

# Tempering the Passions

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*A practical application of the theory of Humors as it applies to cuisine*

*By Euriol of Lothian*

*"It is more important to know what sort of person has a disease than to know what sort of disease a person has." - Hippocrates*

According to Noga Arikha "Humoural theory began in Greece in the fifth century BC with the body of work attributed to the physician Hippocrates. It then continued with Galen, the Roman doctor who adopted the Hippocratic doctrine in the second century AD. For over two thousand years thereafter, humoral theory explained most things about a person's character, psychology, medical history, tastes, appearance, and behavior."

In order to begin to understand the medieval cook's approach to cuisine, it is important to understand the humoral theory as it applies to food. Each food ingredient was categorized on two basic qualities; if it were moist or dry and hot or cold. The qualities of the humors were given a degree of intensity. Intensity ranged from the 1st to 4th degree. In addition the method of preparation would also affect the humoral qualities of the food.

There were two different goals for the medieval cook. For the healthy diner, the goal was to provide a dish (or series of dishes) where the humoral qualities of the ingredients were used to balance each other into a neutral state. For the ill, the goal was to provide a dish (or series of dishes) where the humoral qualities of the ingredients were used to balance the humors of the individual in order to bring him back into a healthy "neutral" state.

Terence Scully goes on to say "... a cook accepted an enormously serious responsibility. At this time an ignorance of the humoral complexion of any ingredient could easily lead to a charge of inadvertently undermining someone's health, or even murder. A cook's job was in many respects an offshoot of that of a physician; he had almost as much responsibility."

As modern (21<sup>st</sup> century) cooks, the humoral theory is of just historical curiosity, as modern medicine and food science has made this theory obsolete. It is the purpose of this class to give a practical approach to applying the humoral theory to cuisine for modern cooks.

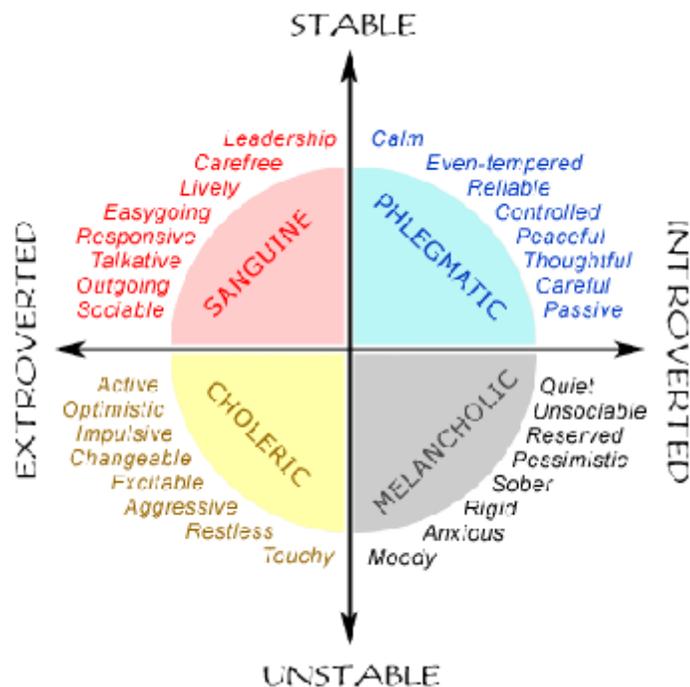
## **The Four Humors**

The human body consists of four humours (liquids) which were integral to its functioning. A person's temperament was the result of variations in the proportions of each humour in his or her body. However, a person's temperament could be adjusted by what one ate and drank, as well as other factors as noted by the following table.

	<b>Blood</b>	<b>Choler (Yellow Bile)</b>	<b>Melancholy (Black Bile)</b>	<b>Phlegm</b>
Moist or Dry	Moist	Dry	Dry	Moist
Hot or Cold	Hot	Hot	Cold	Cold
Element	Air	Fire	Earth	Water
Temperament	Sanguine	Choleric	Melancholic	Phlegmatic
Season	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Time of Day	Morning	Midday	Afternoon	Evening
Age of Person	Childhood	Youth	Maturity	Old Age
Color	Red	Yellow	Black	White
Type of Fever	Continuous Fever	Tertiary Fever	Quartan Fever	Quotidian Fever
Main Organ	Heart	Spleen	Liver	Brain
Governing Musical Modes	Lydian & Hypolydian modes	Phrygian & Hypophrygian modes	Mixolydian & Hypomixolydian modes	Dorian & Hypodorian modes
Tutelary Planet	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Moon
Astrological Signs	Aries, Taurus, Gemini	Cancer, Leo, Virgo	Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius	Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces
Taste	Sweet	Bitter	Sour	Salty

## Temperaments

The following image shows descriptions of personality types within the four temperaments. This image is located from <http://intraspec.ca/images/eysenck.gif> and is based on the work of British Psychologist Hans Jürgen Eysenck.



