



THE MONET  
COOKBOOK  
*Recipes from Giverny*



# Leseprobe

Florence Gentner

## The Monet Cookbook Recipes from Giverny

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# Foreword



While Claude Monet's paintings conjure up images of light and mesmerizing reflections, art historians of the period reveal the dogged determination that lay behind his Impressionist works. Furthermore, the artist's own letters disclose his tendency to worry. Those who sat down with him to enjoy a good meal, however, spoke only of his evident pleasure and delight in sharing. Monet spearheaded a movement in painting that turned contemporary ideas of art upside down and set passions raging, but during his life, at both the worst points and the best, he found sheer joy through food. Wherever he ate, be it at the family dinner table, in a country inn or in a renowned Parisian restaurant, he appreciated simple dishes made of fresh ingredients and prepared according to very basic yet authentic principles.

Monet's life was impacted by frequent upheavals but, fortunately, things stabilized when he moved to Giverny at the age of forty-two. The recipes prepared in his Giverny kitchen epitomize the ways of a social and welcoming middle-class family. Born into comfortable circumstances, Monet was probably brought up with the fine foods of Normandy. Certainly, this would explain how he developed an abiding taste for good food, a preference he maintained throughout his youth as he wandered the countryside in search of beautiful subjects alongside his friends who answered to the names of Renoir, Bazille and Sisley. Guy de Maupassant might well have been thinking of them when he described what he called "living the life of a dauber" in his novel *Miss Harriett*, published in 1883: "Roaming about with a pack on one's back from inn to inn, on the pretext of making landscape studies from nature [ ...] stopping here and there

when a stream takes one's fancy, or one catches a delightful whiff of potatoes frying at a hotelier's door."

The first years of Impressionism were by no means easy; its artists were scarcely in a position to indulge in extravagant dining. That said, many of the early works include beautiful still lifes of gleaming plates and glasses on a table at the Fournaise Restaurant or on a white cloth spread on a forest floor. Impressionist artists were drawn to festive occasions and holidays. Writing in the early 12th century, René Gimpel commented, "The Impressionists show their particular talent and attain the summit of their art when they paint our French Sundays." Later on, Monet especially loved the Sundays when he hosted in his yellow dining room at Giverny surrounded by people he truly enjoyed.

Monet did not prepare the steaming dishes that were brought to his table. Although he appreciated excellent food, he was not a cook himself, unlike his charismatic friend Alexandre Dumas, whom he valued as much for his culinary talents as for his friendship. Monet made sure that he ate well and that he could offer his guests the very best from his kitchen garden. He amassed a talented team of people, including meticulous cooks and diligent gardeners. When Monet was satisfied with his work and his company, he displayed a happiness that was infectious.

Monet's son-in-law, Jean-Pierre Hoschedé, was a part of Monet's everyday life and he left a detailed account of what went on at Giverny. The recipes used in the kitchen there suggest a carefully balanced lifestyle, which Monet deliberately maintained with his

second wife, Alice. Leaving him to get on with his painting, Alice took charge of the household, overseeing the staff, tending to the large family, huge house and enormous garden. In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a proliferation of books on household management written for women. Alongside recipes, these books featured practical advice on everyday family life that often sounded like moral precepts.

Alice may well have read Madame Millet-Robinet's *Domestic Economy*, including a section called "The Duties, Tasks and Pleasures of Country Women." Published in 1853, the book was divided into chapters with practical titles such as "Establishing Order," "Paying Servants," and "How to Deal with Financial Matters." Alice's early life with her first husband was one of luxury, but she faced difficult times when he went bankrupt. Alice found herself having to bravely master all of these household matters. Once Impressionism was properly recognized, Alice and her family could afford a comfortable, even opulent, lifestyle; however, she never expressed any desire to exchange the simple, well-heeled life they had at Giverny for anything more ostentatious.

Claude Monet simply could not imagine anywhere better than Giverny. Here in Normandy, in his property close to the Seine, in his garden that he recreated in the colors of his paintings, he divided his time between work and family. We know from his correspondence how difficult and painful his work could be. "This devilish painting tortures me," he wrote in 1890 to his great friend Berthe Morisot. The letters he wrote to his wife whenever he travelled away from Giverny reveal the levels of distress he felt until he

managed to capture a precise flash of light on the sea or a cliff or a river, and his intense relief when he was at last successful.

