

CASSOULET





Cassoulet is one of those dishes over which there is endless drama. Like bouillabaisse in Marseilles, paella in Spain, chili in Texas, it is a dish for which there are innumerable recipes and about which discussions quickly turn fierce. It was over 30 years ago that I set out to explore this quintessential dish of Southwest France. As an outsider, I felt I might be able to settle some questions: Which regional version of the dish is really the best, and who serves the best restaurant cassoulet in France?

It did not seem too difficult a task. Waverley Root, *Larousse Gastronomique*, and the food critics Henri Gault and Christian Millau have all defined the war over the three “genuine” versions of this casserole dish of meats and haricots (dried white beans such as Tarbais, Lingots, and cocos), one from each of three towns in the Languedoc.

In Castelnaudary, the legend goes, the dish was invented, and therefore a “pure” version is served. The haricots are cooked with chunks of fresh pork, pork knuckle, ham, pork sausage, and fresh pork rind.

In Toulouse, the cooks add Toulouse sausage and either *confit d’oie* or *confit de canard* (preserved goose or duck—see pages 213 and 201–203); while in Carcassonne, chunks of mutton are added to the Castelnaudary formula, and during the hunting season, an occasional partridge, too.

There would be many variations, I knew, but it seemed a simple matter to travel to each of these towns, discover where the best cassoulets were served, taste them, and decide which one I liked the best. What I did not count on was that these regional distinctions have been completely blurred and that cassoulet is not as simple as it seems.

Take mutton. Not one person in any of the three towns would admit that mutton could go into a local cassoulet. Whether my expert was a chef, a waiter, or just a citizen on the street, he or she would point in some other direction and say: “Oh, they use mutton in Toulouse [or Carcassonne, or Castelnaudary, or some other town that came to mind]. They don’t know any better.”

Take partridge. Some people said they’d heard of putting partridge in cassoulet, but no one could say he’d actually seen it done.

Take bread crumbs. “Never! Impossible!” many people proclaimed, but the woman who cooked the best traditional cassoulet I ate used bread crumbs without a qualm.

And what about breaking the crust—seven times, as some cookbooks proclaim? People laughed, but some agreed the crust could be broken and reformed twice to get some



texture into the sauce. No need to go on. These technical matters diverted me from my mission. When I found the best cassoulet, I'd find out how it was made.

After a few hours' recuperation from jet lag in Paris, I ventured out to Lamazère, a restaurant where cassoulet in the style of Toulouse is a specialty of the house. Though the portion of meat was parsimonious, the cassoulet was very good, the beans enveloped in a thick creamy sauce, the preserved goose superb, put up the traditional way in stoneware jars for a minimum of six months. I returned to my hotel happy at last to have the taste of a good cassoulet in my mouth. Alas, I had not counted on the aftereffects. Requiring heavy doses of Alka-Seltzer to get to sleep, I was reminded of the famous tale of Prosper Montagné—how one day he came upon a sign on the door of a bootmaker's shop in Carcassonne: "Closed on account of cassoulet."

A few days later, on a cold and rainy night in Toulouse, I tried one of that graceful town's better-known cassoulet establishments, called, not surprisingly, Le Cassoulet. Arriving early, I was intercepted by a friendly drunk. "Go someplace else," he warned me; "in ten years they haven't changed the menu here."

My first cassoulet of Toulouse was crusty and wonderful, bubbly and aromatic, very subtle in regard to garlic. The confit literally melted in my mouth, and the Toulouse sausage (actually made for the restaurant by a charcutier in Castelnaudary) was extraordinarily fine. The charming and opinionated owner, Monsieur Bonnamy, held forth while I ate: "I'm from Provence, and I tell you that there is more drama here concerning cassoulet than anything I ever saw over bouillabaisse. In Toulouse, everyone talks about cassoulet, everyone cooks it, everyone eats it, but very few make it well. They use canned confit, even canned beans, or sometimes, God help them, they eat the whole dish from a can. Bread crumbs? I never use them! Mutton? It has no place in the dish. Put mutton in a pot with some preserved goose, and the mutton eats the goose alive! You ask me about the cassoulet of Carcassonne? It's just beans with a load of charcuterie! You say Michel Guérard says mutton is 'indispensable'? A comment typical of a person who lives in the Landes—they have so many sheep there, they're always trying to think up things to do with them!"