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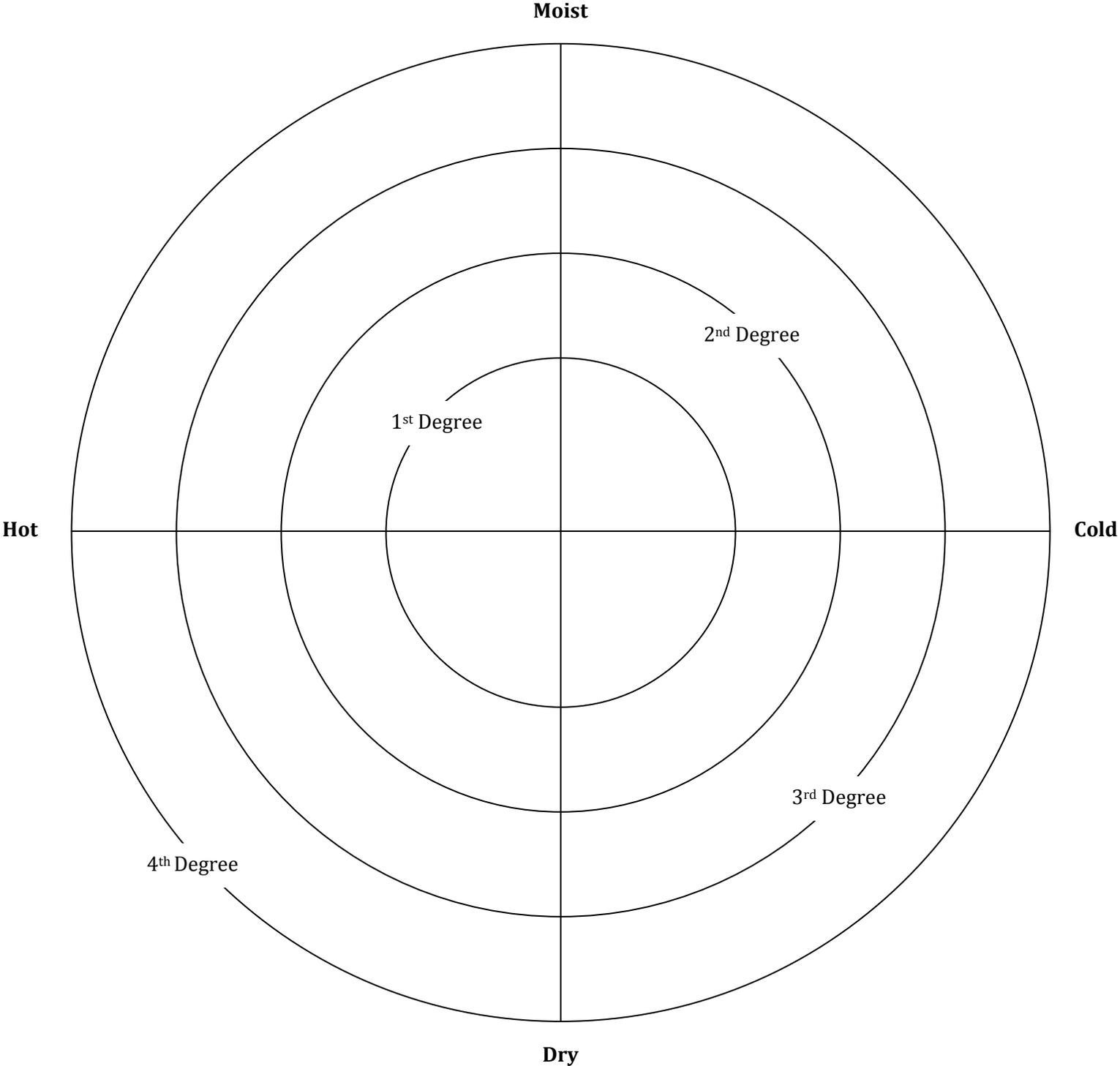
## Bibliography

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**Grant, Mark, trans.** 2000. *Galen on Food and Diet*. London. Routledge. (ISBN: 978-0-415-23233-3)

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Worksheets



## **Some common ingredients**

Two of the ingredients below belong to each of the four humours, and two are considered “temperate” (neutral).

**Strawberry**

**Watermelon**

**Sweet Almonds**

**Garlic**

**Fennugreek**

**Dates**

**Beef**

**Fish**

**Pork**

**Pheasant**

Place the ingredients noted on page 5 in the proper humour.

