

# *The Humble Egg*

*Is there any food more versatile,  
nourishing or comforting?*



A classic French  
omelette is tender  
and delicate

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You could say eggs are nature's ultimate fast food. With eggs on hand, you're only minutes away from a scrumptious, healthy meal.

The delicate flavour of eggs provides a blank canvas for just about every food imaginable, so don't limit your egg repertoire to just breakfast. You'd be amazed how a simple egg can elevate everyday food into something special. Perch a perfectly poached egg atop ratatouille, lentils, pastas, rice, salad greens, baked potatoes or a mushroom ragout and you'll know what I mean.

The French are particularly imaginative when it comes to eggs. While in France last summer, I enjoyed eggs baked in velvety cream; poached eggs wrapped in smoked salmon and served with shellfish; and tiny soft-boiled eggs cleverly concealed in soufflés. Beyond quiche, custards and crêpes, eggs were served alongside vegetables and topped with vibrant pestos, salsas and luscious sauces (not just a conventional hollandaise sauce). Who else but the French would serve *œufs en meurette*, eggs poached in red wine?

However you enjoy your eggs, start with the freshest possible. I prefer to use local, free-range eggs for their superior taste and striking orange yolks. When eggs are fresh and delicious, the rest is easy.

I've included three classic recipes sure to please every egg lover: a traditional French omelette; eggs en cocotte, eggs baked with spinach, mushrooms and cheese; and the ultimate egg custard—velvety *crème brûlée*.

A classic French omelette has a pale exterior and a soft, creamy centre. No resemblance to the ubiquitous omelette served in many restaurants and hotels. Nothing wrong with the grand-slam variety bursting with every conceivable filling, but it lacks the subtlety and, well, sophistication of the classic French omelette.

**“You could say eggs are nature's ultimate fast food.”**

Preparing a classic omelette is a simple feat in principle but requires a little finesse. If you're up for a challenge, and the most delicate omelette imaginable, you'll want to give it a try. Like all cooking techniques, there's no trick to getting it right—perfection comes with patience, practice and a decent non-stick pan. An omelette is little more than soft, lightly scrambled eggs, delicately folded when just set. The entire process takes about a minute. When you've done it right, pat yourself on the back because mastering a classic omelette is considered by many as a test of a chef's true worth.

Eggs en cocotte, or eggs baked in ramekins, is the ultimate comfort food and requires no special skill. Simply line small, ovenproof containers with your favourite filling, crack an egg on top, drizzle with cream and bake until done. My recipe calls for a filling of spinach, mushrooms and cheese, but there is no limit to what you can pair with eggs: roasted tomatoes, your favourite cheese, peppers, chicken livers, potatoes, smoked salmon, or leeks to name a few.

Silky, elegant *crème brûlée* is the prima donna of all custards. Made of egg yolks and cream, *crème brûlée* is a rich and creamy dessert with an enticing golden sugar crust made for shattering. My recipe is infused with luscious caramel, but you can flavour yours with just about anything: rosemary, tea, ginger, citrus, coffee, coconut and chocolate, to name a few variations. *Crème brûlée* makes for ideal entertaining because it can be made days in advance. And what's more irresistible than serving dessert with a blowtorch? I prefer my burly plumber's torch to the fancy gourmet torches. It's fast, efficient and makes for great dinner conversation.

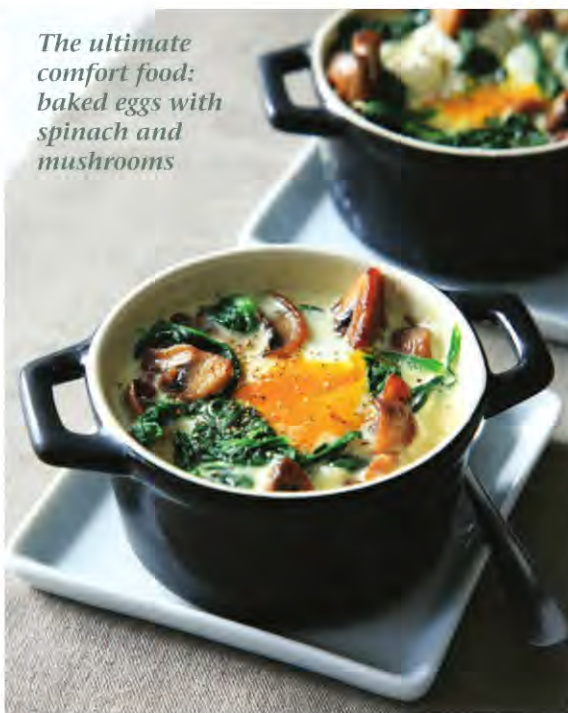
The next time you're looking for inspiration in the kitchen, look no further than your humble egg. It's your indispensable kitchen ally.

