



# The Best of the South West

local products to look out for



## Local Produce

We hope the garden and orchard will one day provide the majority of fruit and vegetables for our evening meals. In the meantime, we are very pleased to buy excellent vegetables from Le potager gourmand du Bernet (Marciac market on Wednesday, Plaisance market on Thursdays).

## La cuisine de l'amitié, la cuisine du terroir

South West France is known for its hearty food and fine wines. The Gers is one of the most rural, least densely populated areas of France and has retained culinary traditions and local specialities, some of which are little known outside the area.

**Foie gras** - Perhaps the most iconic dish of the area with hundreds of cottage industries, farms and large businesses producing such quantities that foie gras is of significant importance to the local economy.

**Confit de canard (preserved duck)** - The duck's liver (foie gras) is by far the most valuable part of the bird, but what remains is put to good and very tasty use. Duck meat is well seasoned, cooked slowly and preserved in duck fat. Traditionally, duck confit would be kept in large stoneware jars, to last for months over the winter without refrigeration. Confit duck finds its way into many local dishes where it serves as seasoning and substance. Commonly, on a restaurant menu, confit de canard will mean a duck leg, removed from its preserving layer of fat and cooked until the skin is crisp.

## Not to be missed - three local specialities

1

### CONFIT DE CANARD

Centuries old recipe synonymous with the region.

2

### FLOC DE GASCOGNE

A blend of fresh grape juice and Armagnac.

3

### CROUSTADE DE POMMES

The local apple (or prune) tart.



## Label Rouge

is a quality benchmark for food items and unprocessed agricultural products (such as flowers). To obtain Label Rouge certification, products must be raised or grown to specific standards and controls.

Other indicators include: **IGP** which denotes a product originates from a specific area; **AOP** meaning traditionally prepared, processed produced and produced in the area; and **AOC** for wine, cheese and other products reflective of the *terroir*.

**Haricot Tarbais (white beans)** - The haricot bean is a staple of the cuisine of the wider south west of France. The beans from Tarbes have attained IGP status (indication géographique protégée - a marque indicating specific qualities, characteristics and traditional stages of production). The crop is grown in a very small area between Riscle to the north and Campan to the south. The beans are climbing plants - one bean sown between two maize plants which act as supports. Mechanical harvesting is not allowed, therefore beans with IGP or Label Rouge status have been picked by hand.



The black pig of Bigorre, an Armagnac still and the vineyards of Jurançon

**Jambon de Bayonne** - Like Prosciutto, Bayonne ham is dry cured in salt, a process which dates back centuries. Although Bayonne ham can be sliced thinly and eaten 'raw', it is most commonly cut thickly, diced and used as we would use lardons. The bone of the ham is highly prized as a flavouring for soups and stews.

## Wines and Spirits

Wines of the south west are characterised by the bold flavours of unusual grape varieties.

The relatively small area in which **Madiran** is produced is one of the oldest wine growing areas in France. The wine itself is dark and strongly flavoured. The use of the Tannat grape (Tannat must represent at least 40% of the blend) provides strong tannins which can take several years to soften.

Those who would say that **Armagnac** is little different from its better known cousin Cognac ought to keep their voices down when in the south west of France. Armagnac has near mythic status here and its advocates are fiercely proud. Armagnac is used in many local dishes and sauces and to preserve fruits, as well as being drunk alone or as the base of several interesting *aperitifs* and *digestifs*.



Gateaux à la broche

**Jurançon** vineyards are situated on the steep slopes of the foothills of the Pyrenees around Pau. Although dry wines are produced too, it is the sweet whites with their bouquet of peaches or tropical fruits which garner the most lavish praise.

## OTHER REGIONAL SPECIALITIES

**Pacherenc du Vic Bilh:** A little known - the name is Gascon - local wine. The best of the sweet, fruity white wines are usually 5 to 10 years old. A real treat.

**Garbure:** Being France, this thick vegetable soup is likely to contain goose, duck and Bayonne ham.

**Porc noir de Bigorre:** Is the pig indigenous to the Pyrenees. The marbled meat is said to have a superior flavour and produces fine hams.

**Piment d'espelette:** Only mildly hot, this Chili pepper is the cornerstone of many Basque dishes.

**Gateau à la broche:** Cooked on a rotating spit, this cake is flavoured with rum and orange flower water.