



Food and Drink in Regency England

by [Laura Wallace](#)

One of Georgette Heyer's greatest talents was the way she immersed herself in the period. The detail she provides in her novels is exceptional, but it often leaves the uninitiated wondering, "just what *is* [orgeat](#)? Or [ratafia](#), or [negus](#), or [madeira](#), or [port](#)? What is a [cordial](#) or a [posset](#)? What does a [baked egg](#) taste like?"

Rest, and look no further. Compiled here is a little culinary research I have done in the name of literature.

Fortified Wines

Port, madeira and sherry are heavy, "fortified" wines, that is to say, bolstered with brandy (or some other heavy liquor). Port derives its name from the port city of Oporto in Portugal. Madeira is named for an island of Portugal, and Malaga for an island of Spain; malmsey is originally a Greek fortified wine, but its production has moved to Madeira. Marsala is of Sicilian origin, and used in the dish veal marsala.

Madeira is particularly noted as a dessert wine, but is often used as an aperitif or after dinner drink, while port is only for after dinner, and historically only for men.

Refreshments at Almack's

"[Orgeat](#)" is defined in my dictionary as "a sweet flavoring syrup of orange and almond used in cocktails and food." Another definition is "an almond emulsion used to flavor drinks and sweets."

"[Ratafia](#)" is defined as "1. a sweet cordial flavored with fruit kernels or almonds. 2. a biscuit flavored with ratafia."

Cocktails? Cordials? Wasn't the point of the insipid refreshments at

Almack's that they were not spiritous? Weak tea and stale cakes! So what sort of cocktails did they make?



I found a recipe for orgeat syrup. I wouldn't ask anyone to make this stuff, as it looks like a lot of trouble and it is reputed to be as unpalatable as Heyer's heros considered it. In fact, one of our own illustrious list members has provided us with the following review:

"The cafe outside Nordstrom's Department Store at the Pentagon City Mall here in Washington has a selection of Italian syrups to make non-alcoholic drinks with. One flavor is Orgeat! So I tried it, of course, when I saw it. It was combined with ice water (not fizzy, I think I recall). It was incredibly, nauseatingly sweet. I imagine it could also have been put into a boozy drink too. It was like making a cherry coke--just adding syrup only to water. However, after trying it, I fully see why it left our Regency folks unexcited. Bleccch."

Orgeat Sirup

Blanch and pound into a paste:

1 pound almonds
10 bitter almonds

Squeeze out the oil. Mix the remaining powder with enough:

Water

to make a paste. Let it rest for 24 hours in a cool place.
Dissolve in:

1 1/2 cups water
2 teaspoons tartaric acid

and add this mixture to the paste. Filter and add to the resulting liquid:

2 1/2 cups sugar
2 tablespoons orange water (optional)

Stir until dissolved and store refrigerated.

Ratafia

Kristin Smagula found the following recipe for Ratafia in *Robert's Guide for Butlers & Other Household Staff*, published in 1828.

Into one quart of brandy pour half a pint of cherry juice, as much currant juice, as much of raspberry juice, add a few cloves, and some white pepper in grains, two grains of green coriander, and a stick or two of cinnamon, then pound the stones of cherries, and put them in wood and all. Add about twenty five or thirty kernels of apricots. Stop your demijohn close and let it infuse for one month in the shade, shaking it five or six times in that time at the end of which strain it through a flannel bag, then through a filtering paper, and then bottle it and cork close for use; you can make any quantity you chose, only by adding or increasing more brandy or other ingredients.

Mulled Wine or Negus

serves a crowd

Negus is another name for mulled wine, which traditionally was prepared by adding some cinnamon/cloves/nutmeg/fruit peel/whatever to a mug of wine, and then heating it by stirring with a hot poker from the fire.

Make a syrup by boiling for 5 minutes:

- 2 1/2 cups sugar**
- 1 1/4 cups water**
- 4 dozen whole cloves**
- 6 sticks cinnamon**
- 3 crushed nutmegs**
- Peel of 3 lemons, 2 oranges**

Strain syrup. Add to it: **4 cups hot lemon or lime juice**

Heat well and add: **4 bottles red wine**

Serve very hot with slices of: **Lemon and pineapple**

These proportions may be varied to taste. Sometimes Madeira, port or sherry is used in this formula.

Here is another recipe for negus, provided by Maria, from *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management*, originally published in 1861:

To Make Negus:

Ingredients: *To every pint of port wine, allow 1 quart of boiling water, 1/4 lb. of sugar, 1 lemon, grated nutmeg to taste.*

Mode: *As this beverage is more usually drunk at children's parties than at any other, the wine need not be very old or expensive for the purpose, a new fruity wine answering very well for it. Put the wine into a jug, rub some lumps of sugar (equal to 1/4 lb.) on the lemon-rind until all the yellow part of the skin is absorbed, then squeeze the juice, and strain it. Add the sugar and lemon-juice to the port wine, with the grated nutmeg; pour over it the boiling water, cover the jug, and, when the beverage has cooled a little, it will be fit for use. Negus may also be made of sherry, or any other sweet white wine, but is more usually made of port than of any other beverage.*

Sufficient: *Allow 1 pint of wine, with the other ingredients in proportion, for a party of 9 or 10 children.*

Talk about your very happy children!