When he was happy, Monet could light up family life at Giverny. He would start singing passages from *Carmen* or every time he heard anyone mention his driver, Sylvain Besnard, by his first name, he would burst out with, "Sweet hope, Sylvain told me: I love you ..." from the comic opera *Les Dragons de Villars* that premiered at the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris. Monet would issue invitations, entertain his friends, whisk his family off on trains, on boats, in cars. His daughter-in-law, Blanche, recalled one boat trip on the *Normandie* that lasted several days, during which they joined friends from Le Havre to Cherbourg and back to witness the arrival of Tsar Nicholas II.

Monet's friends, members of his family and visitors to Giverny would all be charmed by the painter's generosity and his attentiveness to others. At dinner in his dining room, he would display a healthy appetite, doing justice to his cook's chosen recipes. Some of these meals were for everyday, while others would appear on special occasions and holidays like Christmas, or be served at one of the warm wedding celebrations held at Giverny. Without a doubt, Alice could be proud of her organizational skills, but if her management of menus, provisions, garden, staff and eight children sometimes went unrecognized, one can only hope that she had read Madame Millet-Robinet's book's concluding words meant for mothers: "A life that is well-filled is all that is needed and it will slip by at a speed which gives it a charm beyond words."

Florence Gentner

# “I have always been a hearty eater, and it has never done me any harm.”



The recipes that were prepared in Claude Monet's house at Giverny were typical for a middle-class family. No doubt, Monet's lifestyle mirrored his childhood in Le Havre where his Paris-born parents moved with their two sons in 1845 when Claude was five. Monet spoke little about his early years, sharing only snippets to a handful of writers and journalists towards the end of his life. From these recollections we get a picture of an “innately unruly”<sup>1</sup> child growing up in a well-to-do environment. Monet's son-in-law, Jean-Pierre Hoschedé, remembered Monet declaring time and again that “friends are worth more than family”<sup>2</sup>. It was a view that most likely sprang from the resistance he got from his father when, at the age of nineteen, he announced that he wanted to go off and learn to be a painter. This experience may also explain his reluctance to share his early memories with his curious contemporaries.

By contrast, there is ample testimony from people who knew the adult Monet and who were privileged to sit down with him to a well-appointed table. What is abundantly clear is that he was a man with a predilection for the finest things, even at difficult periods in his life. In fact, it was a preference he never sought to deny: “I have always been a hearty eater, and it has never done me any harm,”<sup>3</sup> he told René Gimpel. His early exposure to the rich culinary traditions of Normandy almost certainly left him with a regard for fresh produce and instilled in him values shared by the gourmands of the day: a respect for quality ingredients and the pleasures of entertaining, a desire to broaden one's social circles, and an opportunity to give and exchange. For the generation of connoisseurs who flourished in the second half of the nine-

teenth century, gastronomy was about good taste and a specific culture. Cookbooks were popular at this time, and they all described the mental attitude one needed to adopt in order to be a successful cook.

### **An Approach to Life and Living**

*The Physiology of Taste* by Brillat-Savarin, first published in 1826 and reissued in 1848, opened with thirty “Meditations” on topics such as the “Senses” and the “Power of Taste.” In the introduction, the writer and journalist Alphonse Karr declared that Brillat-Savarin had “brought a seasoning of wit, good humour, and good taste to a good dinner ...” In *The Royal Cookery Book*, which was published in 1867 and set out to cover the “bases of domestic and high-class cookery,” Jules Gouffé highlighted “the notions of art, science, taste without which it is impossible to be a true cook.” This was a way of cooking that stressed organizational skills and economy. In *The Universal Cook*, Alphonse Karr wrote the preface plus an appendix devoted to “The Art of Using Leftovers.”

Claude Monet may not have left us any specific accounts or memories of the food of his childhood, but we can readily picture the wealthy environment, which was both conventional and cultured. On the one hand, his childhood was marked by his father's conservatism, and on the other hand by his mother's passion for music, theatre, poetry and drawing. Monet's father, Claude Adolphe Monet, had left Paris for Le Havre to be near his half-sister Marie Jeanne Lecadre, whose husband ran a wholesale business where Monet's father was later employed. According to a friend of the family, Théophile Béguin Billecoeq, the Monet home in the Ingouville district of Le

Havre was large enough to accommodate visitors from Paris. Claude's mother, Louise Justine Monet, enjoyed entertaining local dignitaries at her table and in her elegantly furnished sitting room.

