

Alma's Roman Foods

(From www.romanmysteries.com)

I. VEGETABLES: Ostia is famous for its cabbages, but we also have carrots (white), turnips, red and white onions, radishes, celery, leeks, mushrooms, beets, sorrel, mallow, truffles, chard, chick peas, broad beans, gourds, squash, broccoli, watercress, chives, spinach, lettuce, watercress, chicory, rocket, endive, fennel, artichokes, thistle, asparagus, olives and garlic. We also eat the green 'tops' of butcher's broom, clematis, rue, purslane, mallow, wild radish and even thorn.

II. FRUIT: Ostia is famous for its melons but we also have figs, dates, apples, plums & prunes, pears, cherries, pomegranate, quince, grapes & raisins. More exotic are peaches, apricots and lemons. I have only seen an orange once, and I have never tasted one... they are extremely rare!

III. FISH & SEAFOOD: sole, bass, mackerel, sturgeon, tuna, turbot, red mullet, anchovies, sardines, shark, eels, oysters, clams, lobster, octopus & squid.

III. NUTS, GRAIN & PULSE: almonds, walnuts, pine nuts, hazelnuts, chestnuts, pistachio nuts, lentils, barley, wheat, spelt. Oh dear! I'm sure I've forgotten one or two...

V. MEAT & GAME: goat & kid, mutton & lamb, beef & veal, pork, rabbit, venison (deer), boar, chicken, geese, ducks, pigeons, quail, peacock, little songbirds and dormice. Very fiddly to prepare, those mice! And of course snails. Some people say that if you feed them on mint-flavoured milk you get minty snails. Personally I've never found that to work.

VI. DAIRY etc: goat, sheep and cow milk, yogurt, cream, soured cream, buttermilk, cheese, and eggs.

VII. SPICES & SEASONINGS: olive oil, sesame oil, vinegar, fish sauce, honey, salt, peppercorns, myrtle berries, garlic, lovage, oregano, chervil, marjoram, bay leaf, thyme, mint, sage, rue, coriander, caraway seed, mustard seed, chervil, chives, cumin, dill, aniseed, fennel, parsley, saffron, rose petals, bay leaves, grape leaves, mastic and whatever takes my fancy.

VIII. BEVERAGES: wine (watered down, of course), grape juice, pomegranate juice, barley water, cabbage juice, milk, buttermilk, and (rarely) beer.

VIII. SWEETS: I've seen pastries made with wheat, honey, nuts and cheese, stuffed dates, candied fruit. But I think it's healthiest to end your meal with fresh or dried fruit.

X. MEDICINAL HERBS: elderberry, rue, wild blackberry, purslane, knotgrass, plantain, parsley, wall herb, myrtle, apple mint, mallow, apple, sweet alyssum, bay leaf, lettuce, persian walnut, barley, fennel, cyclamen, chicory, camomile, red valerian, poppy tears, calamint and wormwood. Oh, and Jonathan recently came back from Rome and told me about ephedron, which is excellent for his asthma.

Recipes: (from Sixty Lessons in Beginning Latin)

Many ancient Roman recipes survive today. You can find them on the Internet by entering 'ancient roman recipes' into a search engine. Entering the name Apicius will also get you many recipes, since most of the complete surviving recipes are attributed to this cook. The recipe which follows is a two thousand year old one that Ollus might have followed preparing the dinner you have just read about. (Measurements and cooking specifics have been converted to terms for the modern kitchen in this and the following recipes.)

Spiced Honey Chicken

Ingredients:

- 8-12 pieces of chicken
- 1 cup of honey
- 1 tsp melted butter or olive oil
- 2 tsp basil
- 2 tsp cummin
- 2 tsp coriander
- 1 tsp orregano
- 1 tsp black pepper

Instructions:

Combine spices, honey, and oil or melted butter in a bowl. (In the case of modern honey, being well-sealed, the melted butter or olive oil may be eliminated if a glazed effect is desired. Warm honey to flowing if necessary.)

In formal Roman style, the meat should be removed from the bones and quartered. If this is not done, the chicken should be deeply scored.

Place the chicken in a lightly greased a well-lipped baking pan (or cake pan). Bake uncovered at 350 degrees for 25 to 45 minutes. (Time will vary according to whether the meat has been removed from the bone and whether white or dark meat is used.)

Serving Suggestions:

Fresh bread would be an obvious complement.