Early the next morning I paid a call on the then most famous chef in Toulouse, the kind, brusque, estimable, inventive Lucien Vanel. His restaurant, which was called simply Vanel, was a magnet for all gastronomic travelers to Toulouse. But Vanel was adamant—he would not cook cassoulet.

“I’m from the Quercy,” he told me. “This is my adopted town, so I leave cassoulet to the native chefs. There are restaurants here that specialize in it, and I have arranged for a friend to cook you a good homemade version [see Cassoulet in the Style of Toulouse, pages 317–319]. But I do have something for you today.”

There then appeared a twinkle in his eye as he told me he’d prepared his *cassoulet de morue*, something I thought he’d dreamed up for journalists—his satire on the most famous dish of his adopted town. (I learned later that such a dish actually exists.) His conceit must be recounted: In a casserole of white beans, he cooked salted cod (his “preserved goose”), a seafood sausage (his “sausage of Toulouse”), and large juicy mussels (his “chunks of pork”). The stock is a saffron-flavored fish soup, bound with mustard, egg yolks, and cream. The dish was a marvelous spoof on a real cassoulet, and, like everything chez Vanel, a treat.

I tried more restaurant cassoulets in Toulouse, Castelnaudary, and Carcassonne, then returned to Toulouse for the homemade version arranged for by Vanel. My hostess was Madame Pierrette Lejanou, wife of a potato broker, descendant of an old Toulouse family, a gastronome, and an excellent cook who learned to make cassoulet at her grandmother’s knee.

What can I say about her version except that it was the best traditional cassoulet I ever ate! Madame Lejanou was so precise in her choice of beans, so careful about her cooking, so firm in her commitment to *andouillettes* (chitterling sausages), so intent on achieving a crust, so particular about her pork fat being just ever-so-slightly rancid, and so careful in her selection of meats (she puts up her own confit, as a good Toulouse cook always does) that her cassoulet was simply great.

A charming woman, effervescent in her approach to food, generous in the tradition of the Languedoc, she feasted me and instructed me until I was overwhelmed. The secret of her cassoulet, I thought, was that it was made with love.

It was on account of Michel Guérard that I drove to Robert Garrapit’s restaurant in Villeneuve-de-Marsan in the Landes. Guérard had told me of a cassoulet cook-off among the chefs of the Landes. Garrapit had won first prize, and Guérard recommended his cassoulet in the highest terms. I arranged to meet him a few weeks later at Garrapit’s restaurant for a feast.

Now, three-star chef Michel Guérard is a modest man, a becoming trait in so renowned a chef, but on the subject of cassoulet he is as opinionated as anyone else: “Cassoulet,” he told me, “was originally a ragout of beans, which was obviously improved by the addition of mutton. To make a cassoulet without mutton is to be banal and, in my opinion, to commit



heresy. Mutton is indispensable in a cassoulet, as indispensable as the bony fish *rascas* in a bouillabaisse. It is a sophistication of dubious value to add confit. Cassoulet becomes too refined when it has a crust. Chefs put a crust on it to make it look better, but in the process they make it heavy and obfuscate its peasant origins. One must keep in mind the history of cassoulet and cook it as the peasants did, with mutton and poor people's food, such things as gizzards and pork skin."

By this time, Garrapit has appeared with his chef d'oeuvre. There were carrots in it, and I asked him why. "They're pretty," he said, "and they sweeten the mutton, too."

Garrapit's cassoulet was light, his sauce good tasting and thin. I understood why he had won the cook-off in the Landes, where, on account of Guérard's influence, lightness in cooking is an important goal. And there were interesting things about his dish—his use of preserved gizzards and huge incredibly flavorful Tarbais beans, which he'd canned fresh so that, most particularly, he would not have to use them dried. It was all very good, but was it a cassoulet?

Guérard, of course, insisted that it was nothing less than an authentic version of the dish. I was not so sure. Those very refinements that Guérard deplored (crustiness, a thick creamy sauce) have become, in my opinion, indispensable to a great rendition of the dish. Two years later, I discussed this again with Guérard when we dined together in Auch. He told me that he had changed his mind totally, that he now makes his cassoulet with confit, and leaves the mutton out.

