

From Apicius, *De Re Coquinaria*:

Glires: isicio porcino, item pulpis ex omni membro glirium trito, cum pipere, nucleis, lasere, liquamine farcies glires, et sutos in tegula positos mittes in furnum aut farsos in clibano coques.

“dormice: similar to pork. rub the flesh likewise off all limbs of the dormice with pepper, chopped nuts, laser and liquamen. put them sewn-up on a tile in the oven or cook stuffed, in a heavy roasting-pan.”

A Recipe for Stuffed Dormice (modernized for the Canadian kitchen)

Ingredients:

pork schnitzel
pepper
onion juice or powder
optional: hot or mild sausage
Lea and Perrins Worcestershire Sauce
chopped nuts
olive oil
honey
sesame or poppy seeds
needle
string

Preparation

Take some pork schnitzel and cut into 6 inch or a little larger ‘squares’; it won’t matter if they are a little oval. You will be rolling them up with stuffing inside to make the ‘dormice’.

To prepare the dormouse, rub the ‘flesh and all the limbs’ of the dormouse all over with a mixture of pepper, chopped nuts, onion juice, and Lea and Perrins Worcester Sauce.

Stuff with a mixture of same, to which a modicum of sausage (hot or mild as you like) may be added. Sew the dormouse up well with string so it looks like a little oblong body, and put it into a lightly olive-oiled glass baking dish (or other baking dish such as Corningware) and put into an oven. Cover, either with a lid or tin-foil to allow the flavours to mingle. Cook at medium heat, about 350° until done. The dormice should be a bit browned, like a roast. They may be cooked on top of the stove, too, if you have a heavy, covered Dutch-oven.

The time will vary depending on the amount of stuffing. You may prepare the stuffing on top of the stove in advance if you wish, likewise the ‘dormice’ Brown them in a little olive oil. Be sure to rub the spices on first, except for the chopped nuts which won’t stick. Allow the dormice to cool slightly and rub more spices plus the nuts before stuffing and baking to mingle the flavours. You can tell when the pork is done by checking to see if the flesh is greyish-white. Pork should be thoroughly done.

Allow dormice to cool and roll in honey and then sesame seeds or poppy seeds. Eat with fingers for hors d’oeuvres. If you leave some of the string which you used to sew them up for a ‘tail’ you’ll have a more ‘Roman’ experience: Dangle the dormouse by its ‘tail’ over your head and nibble away at its tiny body.

About Apicius and Roman Cooking

Cooking was an art in the Roman World. In such a large Empire which comprised so many different ethnic groups and all the foodstuffs which they ate it is hardly surprising. Good cooks were highly prized. They were, of course, slaves, but very expensive slaves. They cost almost as much as the very well-educated slaves who were the best teachers, bought for very wealthy Roman aristocrats to educate their children and even the adults on occasion.

The author of *About Cooking*, Apicius, lived in the 4th century AD. He deals with all aspects of cooking, ingredients, household hints and recipes for all types of food, divided into chapters. The recipe for the dormice is from the chapter about cooking four-footed animals. He does not give precise measurements for anything, because every Roman cook, whether it was Mom or an expensive slave, would want to alter them to suit the taste of the diners.

The Ingredients for Stuffed Dormice

Many of the ingredients are familiar to us today, although we do not eat the variety of meat and fowl the Romans did. Dormice, for example, are familiar to us as the little creature who slept through the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, in a teapot, in Alice in Wonderland. The creature was about the size of a small squirrel, with a bushy tail. He was a nocturnal creature, and spent a very great deal of his time sleeping. He gets his name from the word *dormire* (*dormit*) meaning 'sleep'. Mouse is from 'mus' in Latin. The Romans probably raised them as they did other animals and they may have developed a more or less hairless variety. They were expert farmers and animal producers. Naturally the hair would be removed as well as the innards and (probably) some of the bones. The tail would have been left as a convenient 'handle'. The Romans did not have knives or forks at table but ate mostly finger food. Spoons were used for serving or for soup and stews.

Pepper we know. The chopped nuts would likely be hazelnuts or almonds. Laser was a type of wild-onion, incredibly stinky but very sweet when cooked. Laser generally refers to the juice of the plant, so bottled onion juice from the store would probably be the closest. *Liquamen* is the lighter, more liquid part of the fish sauce *garum*, so highly prized by the Romans. During the Empire, Roman traders travelled far and wide; on their way to China by sea they stopped in India frequently and the Indians acquired the recipe for *garum*. It became an Indian staple sauce and was re-discovered by the British during the Raj (occupation of India). So it was re-imported by the British into the old Roman Empire, after a break of some 1600 years.