### **Meals with Aunt Lecadre**

Following Louise Justine's death in 1857, Aunt Lecadre became an influential figure in the young Monet's life. An artist herself, she sensed Monet's talent and gave her nephew the run of her studio. In 1862, Aunt Lecadre hosted a meal in Sainte-Adresse at the house called "Le Coteau," whose beautiful garden full of flowers steeped in sunlight was the subject of Monet's painting, *The Garden at Sainte-Adresse*. Sainte-Adresse was a lively seaside resort made fashionable by the ubiquitous journalist Alphonse Karr. When Marie Jeanne invited her nephew to visit, he brought along the Dutch painter Jongkind and Jongkind's mistress. We know from a letter Marie Jeanne wrote to her friend Amand Gautier that she was shocked by Jongkind's unpolished ways: "I confess to my shame that I was repelled by his eccentric appearance and his reputation for loose living<sup>4</sup>."

By contrast, Marie Jeanne Lecadre was delighted by the sophistication displayed by Frédéric Bazille whom she entertained two years later at the same table in Sainte-Adresse, once again in the company of her beloved nephew. After his visit, Frédéric wrote to his mother, "I had lunch with Monet's family. They are delightful people, and have a delightful residence at Sainte-Adresse near Le Havre where life is just the same as it is at Méric<sup>5</sup>." In other words, it was no different from Bazille's own life on his vineyard estate at Méric, near Montpellier, which he captured in his

famous group portrait entitled *Family Gathering*. The painting perfectly depicts the educated, middle-class environment into which Cézanne, Bazille and Monet were all born. What's more, it represents the standards of the time and the fact that the artists were pressured by their respective parents to ignore their artistic passions and urged to study law, medicine and commerce.

### **"Innately unruly"**

From an early age, Claude Monet cut a rebellious figure. "Secondary school was always like prison to me, and I could never resign myself to being there, even for four hours a day, when the sun was so enticing, the sea so beautiful, and it was so good to be outdoors, running along the cliffs or splashing about in the water,"<sup>6</sup> he confided one day to Thiébault-Sisson. At school, which he attended sporadically, he didn't make much of an impression except as a caricaturist, poking fun at his teachers for the amusement of his peers. With this talent he gained quite the reputation in Le Havre and was able to earn some money after he left school around the age of sixteen. His "caricatures" of local dignitaries caught the eye of a framer in the city who exhibited them in his shop window and paid Monet on commission.

Monet's caricatures attracted Eugène Boudin, the quintessential painter of sunlit beaches and figures moving about in suits and crinolines. As a youth, Monet stubbornly rejected all forms of advice, but he took in Boudin's kindly words: "Study, learn to look, paint and draw. Do some landscapes. It is so beautiful, the sea and sky, animals, people and trees just as nature made them, with their characters, their true

essence of being, in the light, within the atmosphere, just as things are<sup>7</sup>.” Eventually, the young Monet conceded. He agreed to accompany the celebrated painter of vast skies and scudding clouds on one of his open-air painting trips.

In 1859 it took all of Aunt Lecadre’s efforts to convince Monet’s father that her talented nephew should go off to Paris to learn to be a painter. Monet was able to submit a convincing portfolio (including *A View of Streets*) to the city of Le Havre’s selection committee in support of his application for an endowment. His plea for financial assistance was turned down, however, and he set off for Paris to embark on his new career armed with only the money he had earned from his caricatures and some letters of introduction to painters his aunt knew. Once in Paris, he visited the official Salon and went to see academically trained masters whose teachings he rejected. He wrote regularly to Aunt Lecadre and Eugène Boudin.

### **Memories of Normandy**

Claude Monet’s rebellious childhood almost certainly gave him an abiding love of Normandy. He returned again and again with pleasure, to set up his easel on the cliffs of Étretat, Pourville, Trouville, Varengeville and Honfleur. He confided to Gustave Geffroy: “I have stayed loyal to the sea in front of which I grew up<sup>8</sup>.” He was particularly entranced by the port of Le Havre in the early morning, just as his close friend, Maupassant, was captivated by the sight of its lighthouses: “... on each of the jetties there were two more lights, offspring of these giant ones, marking the entrance to Le Havre; and over there, on the other side of the Seine, there were others

still ... staring with nothing other than the steady unchanging mechanical movement of their eyelids, “This is me. I am Trouville, I am Honfleur, I am the river at Pont-Audemer.<sup>9</sup>”

Like so many others, both Monet and Maupassant associated the beauties of Normandy with the pleasures of eating. Several restaurants in the region remained firmly implanted in Monet’s memory, including the Ferme Saint-Siméon at Honfleur, which he frequented with Bazille, Boudin, Courbet and Jongkind. There was also the Belle Ernestine at Saint-Jouin-Bruneval, not far from Étretat, where he dined with Maupassant himself and with Alexandre Dumas, another celebrated gourmand of the day who always ordered Ernestine Aubourg’s “prawn stuffing<sup>10</sup>.”

