

The Ghent Waterzooï



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Its geographical origin:

The Waterzooï is a dish originating from Ghent in Belgium. This name comes from the Dutch words "Water" and "Zooï" deriving from an old verb "Zieden" meaning "to boil". Literally that means thus "boiling water" in Dutch. It's a dish combination of chicken or more precisely of chicken accompanied by vegetables and potatoes. All of this soaking in a broth.



As you can note on the map here above, Ghent is a town not far from the North Sea side, more precisely in the province of Eastern Flanders in Belgium. Some big cities near Ghent are Bruges, Antwerp and a bit further, Brussels.

Its history:

In the middle Ages were built the harbours and waterways of Bruges and Ghent, in Eastern Flanders, as we still know them today.

In the Renaissance, meat was quite rare while fish was more than abundant. These canals were for the peasants a free and easy source of food. The freshwater fishes that they were fishing here (eel, carp, pike, trout, pike perch, perch, ...) associated with local vegetables like celery, carrot, leek and potatoes cooked together in water composed a broth to which they added some cream. This soup was even substantial than a main dish. The "Waterzooï" was born.

Because of these practices, a tax was imposed on fishing. As time went by, factories grew along the canals and discharged there their waste. Gradually, fish died out. In a restocking attempt of those waterways, Belgium even banned fishing in canals during a three-month period (from the beginning of April to the beginning of June). The fish-Waterzooï became less and less eaten due to rarefaction of fish in the canals.

If at first especially poor people ate this fish-based dish, when the cities began their industrialization, the Ghent-middle class seized this delicious dish as its own. It became the family's Sunday treat. However, it was necessary to stand out of the working class. That's why chicken replaced fish in the famous recipe which took the name of "The Ghent Waterzooï".

At about the same time, the diffusion of the Waterzooï recipe would have been ensured by the Belgian chef Philippe-Edouard Cauderlier (1812-1887) who, thanks to his writings, would have assured its international fame at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Tradition :

Since the nineteenth century, it became a tradition: the Ghent middle class used to eat "the Ghent Waterzooï" every Sunday in the family. It is essentially tasted in the winter. This dish is served in a tureen and is eaten in a simple soup plate with a spoon.



The Ghent Waterzooï recipe:

Ingredients:

- A chicken
- Two white leeks
- Two white celery stalks
- One onion
- A few butter
- A garnished bouquet
- Two egg yolks
- 250 ml fresh cream
- Three carrots
- A dozen potatoes
- A bottle of white wine
- Water
- Salt
- Pepper









Necessary Material:

- A fork
- A spoon
- A knife
- A wooden spoon
- A skimmer
- A meter
- A peeler
- A chopping board
- Four bowls
- Two plates
- A colander
- A large saucepan with its lid
- An average saucepan with its lid
- A frying pan



The different preparation stages:

<p>1. Cut chicken dices.</p>		
<p>2. Clean and chop white leeks and the celery stalks.</p>		
<p>3. Peel onion and carrots and cut them in slices.</p>		
<p>4. Heat butter in a saucepan and melt vegetables and onion at moderated heat during ten minutes.</p>		
<p>5. Brown the chicken in a frying pan with butter.</p>		

6. Add the pieces of chicken, the garnished bouquet, salt and pepper, in the saucepan with onion and vegetables.



7. Recover the whole with a half water and a half white wine.



8. After bringing to a boil, reduce heat, cover and let it cook during one hour.



9. In the meanwhile, peel the potatoes and cut them in four.



10. Boil the potatoes during about twenty minutes in a saucepan filled with water that you bring to a boil.



11. Afterwards drain them in a colander.
Reserve them on the side.



12. With a skimmer, remove chicken and vegetables from the broth. Eliminate also the garnished bouquet.
13. Reduce the broth to a half over high heat.



14. Whip egg yolks in a bowl with fresh cream and pour the whole into a saucepan, always whipping.



15. Thicken the broth, then put back chicken and vegetables.



16. Serve in a soup plate and add some potatoes.

Enjoy your meal!



Presentation:

The Ghent Waterzooï is simply served in a soup plate and eaten with a spoon. It's sometimes accompanied with some bread, a good blond beer or a glass of Chardonnay served as a drink.



Recipe variants:

Other local variants of the "Ghent Waterzooï" exist as those of Leuven with veal or of Brussels with rabbit. According to recipes the ingredients vary and the consistency of the soup too, but their common feature is the mixture of fishes, chicken, veal or rabbit with vegetables such as celery and carrot, and then the addition of fresh cream. Instead of potatoes, the Waterzooï can also be tasted with toasts or rice.

Here are some examples of Waterzooï variants:



Chicken Waterzooï with
Blanche bear from
Hoegaarden



Haddock
Waterzooï



Burbot
Waterzooï with
saffron sauce



Lemonish Waterzooï with
crunchy vegetables