The original recipe for the gamelyne sauce calls for soaking the bread in the wine and vinegar and pushing (drawing) it through a strainer three times. This effectively breaks the bread down into crumbs. Taking fine bread crumbs and soaking them in the wine and vinegar will produce the same end product.

Additional Notes of Interest:

The flavor of the flesh of quail, and for any other bird, is highly dependent on the tactics it takes fleeing danger and its migratory habits. Quail instead of taking to flight when fleeing danger, take to running. If they do take flight, they land only a short distance away. The species of quail that do migrate, only make short flights, and are known to “island hop” across the Mediterranean. Thus they have a flesh that can be said to be “the optimum point, in many opinions, between the blandness of barnyard fowl and the pungency of more athletic wild birds” as noted in *Food* by Waverly Root.

The quail that is commercially farmed in both Europe and America today is a subspecies of the Common quail (*Coturnix coturnix*: found through most of Europe, Asia and parts of Africa) called *Coturnix coturnix japonica* of Japan. This subspecies has been domesticated for centuries in Japan, selective breeding of this subspecies has produced a bird “that matures very quickly and females have been known to lay eggs only 12 weeks after they themselves were hatched.”

References:

[A Collection of Medieval and Renaissance Cookbooks](#) compiled by Duke Cariadoc of the Bow and Duchess Diana Alena

[A Miscellany](#) 6th edition, by Cariadoc and Elizabeth. Chicago, 1992

[Take a Thousand Eggs or More](#), Volume 2; edited by Cindy Renfrow, 1990

[Food](#), Waverly Root, Smithmark Publishers, New York, 1980

[Encyclopedia of the Animal World](#) Elsevier International Projects Ltd., London, 1972