All right. I had dined in the best cassoulet establishments in Paris, in the three great cassoulet towns, and also in the Landes. Madame Lejanou's cassoulet was still dear to my heart, but was it the ultimate, or can the great dish of Southwest France reach an even higher, more heavenly sphere?

During this visit to the region I'd become friendly with the Gascon chefs, especially their spiritual leader, the handsome, generous, multitalented André Daguin, whose elegant Hôtel de France in Auch had long been a mecca for gastronomes.

When Daguin learned I was passionate about cassoulet, he offered to cook me three different kinds and serve them at a single lunch. Knowing the brilliance of this chef, my tongue quivered with anticipation, even though by this time my stomach had started to rebel.

"Don't worry," said Daguin. "You will taste, not eat." But this proved impossible. Who can merely taste delicious food?

I had come full circle now, from the parsimony of Lamazère in Paris to the plenitude and hospitality of a great Gascon chef. Tasting and cross-tasting, eyed by envious diners at other tables who could not believe the sight of a single woman surrounded by huge casseroles, I ate and ate while Daguin paced by, every so often eyeing me like a sly Gascon fox.

His “normal” cassoulet was robust. The taste of a strong garlic sausage permeated the beans. This was a real country cassoulet but touched by a light hand. Daguin had used broken old beans as a thickening agent, rather than an inordinate amount of pork fat, as is common practice in the Languedoc. There was a lot of confit in this casserole (steamed first, interestingly enough). And tomatoes broke up the usual golden champagne color; Daguin’s cassoulet was creamy-red.

Next came his cassoulet of lentils—green lentils cooked with duck fat, pork confit, and Spanish chorizo sausages. It had subtlety and mellowness that did not at first announce themselves; it was a quiet, deceptively lazy dish that crept up on me until I could not stop replenishing my plate.

But the best was yet to come: Daguin’s famous *cassoulet de fèves*, a concoction of preserved duck and fresh fava beans, crisp on the outside, soft and buttery-tender within. The contrast of flavors and textures, the beans so full of spring and the Mediterranean, beans that absorbed the taste of the other ingredients and yet, almost paradoxically, maintained a fresh taste of their own—I could not quite believe what I was eating. It seemed a miracle.

Suddenly all the controversy—Toulouse versus Carcassonne versus Castelnaudary; mutton versus preserved goose; the questions of bread crumbs and partridges and *andouillettes*—became irrelevant. For Daguin’s cassoulet of fava beans transcended definitions. As far as I was concerned, the cassoulet war was won!



ANDRÉ DAGUIN'S FAVA BEAN CASSOULET

→→ *Cassoulet de Fèves*

SERVES 8

ACCORDING TO ROBERT COURTINE, the French food authority, before white beans were cultivated in France, fava beans were used to make this dish. The old name for the dish was *fevolade*. In effect, then, Daguin's version is the "original" cassoulet.

This cassoulet is excellent reheated later in the day, or even the next day.

4 confit of Pekin or Muscovy duck legs
(such as Duck Legs Confit Cooked in
a Pouch, pages 198–200) or 2 confit of
Moulard duck legs, drumsticks and
thighs separated

8 to 9 pounds fresh fava beans, in their pods
(usually available starting in March)

2 pounds small white onions, peeled

1½ pounds ventrèche or pancetta, cut into
½-inch dice

Freshly ground pepper

1 tablespoon sugar

6 ounces fresh pork skin with ¼-inch layer
of hard fat attached, or substitute Confit of
Pork Rinds (page 17)

4 cups unsalted chicken stock (storebought
or homemade—page 405)

1 leek, trimmed, well washed, and left
whole

8 small celery ribs: 2 chopped, 6 tied in a
bundle

5 firm garlic cloves, peeled

- 1 To soften the confit fat remove from the refrigerator 3 to 4 hours in advance and let stand in a warm place or in a deep pan of warm water.
- 2 Shuck the beans; you should have about 2 quarts. Slip off and discard the heavy skin covering 1 cup of the favas; set the skinned beans apart. Cut off the tiny shoots on remaining beans, if old. (Because not all the favas are skinned, the cassoulet will turn dark in color; this is as it should be.)
- 3 Scrape the fat off the duck confit legs into 5- or 6-quart flameproof casserole. Add the onions and sauté over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, for 4 to 5 minutes, until softened. Add the diced ventrèche and a light sprinkling of pepper and sauté over moderate heat, stirring often, for 5 minutes longer.
- 4 Stir in the 1 cup peeled fava beans and the sugar. (The peeled beans will break down, and their natural starchiness will act as a liaison for the cooking juices.) Cover the pan tightly and cook the beans slowly for 10 minutes.