The Romans were extremely fond of seafood and "Apicius" supplies this recipe for large shrimp.

Egg-dressed Shrimp

Ingredients:

- 3 cups cooked and peeled large big shrimp
- 1 tsp green pepper
- 1 tblsp finely chopped fresh parsely
- 1/2 tsp ground celery seeds
- 2-3 tblsp vinegar
- 4 tblsp fermented fish sauce (or 1/2 tsp salt and 3 tblsp olive oil)
- 4-5 diced hard-boiled egg yolks

Cook and peel shrimp. Then grind together green pepper, celery seeds and parsley. Pour vinegar, fish sauce, and egg yolks over the ground ingredients and and mix thoroughly. Pour the resulting mixture over the shrimp and serve.

This might be done over a bed of rice, which was available from Egypt to Romans who could afford it. (It had been brought there from India by Alexander's men.)

The dishes above are clearly for the well to do. Below is a recipe for a soup that more common people might make:

Barley Leek Soup

Ingredients:

8 ounces of pearl barley

2 ounces of red lentils

2 leeks

2 tsp dried dill tops

4 fluid ounces of olive oil

4 tsp of white wine vinegar

Soak the barley and lentils overnight in water, drain. Dice the leek very finely. Place all ingredients in a saucepan with 2 pints of water. Bring to a boil and simmer, gradually adding another 2 pints of water or a little more. Salt to preference.

The Romans also pickled many vegetables besides our customary cucumbers. To do this, you need to use a mixture of 1 part distilled water to 2 parts wine vinegar. Add 2 tablespoons of salt for each quart of liquid. Spice measurements of the time are uncertain, but besides our customary dill and garlic cloves, the Romans appear to have used oregano, cumin, corriander, and basil. Among the vegetables they pickled were cauliflower, asparagus, mushrooms, green onions, and cucumbers, of course. Romans also pickled cabbage and lettuce, though these may not appeal to modern tastes. Your pickling container should be almost filled with the mixed cut vegetables, then filled to the brim with the pickling liquid, salt, and spices. Seal the container tightly and allow it to sit in a cool place for at least 2 weeks.

The following is an example of a simple Roman dessert.

Custard

Ingredients:

2 cups milk (goat's, if available in a local healthfood store)

2-3 tbs. honey

5 eggs

Mix the milk, honey, and egg vigorously in a mixing bowl until smooth. Place in baking dish and cook gently in an oven at 325 F or 170 C for one hour. (An inserted knife should have nothing stuck to it.) Refrigerate and serve when cooled. Apicius recommends adding a dash of pepper to the mixture before baking but modern cooks and most Romans may have preferred a dash of nutmeg if it was available.

Pulchra's Roman Beauty Tips

1. Every Roman girl would like pale skin like mine. The best way to keep your skin fair is to stay out of the sun or use a parasol. Some ladies use chalk powder but that is terribly obvious.
2. To give a natural blush to your cheeks, take a wine-cup with some dried wine in the bottom. Rub your finger gently in the powdered dregs, then brush lightly across your cheekbone. Use red-currant juice to stain your lips an attractive pink.
3. For mysterious eyes, use a little kohl. This is a very exotic, charcoal grey powder from far-away lands. On your make-up palette, mix the kohl with a little water and use a tiny brush to outline your eyes. Then smudge gently for a natural look.
4. For luminous eyes, brush some powdered stibium across the upper lid of your eye. Be careful! The skin is very delicate here.
5. To tint your hair red, dye it with a mixture of henna and red wine. To lighten dark hair, use a mixture of vinegar and lye. Of course if the gods have blessed you with golden hair like mine, don't tamper with it!
6. Use pumice to smooth the rough skin on your heels. The best time is at the baths, between the massage and hairdresser.
7. You can also use pumice to keep your legs smooth and hair-free. Rub the stone briskly over your legs while your skin is dry. Some people suggest smearing your legs with rabbit blood to keep the hair from growing back but I think that's repulsive.
8. Oil of lemon is a very delicious fragrance and quite subtle. Use it on those special occasions when you really want to impress someone; a dark eyed boy with curly hair, for example...
9. After your bath, when you've scraped off the oily dead skin, towel yourself briskly and re-apply a lightly scented oil to your face and body. Your skin will look dewy fresh and you'll smell nice, too.

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Online Roman Mystery Games: www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/romanmysteries