I find it a little curious that by mid-century negus has been demoted from Insipid Almack's Refreshment to a children's drink. A Regency heroine would have been a grandmother by then, so it's likely that either

she or her children revolted against serving it at grown-up parties.

Restoratives

A "cordial" is an aromatic drink or liqueur, but is also defined as a stimulant. So a cordial provided to a lady fainting on a sofa, while meant to revive her, might put her to sleep. On the other hand, it might calm an agitated person. Along with laudanum, a vile-tasting opium derivative, taken by diluting several drops in a glass of water, this was one of the most popular "restoratives" until we discovered how addicting they can be. It should also be noted that during the Victorian era, heavy wines like port and claret were considered too strong for the delicate nature of ladies. Yet at the same time they were being plied with cordials and laudanum to overcome their delicateness.

On the other hand, the traditional nanny remedy for insomniac children (and frail heroines) looks quite well-designed to put a person to sleep: a Hot Milk Posset.

Hot Milk Posset

2 generous servings (one for Nanny and one or two for the little ones)

Blanch and pound in a mortar:

**2 or 3 bitter almonds (modern substitution:
1/8 teaspoon or less almond extract)**

Heat:

**1 pint milk
1/2 teaspoon grated lemon peel
1/4 cup sugar**

Add the almonds and when the milk begins to scald remove from heat. Beat and add:

1 egg white

Add and combine lightly, until the whole drink is frothy:

**1/4 cup dark rum
1/2 cup brandy**

Serve hot.

Sweet slumbers!

Shirred or Baked Eggs

or Eggs en Cocotte

Baked eggs always have great "eye appeal" served in little ramekins, casseroles, or cocotte dishes. Care

must be taken that they are not overcooked, as the white can become quite hard and rubbery and the ramekin will retain the heat and continue to cook the egg after it is removed from the oven. If you put a poaching paper over the ramekin, this will return enough heat to the topside of the egg to set it. The centers could be soft, the whites just set. Don't try to hurry baked eggs; they must be cooked in gentle oven heat.

My dictionary defines "cocotte" as "prostitute" but was helpful enough to provide two useful definitions for "ramekin": (1) a cheese preparation made with eggs and bread crumbs or unsweetened puff pastry, baked and served in individual dishes. (2) a small individual dish used for both baking and serving.

For an "individual casserole" dish I use CorningWare's smallest round white casserole (about 5" diameter). You could also use a deep square petit pan (CorningWare), and Pyrex makes some small baking dishes too. Some of these recipes call for muffin pans, for which you could also use Pyrex custard cups.

I have not tried most of these recipes, and cannot vouch for whether they are anything like what the English ate during the Regency. Some are very basic and appear to be traditional; others are more exotic and in my opinion would not have been served in any household where an English cook ruled the kitchen.

Below you will find the following recipes:

- [Basic Baked Eggs](#)
- [Baked Eggs on Toast](#)
- [Additions to Baked Eggs](#)
- [Eggs in a Nest](#)
- [Eggs Baked in Bacon Rings](#)
- [Ham Cakes and Eggs](#)
- [Baked Egg Florentine](#)
- [Basic Bechamel Sauce](#)
- [Baked Egg in a Spanish Saute](#)

Basic Baked Eggs

Preheat the oven to 350F.

Grease small bakers or ramekins. Break carefully into each one:

1 egg

Add lightly:

Salt

Sprinkle over the top:

1 teaspoon cream or melted butter

Bake for about 8 to 10 minutes. You may garnish with:

**Chopped or sliced truffles
Sauteed pieces of chicken liver**

Baked Eggs on Toast

Carefully prepared, this makes a delicious dish.

Preheat oven to 325F.

Grease warmed individual molds with:	Butter
Place in each one:	1 teaspoon chopped celery, chives, or parsley
Break into each one:	1 or 2 eggs
Season them with:	Salt and paprika
Cover each mold with a small poaching paper. Place the molds in a pan of hot water, deep enough to reach to within 1/2 inch of the top of the mold. Bake until the eggs are firm. Turn them out on:	Rounds of hot buttered toast
Serve them with well-seasoned:	Bechamel Sauce or Tomato Sauce.

Or serve with one of the Additions to Baked Eggs, listed below.

Additions to Baked Eggs

For interesting variations to baked eggs try adding: cooked mushrooms, asparagus tips, tomatoes or other vegetables, such as creamed spinach. Or add chicken hash, small bits of bacon, sausage or anchovy. Or place a round of toast covered with Gruyere cheese in the bottom of the baker before the eggs are added. Instead of butter, you may also cover the eggs with a cheese or tomato sauce before baking. Other tasteful sauce additions are: one cup cream sauce flavored with 1 teaspoon prepared mustard; creamed mushrooms or canned soup--celery, mushroom, asparagus, etc. Dilute the latter with milk or water to the consistency of cream sauce. Eggs are also good baked in 1 cup or more of creamed onions.