Among the other culinary delights that he appreciated throughout his life, his letters single out lobster, duck, cider and fruit from the orchards of Normandy. Writing in his own inimitable style, Thadée Natanson recounts one of the few stories Monet shared about his youth, which involved eating oysters with his great friend Courbet and another friend, on a “golden morning” in a fish shop in the Halles district. “Of the three, Monet drooled most in anticipation of the treat in store, his appetite at twenty being “... more voracious than discerning (as it would later become).” Courbet gleefully ordered the sellers to start opening oysters. But they did not stop after a mere three or four dozen ... carrying on far beyond that for a whole hour, wearing the oyster sellers out and leaving them understandably exhausted: the three of them between them had worked their way through at least twenty dozen ...<sup>11</sup>”



## The Principles of Good Cooking

Since Claude Monet was heavily influenced by the region where he grew up, he was happy to rediscover it much later when he moved to Giverny. In the warm environment that he created there, he embraced a way of living and an approach to entertaining that he remembered from his childhood, where the quality of the company and the care taken in preparing the food were equally important. Monet's philosophy was similar to what mine engineer and food connoisseur, Henri Babinski, known as "Ali-Bab," described in the introduction to *Practical Gastronomy*, first published in 1907: "One thinks ahead to the cooking; one discusses the menus in advance, one goes for each ingredient to suppliers one knows and who know themselves what they are doing; finally the preparation of every dish must be the object of the minutest care."

When it came to the quality of ingredients, Henri Babinski believed that French culinary art reached its peak in the second half of the nineteenth century. He ascribed this to a number of factors: "the richness of the soil which yielded exquisite produce; the skill of the farmers, gardeners and stockbreeders who developed the most wonderfully selected strains, in both the vegetable and the animal kingdoms; the art of the cheese and preserve makers, and the practice of extracting and preparing juices and purées which are the fundamental bases of good cooking; and finally the unrivalled quality of our wines, which complement them." In short, for a painter who loved the finest things, deciding to live in the Normandy countryside made perfect sense.

Like the testimony of Monet's guests at Giverny, the collection of Monet's favorite recipes proves that the painter was a consummate master of the art of convivial living. Monet famously quipped, "Beyond painting and gardening, I am good for nothing."<sup>12</sup>

In retrospect, he might have added that he was a gifted host, giving people he appreciated warm and delectable moments to savor.

1. Claude Monet, *My History*, collected by Thiébauld-Sisson (published in *Le Temps*, November 26, 1900), Paris, L'Échoppe, 1998.
2. Jean-Pierre Hoschedé, *Claude Monet, ce mal connu. Intimité familiale d'un demi-siècle à Giverny de 1883 à 1926*, Genf, Pierre Cailler, 1960.
3. René Gimpel, *Diary of an Art Dealer* (1963), Paris, Hermann, 2011.
4. Marie Jeanne Lecadre, letter to Armand Gautier, October 30, 1862, former Blaise Gaudier collection.
5. Frédéric Bazille, letter to his mother, June 1, 1864, in F. Bazille, *Letters*, collected, edited and annotated by Didier Vatuone, Montpellier, Les Presses du Languedoc, 1992.
6. C. Monet, *op. cit.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. Gustave Geffroy, *Claude Monet, His Life and Work* (1924), edited and annotated by Claudie Jurain, Paris, Macula, 1987.
9. Guy de Maupassant, *Pierre and Jean* (1887), Paris, J'ai lu, "Librio littérature" series, 2014, *Posthumous notes by Blanche Hoschedé-Monet*, in J.-P. Hoschedé, *op. cit.*
10. *Posthumous notes by Blanche Hoschedé-Monet*, in J.-P. Hoschedé, *op. cit.*
11. Thadée Natanson, *Painted in their Turn*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1948.
12. Maurice Kahn, "From Day to Day: Claude Monet's Garden," *Le Temps*, June 7, 1904.



# Tomato Soup



4 large ripe tomatoes 1 kg (2.2 lbs)  
1 small onion  
1 bay leaf  
2 sprigs parsley  
1 cube beef stock

1 pinch baking soda  
1 tsp superfine sugar  
1 tbsp butter  
1 tbsp flour  
Salt to taste

❖ *Serves 4 Preparation time: 15 minutes Cooking time: 25 minutes*

Scald the tomatoes and then immediately run them under cold water and peel. Cut them into quarters, discarding the tough cores, and put in a saucepan. Crumble the stock cube over the tomatoes, add 100 ml ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) of water, the parsley, bay leaf, baking soda and sugar. Mix well, cover and leave to bubble gently for 15 minutes or until the tomatoes are cooked.