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- 5 Meanwhile, simmer the fresh pork skin in water to cover until supple, 10 to 20 minutes. (There's no need to simmer confit of pork rind.) Drain the skin, roll it up, and tie it with a string.
- 6 Add the stock, the remaining favas, rolled pork skin, leek, all of the celery, and the garlic to the beans. Bring to a boil and skim carefully. Reduce the heat, cover with a sheet of crumpled wet parchment and simmer over low heat for 1½ hours.
- 7 Place the pieces of duck confit in a colander set snugly over a kettle of boiling water; or use a steamer or couscous cooker. Cover and steam for 10 minutes. Remove the duck, let cool slightly, then remove the skin and bones. Set the meat aside, covered with foil to keep moist.
- 8 Preheat the oven to 300°F. Remove the rolled pork skin from the bean ragout and cut into slices 2 inches wide. Unroll the slices and use them to line a 3- or 3½-quart ceramic baking dish fat side down. (The skin side sticks.) Place the pieces of duck confit on top.
- 9 Pick out and discard the leek and bundle of celery from the beans. With a slotted spoon, transfer the favas to the baking dish, leaving the cooking juices in the casserole. Skim the fat off the juices and taste for seasoning; there will probably be no need for salt. Pour enough of the juices over the duck and favas to cover. Reserve the remaining juices. Loosely cover the baking dish with foil and set in the preheated oven.
- 10 Bake for 20 minutes. Spoon off all the fat that rises to the top. Add enough of the reserved cooking juices to keep the favas moist. Bake for 40 minutes longer. Remove the foil and bake, uncovered, until a crust forms on top, about 30 minutes. Serve hot.

NOTES TO THE COOK

- The confit is salty and will salt the dish sufficiently.
- If you cannot obtain ventrèche or pancetta, substitute lean fresh pork side or belly; blanch it in a large pot of boiling water for 10 minutes. Rinse, drain, dry, and cut into small dice.



CASSOULET IN THE STYLE OF TOULOUSE

→→ *Cassoulet de Toulouse*

SERVES 10 TO 12

THIS IS THE RECIPE given to me by Pierrette Lejanou. The addition of walnut oil at the last moment brightens the taste of the beans.

Begin preparations two days before you plan to serve the cassoulet.

1 pound boneless pork shoulder, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 12 chunks

1½ pounds fresh ham hock or pig's knuckles, cracked by the butcher

¾ pound fresh pork skin with ¼-inch layer of hard fat attached

Salt and freshly ground pepper

2 pounds dried white beans, such as Tarbais, Lingots, or cannellini, rinsed and picked over to remove any grit

½ cup fat from confit or rendered duck fat

2 medium onions, chopped

3 small carrots, peeled and cut into thin rounds

½ pound ventrèche or pancetta, or blanched lean salt pork, in one piece, about 1¼ inches thick

1 whole head of garlic, unpeeled, plus

4 small cloves garlic, peeled

1 large plum tomato, peeled or 1 tablespoon sun-dried tomato paste

2 quarts unsalted chicken stock (storebought or homemade—page 405)

Herb bouquet: 4 sprigs parsley, 2 sprigs thyme, 1 imported bay leaf, and 3 small celery ribs tied together with string

6 confit of duck legs (such as Duck Legs Confit Cooked in a Pouch, pages 198–200), drumsticks and thighs separated, or substitute 12 confit of duck wings

¼ pound fresh hard pork fat or blanched fat salt pork

1 pound Toulouse sausages, fresh garlic-flavored pork sausages, or Confit of Toulouse Sausages (page 298)

2 tablespoons fresh bread crumbs

2 tablespoons French walnut oil

1 Two days in advance, season the pork shoulder, fresh ham hock or pig's knuckles, and the pork skin moderately with salt and pepper. Place in an earthenware or glass dish, cover, and refrigerate overnight. Soak the beans overnight in enough water to cover by at least 2 inches.

