



INGREDIENTS

Serves 4

Poached egg

- Up to 100 ml (4 fl. oz) white wine or malt vinegar
- 4 eggs

Hollandaise sauce

- 280 ml (10 fl. oz) white wine vinegar
- 4 sliced shallots
- 20 white peppercorns
- 750 g (1 kg) butter to make 500 ml clarified butter
- 6 egg yolks

To serve

- 4 muffins
- 4 slices of good ham
- salt and pepper



METHOD

Poached egg

- 1 Half fill a tall pan (20 cm at least) with water. Bring water to the boil and add the vinegar. Reduce to a simmer with a gentle rise of bubbles.
- 2 One by one crack the eggs into the pan, 'swirling' the water gently with a spoon.
- 3 Poach the eggs for 2-3 minutes until cooked. The whites should be set but the yolk still soft. Lift each egg out with a slotted spoon.
- 4 'Refresh' the eggs in cold water to arrest the cooking process, then reheat in boiling water when ready to serve.

Hollandaise sauce

- 1 Put the vinegar, shallots and peppercorns into a saucepan and reduce by two thirds. Strain the liquid into a glass bowl. This is the reduction.
- 2 Melt the butter on a gentle heat. Remove from heat and allow it to settle away. Skim the surface until only a clear liquid remains. This is clarified butter.
- 3 Place a round-bottomed bowl over a pan of steaming water. Add the egg yolks and 1 ½ tbs of the reduction. The rest of the reduction can be stored in the fridge for up to 2 months.
- 4 Beat the mixture over the heat until the yolks form a thick pale mass without lumps.
- 5 Remove from the heat and whisk vigorously, adding enough clarified butter to make the sauce thick and creamy. Any leftover clarified butter can be stored in the fridge for up to 2 months.

To serve

- 1 Toast the muffins and place a slice of ham onto each one.
- 2 Place the hot poached egg onto the ham and spoon over the Hollandaise sauce. Serve immediately.

ABOUT EGGS



Next time you're boiling eggs, try putting lemon juice or vinegar into the water. Make a hole with a pin (you'll need to twist it slightly) in the side of each egg. A side is better to pierce than an end. Get two small saucepans of boiling water ready. Into one of them, put a couple of teaspoons of vinegar or lemon juice to make the water slightly acidic. Lower half your pierced eggs gently into one pan, and the rest into the other. Scientists say that acid causes the protein in the egg white (albumen) to coagulate (go solid) more quickly. Does your experiment show that? Cook the eggs for about 3 minutes and then enjoy eating them!

- Yolk colour tends to be thought of as important. A hen cannot make the pigments for egg yolk colour herself. But 'free-range' hens, able to roam around and scavenge for food, have access to a wide range of plant material and the pigments from these materials colour the yolks. Although nutritionally suitable, the artificial diet fed to hens reared intensively may not contain plant pigments. Besides, natural pigments are not very stable, so artificial agents to colour the yolks may need to be added. It's said that maggots, coloured red for freshwater fishing, have been fed to hens (which love them - and maggots are very nutritious) and then the hens have laid eggs with crimson yolks!
- Eggs contain all the essential protein, minerals and vitamins, except vitamin C. And egg yolks are one of few foods that naturally contain vitamin D.
- Chickens have been domesticated, and laying eggs for us, for nearly five thousand years.
- Eggs have been seen as an especially good food for invalids from at least the eighteenth century. Mrs Beeton gives this recipe for 'egg wine'. 'Beat an egg with a little water. Warm a glass of sherry with half a glass of water, pour it onto the egg, stir in some sugar and nutmeg.' Sounds delicious!

If these facts have inspired you to learn more about links between art and science, then you might like to take our short course, *Perspectives on Leonardo da Vinci (A178)*.

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