

Oven Politics and Kitchen Religion

Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

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All the talk about religion in politics and separation of church and state in this election year filters into our thoughts even while we're deciding what to have for dinner or what ought to go on the list for weekend shopping. We're reminded, somehow, that not so long ago we knew ahead of time that we'd have fish for dinner every Friday and the reasons were sometimes religious ones.

If your family was Roman Catholic, you were pretty certain of a fish dinner on Friday night because that was a fast day. And if your family was of Protestant persuasion, you were almost equally as sure fish would be on the menu because that was traditional.

Fast days seem to have lost their importance, at least as far as Fridays are concerned, and nowadays fish may come to the dinner table as often as two or three times a week without any special reason. Fish is, it seems, a far more popular entree than it ever used to be. Perhaps requiring that fish substitute for meat on Fridays cast fish in an inferior role for some families. However, speaking from a strictly personal point of view, I'll choose fish over meat 10 times out of 10 chances.

Perhaps one reason for my preference is that we grew up right here on Cape Cod where fish flipped from the sea to the platter with minimum time spent between, and fresh fish is about as tasty as food can be. And another reason may be Aunt Olivia's expertise in fish preparation. Imagine, for example, sitting down to **Stuffed Fillet of Haddock with Lobster Sauce**.

2 lbs. haddock filets	4 C. bread cubes
2 T. lemon juice	1 t. salt
4 slices bacon, diced	1 T. dried summer savory
1/4 C. chopped green onion	1/2 C. milk (approx.)
1/4 C. chopped parsley	1 well-beaten egg
2/3 C. chopped celery	Parsley sprigs for garnish

Rinse fish fillets and pat dry with paper towel. Place fish in a shallow, well-buttered baking pan and sprinkle with lemon juice. Set aside. In a medium saucepan, saute bacon until almost done, add vegetables, and stir-fry five minutes. Remove from heat and set aside. Cut crusts and heels of white bread into 1/2-inch cubes and combine with salt and summer savory. Moisten with milk and add to sauteed vegetables. Beat egg and fold into mixture. Heap dressing over fish fillets and bake 20 minutes at 375° or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork.

While the haddock bakes, prepare **Lobster Sauce**, using either one 7-oz. can or half-a-pound of fresh or frozen, cooked and shredded lobster meat. Prepare a white sauce by melting 2 T. butter in a medium-sized saucepan, remove from heat and blend in 2 T. flour; when smooth, gradually stir in 2 C. hot milk. Return to heat and bring to a boil, stirring constantly until thickened. Reduce heat and simmer five minutes, stirring to prevent sticking. Just before serving, add lobster meat and 2 T. sherry wine (optional). Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Arrange fish fillets topped with stuffing on a serving platter. Pour one-third of the lobster sauce into a gravy boat and pass to six appreciative fish-lovers.



As any devoted fish-eater knows, haddock fillets are white-fleshed, mild-flavored, thick, and large-flaked. In contrast, sole fillets are white-fleshed, mild-flavored, thin, and fine-flaked. Two small fillets of sole are just about right for one serving, so when Aunt Olivia expected six for dinner, she made sure there were at least a dozen small fillets... about three pounds altogether. For company, she often prepared **Fillet of Sole with Crabmeat Stuffing**.

12 small fillets of sole	1/4 t. salt and a pinch of
6 slices white bread, crumbed	pepper
4 C. flaked crabmeat	1-1/2 t. lemon juice (approx.)
3 T. minced parsley (fresh)	sherry wine
Paprika	12 t. butter
1/2 t. onion powder	

Combine bread crumbs, crabmeat, parsley, onion powder, salt and pepper, and toss lightly with lemon juice. Add enough sherry wine to make mixture moist, but not wet. Using muffin tins, divide stuffing into 12 equal portions. Place one portion of stuffing on each fillet and roll, jellyroll fashion, keeping stuffing mixture tucked inside of fish. Arrange fish rolls in well-buttered baking dish with ends underneath, leaving a small space between each roll. Sprinkle lightly with paprika and dot each roll with a teaspoon of butter. Bake at 350° for 10 to 12 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork.

Like Stuffed Fillets of Haddock, Stuffed Sole may be made oven-ready a few hours ahead and refrigerated until cooking time. Allow five extra minutes for baking if fish and stuffing are refrigerator-cold when you slide them into the oven.

It has always surprised me that a super-elegant, fruity-vegetable dish, one of Uncle Henry's first choices whenever fish was the main course, didn't become world famous, but maybe folks just weren't ready yet for Aunt Olivia's **Carrot and Grape Compote**. Maybe they are now, though.

1-1/2 lbs. carrots	2 C. orange juice
2 lbs. seedless green grapes	1/3 C. sugar
1/4 C. cornstarch	1/3 C. chablis
1/3 C. water	salt and pepper to taste

Wash, peel, and cut carrots on the diagonal in 1/4" slices. Boil in water for 20 minutes until fork-tender. Drain and set

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aside. Wash grapes, remove stems, discard any bruised or discolored ones. Set aside.

In a medium-sized saucepan, combine orange juice, sugar, and chablis; heat to a boil. Blend cornstarch and water in a cup until smooth. Using a wire whisk, gradually add cornstarch mixture to boiling juice a tablespoonful at a time. Add no more cornstarch after the juice mixture begins to thicken. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring, for five minutes. Season to taste.

At serving time, put carrots and grapes into hot sauce and heat through. Serve immediately in six individual sauce dishes, dividing the sauce among them.

What would you like for dessert after your fish dinner? For those of you with small appetites, the very thought may be almost too much; and you may settle for a cup of black coffee. Moderate eaters might welcome fruit or a cheese tray. To satisfy those who still suffer hunger pangs, a slice of **Cheese Pie** may be just the ticket. If this pie doesn't disappear completely within 15 minutes of its appearance, store remainder in the refrigerator. It keeps well.

Line a pie plate with a graham cracker crust (see directions on graham cracker box), or purchase a ready-made shell at the supermarket. Soften a package of cream cheese to room temperature. Preheat oven to 325°. Assemble the following ingredients:

8-oz. cream cheese	2 eggs
1/2 C. sugar	***
1 T. lemon juice	1 C. sour cream
1/4 t. vanilla	2 T. sugar
Dash of salt	1/4 t. vanilla
One graham cracker pie shell	

Combine first five ingredients and blend well. Add two eggs, singly, blending well after each egg. Fill graham cracker crust and bake on a cookie sheet at 325° for 25 to 30 minutes or until knife blade comes out clean when filling is tested about an inch from the edge of the pie.

While pie bakes, combine sour cream, sugar, and vanilla; when cheese portion is done, remove pie from oven. Do not turn off heat. Gently spread sour cream mixture over the top of the cheese. Return to oven for another 10 minutes. Remove pie from oven and transfer to cooling rack. When pie is cool, chill until firm.

Depending on the size of the slices you cut, this pie will serve six... or a dozen. Gild the lily? Top with fresh sliced peaches, strawberries, or pitted Bing cherries. While religion and politics may be inseparable, neither is really welcome in the kitchen, but if these recipes don't make a True Believer of you, I'm afraid Aunt Olivia will turn over in her grave! Bon appetit.