#### WINE PAIRING

Eggs + sparkling wine = brilliance. Here the contrast in pairings (the humblest of foods plus the grandest of wines) works magic. Pick a brut (dry) sparkling wine.

For the Caramel Crème Brûlée: One of BC's late harvest Rieslings would suit – sweet pear and shining acidity. —Treve Ring

*The ultimate comfort food: baked eggs with spinach and mushrooms*



*Luscious crème brûlée with a caramel twist*



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## Classic French Omelette

Makes one omelette.

An omelette is best made with clarified butter because it can withstand higher cooking temperatures without burning. The process for making clarified butter is simple: melt one pound of unsalted butter in a small saucepan over low heat until a froth appears. Remove the froth with a spoon and discard. (The milk solids will sink to the bottom of the pan.) Slowly pour the melted butter, now pure butterfat, through a strainer lined with cheesecloth into a clean container, leaving the milk solids and water residue behind. I keep a supply of clarified butter on hand in the fridge because it's so practical for sautéing foods and it has a much longer shelf life than fresh butter.

This omelette requires a bit of dexterity. You must use both hands: one to hold a spatula and continuously stir the eggs once they hit the pan, and the other to hold the handle of the pan and shake the skillet back and forth. Keeping the eggs moving prevents large curds from forming. The goal is an omelette that is smooth, soft and creamy in the centre and just cooked on the exterior, without browning. The result is a tender, delicate, soft omelette. The entire process takes about a minute so moving quickly is key.

- 7 or 8-inch non-stick saucepan or skillet with shallow sloping sides
- 3 large eggs
- 1 Tbsp clarified butter or a combination of butter and vegetable oil
- 1 Tbsp finely chopped mixed herbs (parsley, tarragon and chives)
- Pinch of kosher salt

Heat a skillet over medium-high heat and add the clarified butter (or butter and oil).

While the pan is heating, whisk the eggs in a small bowl. There should be no traces of egg white left. Add the mixed herbs and season with kosher salt.

Pour the whisked eggs into the hot pan and stir the eggs continuously (with a non-stick spatula), while simultaneously shaking the pan back and forth so that the runny eggs fill in any gaps or holes on the bottom of the pan. When the eggs are almost set, turn off the heat and evenly smooth out the omelette with a spatula. Run the spatula around all sides of the omelette to loosen it from the pan. Grasping the handle, tip the pan to encourage the omelette to slide to one side of the pan. Using a spatula, gently fold one-third of the omelette onto itself. Then, holding the pan over a plate, slide and roll the omelette onto the plate so that it lands with the seam side down.

Brush with a bit of butter if desired.

## Eggs en Cocotte

Makes six servings.

- 1/4 cup butter, melted
- 1/2 cup freshly shaved or grated Parmesan cheese (optional)
- 6 large fresh, organic eggs
- Salt and pepper
- Cream for drizzling over eggs
- 6 oven-proof ramekins
- Kettle of boiling water
- Straight-sided pan (or baking dish)

If you wish, you can line the saucepan, or baking dish, with a non-slip shelf liner or silicone baking mat (cut to size) to prevent the ramekins from sliding when transporting them to and from the oven. Alternatively, a tea towel does the same trick (with a little more bulk). Baking mats and shelf liners can be found in most kitchenware or hardware stores.

### Suggested fillings:

Fillings must be well-seasoned to hold up to this simple dish. Taste each filling; it should be seasoned and tasty *before* adding it to the ramekin.