2 The following day, simmer the pork skin in water to cover until it is supple, 10 to 20 minutes. Drain, roll up the strip, and tie it with string.

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3 Dry the cubes of pork shoulder with paper towels. In an 8- or 9-quart flameproof casserole, heat the duck fat over moderately high heat. Add the pork shoulder and lightly brown on all sides. Add the onions and carrots and sauté, stirring, until the onions are soft and golden, about 5 minutes. Add the ham hock or pig's knuckles and the whole piece of ventrèche or pancetta. Allow these meats to brown a little around the edges, turning the pieces occasionally. Add the whole head of garlic, and the tomato or tomato paste; cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the stock, bundle of pork skin, and herb bouquet. Bring to a boil; cover, reduce the heat to low, and simmer the ragout for 1½ hours.

4 When the ragout has cooked for 1 hour, drain the beans and put them into a large saucepan, cover with fresh water, and slowly bring to a boil. Skim, and simmer for a few minutes, then drain and immediately add the beans to the simmering ragout. Continue simmering for up to 2 hours, or until the beans are tender. (You can tell when the beans are done by removing one or two beans with a spoon and blowing on them—the skins will burst.) Let cool, then skim off all the fat that has risen to the top; reserve 2 tablespoons of this fat for finishing the cassoulet. Cover the pork ragout and beans and refrigerate overnight to develop the flavors.

5 The next day, steam the duck confit for 10 minutes to soften. As soon as the meat is cool enough to handle, pull it off the bones in large chunks.

6 Remove the ragout and beans from the refrigerator and bring to room temperature. Pick out the ham hock or pig's knuckles, pancetta, garlic head, and herb bouquet. Cut the meat from the ham hock or pig's knuckles into bite-size pieces, discarding bones and fatty parts. Cut the pancetta into 1-inch pieces, discarding the extraneous fat. Set all the meats aside. Press on the garlic to extract the pulp and set aside. Discard the garlic skins and herb bouquet.

7 In a food processor or electric blender, puree the pork fat or salt pork with the cooked and raw garlic and 1 cup water. Add this garlic puree to the ragout and beans and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove from the heat. Fold reserved meats into the ragout and beans.

8 Preheat the oven to 325°F. To assemble the cassoulet, remove the roll of pork skin from the ragout. Untie, cut the skin into 2-inch pieces, and use to line a 5½- or 6-quart ovenproof casserole, preferably earthenware, fat side down—the skin side sticks (see Note at right). Using a large slotted spoon or skimmer, add one half of the beans and pork shoulder. Scatter the duck confit on top of the pork and beans. Cover with the remaining beans and pork ragout. Taste the ragout cooking liquid and adjust the seasoning; there will probably be no need for salt. Pour just enough of the ragout liquid over the beans to cover them. Be sure there is at least 1 inch of “growing space” between the beans and the rim of the dish. Drizzle with the 2 tablespoons fat reserved in Step 4. Place the casserole in the oven and let cook for 1½ hours.



9 Prick the sausages and brown them under a hot broiler or in a skillet. Drain; cut larger sausages into 3- or 4-inch pieces.

10 Reduce the oven heat to 275°F. Gently stir up the skin that has formed on the beans. Place the sausages on top of the beans. Dust the bread crumbs on top of the beans and sausage. Bake the cassoulet for 1 more hour. The top crust should become a beautiful golden brown; if it isn't, turn on the broiler and carefully "toast" the top layer of beans, about 2 minutes. Transfer the cassoulet from the oven to a cloth-lined surface and let it rest 20 minutes. Drizzle with the walnut oil just before serving.

NOTES TO THE COOK

- Fresh pork rind is essential to enrich and flavor the beans. If only salted rind is available, do not include it in the first day's marinade.
- If you don't have a large enough earthenware or stoneware serving dish, substitute 2 smaller ones, such as the insert from a slow cooker or an ovenproof mixing bowl.