Eggs in a Nest

Preheat oven to 350F.

Beat until very stiff:	2 egg whites
Heap them in a greased ovenproof dish. Make 2 cavities an equal distance apart, not too near the edge. Slip into them:	2 unbroken egg yolks

Bake for 10 minutes or until the eggs are set. Season with: **Salt and white pepper**

Sprinkle with: **Chopped chives (optional)**

Eggs Baked in Bacon Rings

Preheat oven to 325F.

Saute or broil lightly:

Grease the bottom of muffin pans. Line the sides with the bacon. Place in each pan:

Drop into it:

Pour over the egg:

Sprinkle with:

Bake for about 10 minutes or until the eggs are set. Turn them out onto:

Garnish with:

Strips of bacon

1 tablespoon chili sauce (optional)

1 egg

1 teaspoon melted butter

Salt and paprika

Rounds of toast or

Slices of drained pineapple

Parsley

Ham Cakes and Eggs

Preheat oven to 325F.

Combine:

1 cup cooked ground ham

1 egg

1 tablespoon water

1/8 teaspoon paprika or pepper

Press these ingredients into 4 greased muffin tins. Leave a large hollow in each one. Drop into the hollows:

4 eggs

Bake the cakes until the eggs are firm. Turn out the cakes on: **Rounds of toast**

Garnish them with:

Parsley or chopped chervil

Baked Egg Florentine

This dish is really rich and filling! I make it regularly. Serves 1. When doubling, you can make it in a larger casserole. You can substitute frozen spinach for fresh, but it won't be the same! Use 1/4 to 1/3 of a (10 oz) package of frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed.

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Lightly oil an individual casserole dish and warm it in the oven.

Heat in a small skillet:

1 teaspoon olive oil

When hot, reduce the heat to low and add:

**2-3 handfuls fresh spinach leaves,
washed and patted dry**

Coat the spinach leaves with the oil and cook covered 2-3 minutes, or until they are limp and bright green. Put the spinach in the bottom of the casserole. Break over the spinach: **1 or 2 eggs**

Pour over the top:

Warm [Bechamel Sauce](#)

Bake for 15-20 minutes. Remember that it will continue to cook for a few minutes after you take it out of the oven. Variations: I have topped this with crumbled bacon and/or freshly grated Parmesan cheese. (*Don't* use the canned stuff!!)

Basic Bechamel Sauce

In a small saucepan, melt:

2 teaspoons butter

Add directly into the melting butter:

**approximately 1/2 teaspoon freshly
grated onion**

Let the onion heat through, then add:

1 Tablespoon flour

Reduce the heat and stir this roux with a whisk until it is lightly browned. Add:

**3/4 cup heavy cream
pinch salt
pinch ground white pepper
pinch ground nutmeg**

Continue cooking over low heat 2-3 minutes, constantly stirring with a whisk until it begins to thicken. Remove from heat.

Notes: When doubling, use milk in addition to (or instead of) cream. I use cream because it has fewer carbohydrates than milk (I'm on a low-carb, not a low-fat diet--see my home page for details) and because using cream reduces cooking time (it thickens very quickly). The original recipe calls for 1 cup of milk, and uses 1/2 of this recipe to top the Baked Egg Florentine. When using milk, cooking time may be as long as 7-10 minutes.

Store any unused sauce in the refrigerator for up to two days. Use as a topping for vegetables, leftover frittata, leftover casserole, fish filets, etc. Everything is yummy with cream sauce poured over it!

Variation: Sauce Mornay

Once the Bechamel Sauce is cooked, add 1 teaspoon grated Parmesan cheese, and stir to mix.

Baked Egg in a Spanish Saute

Preheat oven to 325 F. Oil and individual casserole dish and warm it in the oven.

Heat in a small skillet:

1 teaspoon olive oil

Add and saute:

1 garlic clove, minced

1 tablespoon (or more) chopped onion

1 tablespoon (or more) chopped green pepper

Put the sauteed vegetables in the bottom of the casserole.

Break over them:

1-2 eggs

Top with:

1 Tablespoon freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Bake about 15 minutes, or until the eggs are set but not hard.

Did a couple of quickie web searches and found some more baked egg recipes! (BTW, the search demonstrated that a lot of Bed & Breakfast inns serve baked eggs.) Here are some URLs:

- [Ham and Egg Bake](#)
 - [Cheese Baked Egg](#)
 - For more egg recipes, try the [Online Inkeeper](#) (found the above two there).
 - For a bazillion recipes and food sites, try [Flora's Recipe Hideout](#).
-

L.A.W. 02 January 2003



[Go to Laura's home page.](#)