



The « Chicon » Chirory or Endive



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Translated in English by Lise Cartuyvels



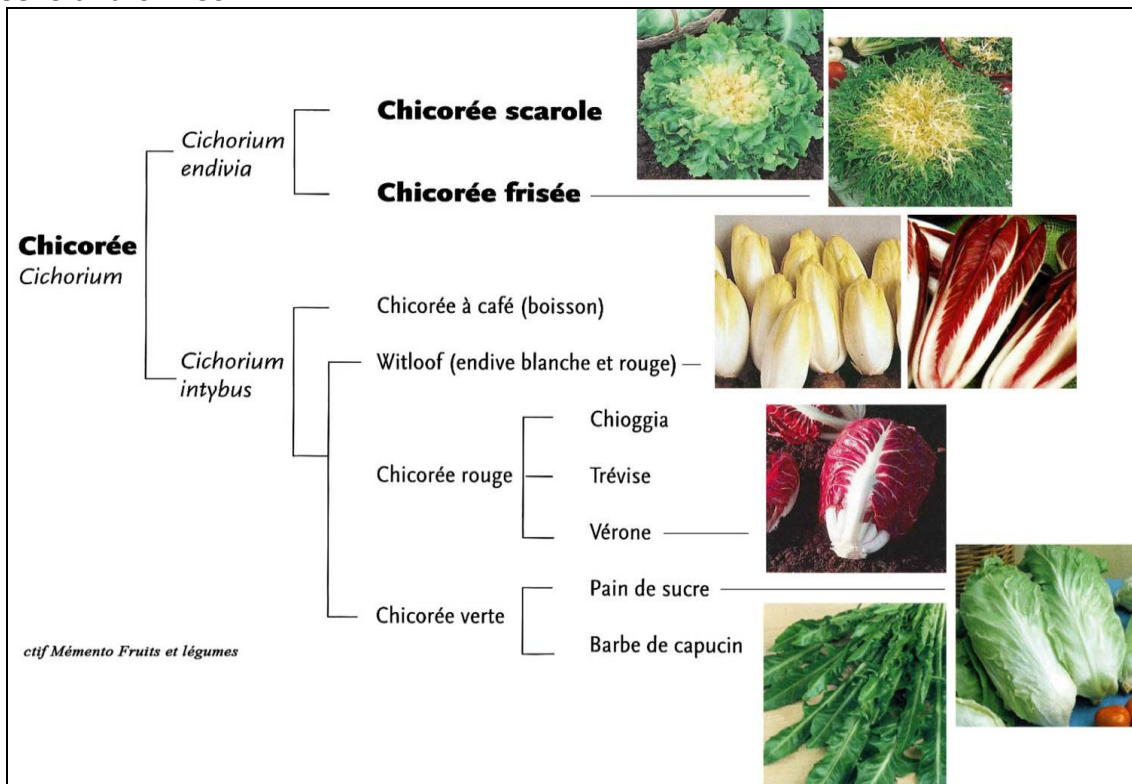
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What is a « chicon » ?

Latin name: *Cichorium intybus* var. *foliosum* L.

	<p>The endive or Brussels chicory or "witloof" chicory is the name given traditionally in Belgium and in the north of France to designate the bleached shoots obtained by forcing a variety of endives.</p>
<p>Endives with their roots</p>	<p>However, this bitter chicory (of the Asteraceae family) is normally cultivated (by forcing) as an annual plant in order to produce these famous « chicons ».</p>

Contrary to what its usual name might suggest, this endive is not a variety resulting from the "true endive" named *Cichorium endivia* L. which gives the salad greens and crimson.



The « chicon » is a vegetable that does not exist as such in the wild. It was really created by man with, as always in these cases, a share of luck.

A lucky discovery, story

It is said that the « chicon » was born exactly at the same time as Belgium at the time of the Revolution in September 1830. At that time, chicory was grown a lot. When the revolution broke out, a peasant from Schaerbeek decided to put his stock of chicory in his cellar. And to be well sheltered, he covered the whole with a small layer of soil. Days went by, things calmed down. And when our man went back down to his cellar, he discovered that his chicory had produced a strange white foliage. That he will called witloof (white leaf, literally translated). That would be the origin of the « chicon ».



Officially, however, the head gardener of the National Botanical Garden, a certain Frans Bresiers, is the inventor of the « chicon ». At the time, Schaerbeek was located in the countryside and the National Botanic Garden (now in Meise) was in the centre of Brussels, on the area still called the Botanique near the North Station.

In this garden, plants of all kinds were collected. The chief gardener, learning that the chicory would produce white leaves, did a series of tests. He understood quite quickly that if the « chicon » was white, it is because it had grown in the dark. In fact, the absence of light prevents photosynthesis. Therefore, without chlorophyll, the leaves are not green as in all the other plants but remain white.

The work of Frans Bresiers and of the National Botanic Garden will consist in transforming these random (and therefore irregular) white shoots into a real vegetable. Larger, firm, with tightly packed leaves, a bit less bitter too. All this is a job of selection, then the development of techniques of forced crop. It would take several decades for the first witloofs to appear on the markets in Brussels in 1867.