CONFIT OF TOULOUSE SAUSAGES AND DUCK COOKED WITH RED WINE-FLAVORED BEANS

→→ *Confits Dans les Haricots au Madiran*

SERVES 6 TO 8

MADIRAN IS A “BIG” red wine, deep in flavor and very dark in color. It is like a full-bodied hearty Syrah from the Rhône Valley or an earthy, old-vines Zinfandel. Although you may have heard that beans should not be cooked in wine or, for that matter, in any other acid, this unusual recipe given to me by André Daguin exploits that prohibition to great advantage. The beans cook very slowly and absorb the flavor of the wine, which loses its acidity on account of the long cooking, becoming mellow by the time the dish is fully cooked.

Be sure to note that the beans must soak overnight before you begin the recipe. A dish like this is better prepared ahead and reheated.

1 pound dried white beans such as Tarbais, Lingots, or cannellini, rinsed and picked over to remove any grit

6 pieces confit of Pekin or Muscovy duck (such as Duck Legs Confit Cooked in a Pouch, pages 198–200)

½ cup confit of duck fat or rendered duck fat

1 medium onions, chopped

6 garlic cloves, peeled

2 teaspoons tomato paste

4 cups full-bodied red wine, such as Madiran, Zindandel, or Syrah

Herb bouquet: 3 sprigs parsley, 1 sprig thyme, and 1 imported bay leaf tied together with string

4 cups unsalted chicken stock (storebought or homemade—page 405)

8 ounces unsmoked pork rind (can be cut from salt pork or fatback) or Confit of Pork Rinds (page 17)

Salt and freshly ground pepper

12 baby white onions (about ½ pound), peeled

1 tablespoon sugar

½ recipe Confit of Toulouse Sausages (page 298)

- 1 Put the beans in a large pot and cover with at least 2 inches of cold water. Let soak overnight.
- 2 Remove the confit from the refrigerator and let stand in a warm place to allow the fat to soften while you cook the beans.



- 3 In a 5-quart flameproof, nonreactive casserole, heat 1½ tablespoons of the duck fat from the confit. When very hot, add the chopped onions and whole garlic cloves. Stir in the tomato paste until the onions and garlic are a uniform pink color, then add the red wine and herb bouquet. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to moderately low, and simmer for 15 minutes.
- 4 Meanwhile, drain the beans and put them in a saucepan with enough tepid water to cover. Slowly bring to a boil. Boil for 5 minutes. In another saucepan, bring the stock to a boil. Drain the beans and immediately add to the simmering red wine. Pour in the boiling stock. Simmer, skimming, for 3 to 4 minutes.
- 5 Preheat the oven to 275°F. Soften the pork rind by simmering in water for 10 minutes. Drain, roll up, and tie with a string. Add to the beans.
- 6 Cover the casserole tightly and place in the oven. Bake for 3½ hours, or until the beans are tender and the wine has lost its acid taste. Season with salt and pepper.
- 7 In a medium skillet, cook the baby white onions in ½ cup water, covered, until almost tender, 6 minutes. Add the sugar and 1 teaspoon duck confit fat. Continue cooking over moderately high heat, stirring often, until all the water has evaporated and the onions begin to brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the heat.
- 8 Pull the confit meat off the bone. Discard the skin and any gristle. Cut the meat into bite-size pieces. Cut the Toulouse sausage into 1-inch lengths.
- 9 Raise the oven temperature to 350°F. To assemble the dish, remove the pork rind from the beans, cut into 2-inch pieces, and use to line a 3½-quart casserole, fat side down. Using a slotted spoon, cover with half the beans. Scatter the duck confit and sausage pieces over the beans. Spoon the baby onions on top. Add another layer of beans. Scatter any leftover pieces of pork rind on top. Pour the bean cooking liquid over all.
- 10 Return the dish to oven and bake, basting 3 or 4 times with the remaining ¼ cup duck confit fat, until the top crust becomes a beautiful mahogany brown, about 45 minutes. Serve directly from the dish.

CATALAN-STYLE SHOULDER OF LAMB WITH GARLIC AND WHITE BEANS

→ *Épaule d'Agneau à la Catalane (en Pistache)*

SERVES 8

THERE IS A SUPERB VERSION of cassoulet called *en pistache* in Catalan, as served in the central Pyrenees. If you like the combination of lamb and garlic—and who doesn't?—you will adore this dish.

Buy “choice” lamb rather than “prime”; it is less fatty, and lamb fat is not particularly appetizing. The method of cooking the lamb in its own juices with a small quantity of wine and aromatics was devised to bring out the true flavor of the meat. With the dish, pass a small bowl of pickled walnuts.