- Chopped roasted tomatoes
- Diced and sautéed mushrooms and shallots
- Creamed spinach
- Cooked ham with gruyère cheese
- Cooked spicy sausage with tomatoes
- Shrimp and crabmeat
- Mild blue cheese and sautéed leeks

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Brush each ramekin with the melted butter. Place a large spoonful of one of the



suggested fillings (or a combination of fillings) in each ramekin. Top with a bit of shaved parmesan cheese, if desired. Make a slight indentation in the filling with the back of a spoon to make room for the egg. Break an egg on top of each mixture and season with salt and pepper. Drizzle the egg with a bit of cream.

Place the ramekins in the lined saucepan (or baking dish) and move the pan onto a counter, nearest the stove. Carefully pour the boiling water into the pan, being careful not to pour water into the ramekins. The water should come halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Cover the pan with a lid or a sheet of foil and carefully transfer the pan to the oven.

Bake just long enough to set the egg white, about 9 minutes (the yolk should be runny or very soft). If the egg white is almost but not quite firm, remove the pan from the oven (keeping the lid on) and check after an additional minute. The residual heat will continue to cook the egg.

Remove the ramekins from the pan and drain off any excess butter. Serve the eggs in the ramekins, hot from the oven, with hot buttered toast.

## Caramel Crème Brûlée

*Serves eight.*

This recipe is easy to make, but it takes a little planning and organization. Have your equipment ready and take note that crème brûlée needs to be chilled a few hours before serving. Fortunately, the custard can be prepared well in advance and stored in the refrigerator for up to three days. The sugar topping, however, must be torched just before serving. You can use any type of ovenproof dish, but I prefer wide shallow containers because they offer a larger surface to brûlée.

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|--|---|
| 3 cups 35% cream   | baking dish wide enough to hold the ramekins                                |
| 1/2 cup white sugar, plus extra sugar for the brûlée topping | Small (1 to 2 quart) saucepan for the cream                                 |
| 1/2 cup water  | Deep 4-quart saucepan for the sugar   |
| 8 large free-range egg yolks                                 | Fine-mesh strainer placed over a mixing bowl that can hold 4 cups of liquid |
| You will need:   | Aluminum foil   |
| 8 small ramekins or shallow ovenproof containers             | Blowtorch for sugar topping   |
| Shallow, straight-sided saucepan or                          |   |

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Pour the cream into a small saucepan and heat until it just begins to boil. Remove from the heat and set aside.

In a deep saucepan, add the sugar to the water and mix well. Cook the sugar on medium-high heat until it melts and turns light amber, approximately 7 to 10 minutes. Once the sugar starts to change colour, you must be attentive and be ready to remove it immediately from the heat; beautiful amber can turn black and smoky in a heartbeat. This is not a time to multi-task: do not answer the phone! Slowly stir the warm cream into the hot caramelized sugar. Be careful—as soon as the cream hits the caramel, the mixture will rise and bubble madly.

In a large bowl, whisk the egg yolks. Add a small amount of the hot caramel cream and whisk until incorporated. Add the rest of the caramel cream in a slow stream, whisking until combined. Pour this mixture through the fine-mesh strainer placed over a bowl. (The mixture is strained to ensure a smooth custard. Sometimes the hot cream will cook traces of yolk, leaving your custard grainy.)

Bring a kettle of water to a boil.

Place the empty ramekins in the shallow, straight-sided saucepan or baking dish and pour the custard into the ramekins. Carefully pour the boiling water into the pan approximately half way up the ramekins, being careful not to pour water into the custard. Cover the pan with a sheet of aluminum foil and poke a few holes into the surface of foil to allow some of the steam to escape.

Bake approximately 50 minutes, until the custards are barely set; the centres will jiggle slightly but will set further as they cool. If you use shallow containers, the baking time will be reduced to approximately 25 minutes.

Refrigerate until completely cool, at least three hours. Just before serving, generously dust each ramekin with white sugar. Tilt the ramekin from side to side to disperse the sugar. Using your blowtorch, carefully torch the sugar with the flame until the custards are evenly browned.



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