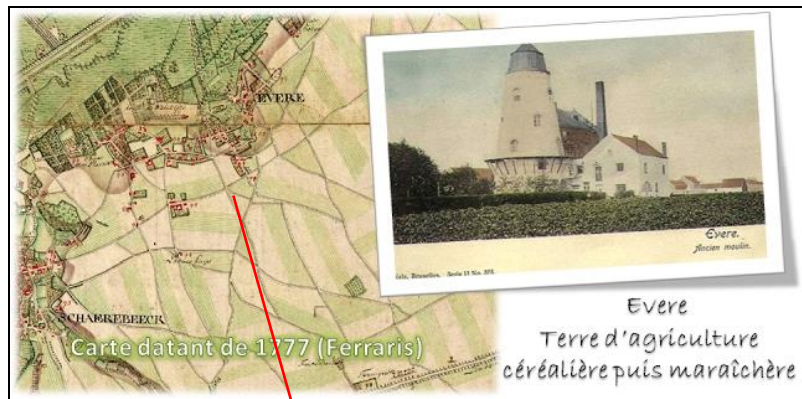
"Witloof" is the very first Flemish and popular appellation. « Chicon » is an appellation we owe to Frans Bresiers. In fact, it comes from the Latin scientific name of the chicory "Cichorium" that gave the word « chicon ».



Where are « CHICONS » grown?

If the first « chicons » grew in Schaerbeek, the culture then moved due to the urbanization.

The first crop of « chicon » for commercial purposes was born in 1867 in Evere. Its paternity falls to a well-inspired cultivator, Jef Lekeu.



The municipality of Evere has long been the homeland of the crop of chicory which subsequently gradually extended to a large part of Flemish Brabant.

It is still true today, especially in Kampenhout where one can also visit a « chicon » Museum.



The « Chicon » Museum in Kampenhout

- www.witloofmuseum.be
Leuvensesteenweg, 22
1910 Kampenhout
Tel: 016 22 33 80
- witloofmuseum@kampenhout.be



The « chicon » Museum illustrates in an exciting way the crop and the trade of the « chicon », while highlighting the social and cultural aspects of the crop of « chicon ». A pad at the reception desk allows you to test your knowledge about chicory.

The brotherhood of the witloof companions

The brotherhood defends and promotes the crop of witloof (« chicon » or « endive ») on open ground as well as all its products (both solid and liquid), participating in gastronomic, cultural, folkloric and traditional events. The association maintains contacts with other Belgian as well as foreign groups, working in the same spirit and, lastly, contributes to any action favoring assistance for works of a social, humanitarian or charitable nature.



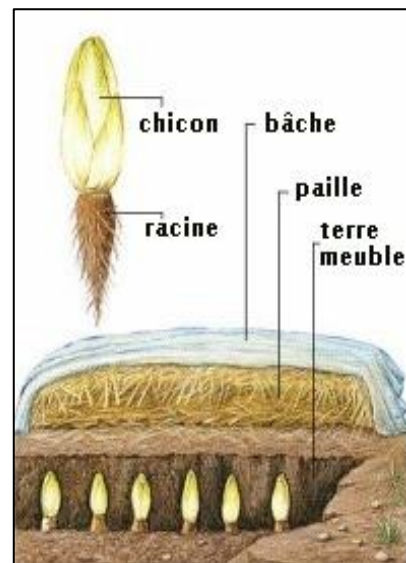
How are the endives cultivated?

The large scale production of endives includes two steps :

The seed, sown in the spring, produces a creeping plant with tuberous root and long green leaves. Those roots-tubers are harvested in October and sheltered in a dry and dark area before their forcing.



For the forcing, each root is transplanted in a "pit" (20 cm deep hole under which there is a heating mean), then covered with soil and straw under a microporous sheet.



At a temperature of about 20°C, the root in field production (traditional method) or most often nowadays in a dark room, delivers after 3-4 weeks a cream white to light yellow bud with tight leaves that will be harvested: the endive.

By transplanting those roots at different times, you can get a crop of endives from winter to spring.

Endives grown inside are not washed after harvesting, because they don't have any contact with soil.



The « chicon » and its culinary traditions.

In our Belgium, this vegetable which is called "endive" can be found in different dishes for the pleasure of our taste buds. Here are some examples:



the chicon tart



Chicory gratin
or endive-ham gratin rolls



« chicon » leaves shrimp (as appetizers)



chicory salad



Braised chicory



Chicory soup

Belgians remain the world biggest endives eaters:
8 kg per year per capita

the recipe of chicory soup in a few steps

(preparation: less than 60 min)

Ingredients:

(for 6 persons)

- 500 g of chicory
- 2 sprigs of white celery
- 2 sprigs fresh parsley
- 1 onion
- 1 dl light cream
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1.5 liters of chicken broth (3 cubes dissolved in 1.5 liters of hot water)
- salt and pepper
- For filling (optional): 100 g gray shrimp from the North Sea



Utensils :

- A kitchen knife
- A ladle
- A large saucepan
- A table spoon
- A wooden spoon
- A mixer
- A graduated container



Stage of the preparation



Beforehand:

- Slice the onion.
- Cut the celery in dices.
- Remove hard hearts from the chicory and cut in chunks

Preparation: (40 min)

1. Melt the butter in a large saucepan.
2. Brown the chopped onion until it becomes translucent.
3. Add the dices of celery and chicory and cook during 10 min.



4. Sprinkle with the flour and stir well.

5. While stirring, pour the chicken broth. Cook 20 min at a low heat.



6. Mix the soup very finely. Extend the cooking time by 1 min.

7. Chop the parsley.



8. In a soup tureen, combine egg yolk, cream and chopped parsley.

9. Pour the chicory soup over and mix well.



Presentation

Add a few shrimps from the North Sea into the soup (optional)

Along with French loaf or thin slices of rye bread.

ENJOY YOUR MEAL



See also clip on <http://www.comenius-namur-marsala.com>

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