1 pound dried white beans, such as Tarbais or cannellini

3 to 3½ pounds boned lean shoulder of lamb, cut into 2-inch chunks

1 whole head of garlic plus 4 garlic cloves

Salt and freshly ground pepper

1 teaspoon sugar

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

10 ounces thick slices fatty pancetta or ventrèche, cut into ½-inch dice, any rind reserved

2 medium onions, chopped, plus 1 whole onion stuck with 2 whole cloves

1 cup dry white wine

3 tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped, or 1 can (14½ ounces) organic diced, peeled tomatoes

1 tablespoon tomato paste

½ ounce dried French cèpes, rinsed

1 wide strip of orange zest

2 carrots, sliced

Herb bouquet: 3 sprigs of parsley, 1 sprig of thyme, 1 imported bay leaf, and 2 celery leaves tied together with string

1 pound French or Italian garlic sausage or homemade Toulouse Sausage (page 298) flavored with a pinch each of ground cinnamon, ground cloves, dried marjoram, and ground cayenne

- 1 Put the beans in a large pot and cover with at least 2 inches of cold water. Let soak overnight.
- 2 The next day, trim off as much fat as possible from each cube of lamb. Peel the 4 cloves of garlic and cut each clove into slivers. With a small paring knife, make a slit in each piece of meat and insert a sliver of garlic. Rub the meat with a little salt and pepper and sprinkle very lightly with sugar so the lamb will have a nice brown glossy color when browned.



3 In a 3-quart flameproof casserole, heat the oil over high heat. Add the lamb in batches without crowding and brown lamb on all sides. Avoid too high a heat, but do sear the lamb cubes. As they are browned, transfer the pieces to a plate.

4 When all the lamb has been browned, wipe the fat out of the casserole and return to low heat. Add the pancetta cubes, cover, and cook for 5 minutes, shaking the casserole often to prevent sticking. Uncover, add the chopped onions, and cook gently, stirring once or twice, until soft and golden.

5 Pour in the wine and bring to a boil. Return the lamb pieces to the casserole along with any juices that have collected on the plate. Add the tomatoes, tomato paste, dried cèpes, and orange zest. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer, tightly covered, for 2 hours, or until the lamb is tender. Set aside, uncovered, to cool slightly. Skim off any fat that rises to the surface.

6 Drain and rinse the soaked beans. Put them in a 4- or 5-quart flameproof casserole. Add the carrots, onion stuck with cloves, pancetta rind if you have it, and herb bouquet. Add enough water just to cover and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pot and simmer for 1 hour. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and simmer for 30 minutes. Add the sausages, each pricked in several places, and simmer for 30 minutes longer. Remove and discard the onion stuck with cloves, and the herb bouquet.

7 Separate the head of garlic into cloves. Cook the garlic cloves in their skins in a small saucepan of water to cover for 10 minutes. Set aside and peel when cool enough to handle.

8 Preheat the oven to 325°F. Line a 5½-quart earthenware or stoneware bean pot with the rind, fat side down. Using a slotted spoon, transfer about one third of the beans to the pot, then add a layer of about half of the lamb. Cut the sausages into 8 slices and place them between the lamb chunks. Scatter the peeled garlic cloves on top. Cover with another layer of beans, add the remaining lamb, then the remaining beans. Pour all the meat cooking liquid over the beans and add enough of the bean cooking liquid just to cover. Bake, uncovered for 1 hour, or until a crust forms on the surface. Serve directly from the pot.

NOTES TO THE COOK

→ Parboiling the garlic cloves, then peeling and tossing them with the beans, makes for a pleasant surprise, since the peeled cloves and the white beans look alike.

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- You can make your own Catalan sausage for this dish by following the recipe for Toulouse Sausage and seasoning the meat with pinches of ground cinnamon, ground cloves, crumbled marjoram, and hot cayenne, while leaving out the nutmeg. Or substitute a mildly spicy Italian, Spanish, or Polish sausage.
- This dish can be prepared 1 day in advance. When ready to serve, poke holes in the bean crust, add ½ cup water, and reheat in 350°F oven for 30 minutes, or until hot throughout.