Peel the onion, chop into fine rings and gently sauté in a separate pan. Stir constantly until the onion becomes translucent. Then sprinkle with flour and continue to stir, making sure the onion and flour do not brown. Mix a little of the cooking liquid from the tomatoes into the onion and flour mixture, then add the tomatoes with the rest of the liquid. Stir well. Blend the soup and add a little salt to taste. Serve immediately.

# Cheese Soufflé



2 eggs

60 g (4 tbsp or 1/2 stick) butter + 10 g (1 tbsp) for greasing the soufflé dish

60 g (1/2 cup) flour

250 ml (1 cup) milk

60 g (1/2 cup) grated Emmental

Salt + freshly ground pepper to taste

❖ Serves 2 *Preparation time: 10 minutes* *Cooking time: 30 minutes*

Grease a soufflé dish. Preheat the oven to 180°C (gas mark 4 or 350°F).

Melt the butter over a low heat and then remove from the heat and whisk in the flour until the butter is completely absorbed. Return the pan to the heat and cook the mixture gently, gradually adding the milk and whisking constantly. You should end up with a fairly thick sauce.

Separate the eggs. Take the pan off the heat, add the yolks one by one to the sauce: wait until the first yolk is fully mixed in before adding the second. Finally, add the grated cheese. Season with salt and pepper.

Beat the egg whites until they form stiff peaks, then carefully add them to the mixture, folding rather than stirring them in, and lifting the mixture up from the bottom. Pour the mixture into the soufflé dish, filling it no more than three-quarters full. Cook for about 20 minutes without opening the oven, until the soufflé has risen and has turned a lovely golden brown. Serve immediately.

# Mushroom Gratin



200 g (3 cups) good quality button mushrooms  
2 shallots  
1 tbsp butter

150 ml (5 fl oz) light cream or half-and-half  
1 tbsp cognac  
1 tbsp flour  
Salt + freshly ground pepper to taste

❖ Serves 2 Preparation time: 15 minutes Cooking time: 35 minutes

Trim off the muddy bases of the mushroom stems, then carefully wipe them and the mushroom caps to remove any grit, but do not wash them. Cut into fairly thin slices. Peel and dice the shallots.

Preheat the oven to 220°C (gas mark 7 or 425°F).

Put the butter in a medium saucepan to melt. When it begins to foam, add the shallots and mushrooms, cover and leave to sweat for about 10 minutes on a medium heat. Add the cognac and simmer for another 2 minutes.

Meanwhile, slowly mix the cream into the flour and then pour the mixture onto the mushrooms. Stir constantly to make sure that the mushrooms are coated with the cream and to thicken the sauce. Season with salt and pepper and then transfer the mixture to a gratin dish.

Bake in the oven for about 15 minutes until crisp and golden on top. Serve immediately.

# Braised Beans



400 g (2 1/2 cups) dried beans  
(preferably Tarbais beans)  
1 medium-sized piece bacon (200 g or  
7 oz)  
1 medium-sized piece smoked ham  
(200 g or 7 oz)  
6 Strasbourg sausages

2 medium onions  
1 bouquet garni (1 large sprig  
thyme + 2 bay leaves)  
1 tbsp lard  
100 ml (1/2 cup) fine red wine  
Coarse salt to taste

❖ *Serves 6 Soaking time: 6 hours Preparation time: 15 minutes Cooking time: 2 hours 30 minutes*

Soak beans in plenty of cold water for at least 6 hours.

Peel the onions. Tie the thyme and bay leaves together into a bouquet garni.

Transfer the beans into a large casserole pan with the water they have been soaking in and add half of a tablespoon of coarse salt, the onions and the bouquet garni. Cover and cook over a medium heat for at least two hours. The beans should just simmer: turn down the heat as soon as the water begins to bubble to stop them from boiling. The beans should swell but not burst. When they are tender to the touch but not completely cooked, drain them in a colander over a bowl and reserve the cooking liquid. Cover the beans to keep them from drying out.

Dice the bacon and smoked ham into roughly 2 cm (3/4 inch) cubes. Melt the lard in a large heavy-bottomed frying pan, add the bacon and ham and sauté until lightly golden but not brown. Then add the beans, red wine and about 400 ml (a bit more than 1 1/2 cups) of the reserved cooking liquid. Put the sausages in the pan, gently submerging them. Cut a circle of greaseproof paper considerably larger in diameter than the pan and place it on top of the pan so that it overlaps with a tightly-fitting lid (to keep the steam in). Leave to simmer on a low heat for about 30 minutes, but take the lid off the pan from time to time to check how the beans are doing (without stirring them): they will be cooked when the sauce is almost completely reduced.

