

In the kitchen



Creamy pork rillettes are on **Paola Westbeek's** shopping list this month...

One of the best ways to ring in the weekend is with a trip to the local butcher for the makings of a rustic *planche de charcuterie* for our Friday evening *apéro*. I'll pick up things like wrinkly *saucissons* flavoured with herbs and spices, delicate slices of cured hams, thick slabs of pâtés and small tubs of creamy *rillettes*. Though I usually end up bringing home a little of everything (it's hard for me to choose favourites), I am especially partial to *rillettes*, a shredded meat spread which originated in the Touraine region of the Loire Valley.

The word '*rillette*' is derived from the Old French word '*rille*', meaning 'thin strips of pork' and first found in a document dating to 1480. '*Rille*' was also used by Humanist author and Touraine native François Rabelais to refer to a 'brown pork jam' (*brune confiture de cochon*) in his novel *Tiers Livre* (1546). Three centuries later, Honoré de Balzac wrote about '*les célèbres rillettes*' from Tours which were 'prized by gourmets, but rarely appeared on aristocratic tables' (*Le Lys dans la Vallée*, 1836). It wasn't until the end of the 19th century that the peasant recipe tickled the taste buds of Parisian connoisseurs and became the delicacy we know today.

While variations of *rillettes* are found all over the country, made with everything from game to fish, the authentic *Rillettes de Tours*, awarded IGP certification in 2003, is made with thick chunks of pork (usually shoulder or belly) which are slow-cooked in lard with salt, pepper and sometimes the addition of subtle



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spicing, white wine or *eau de vie*. The process takes anywhere from five to 12 hours, giving the meat plenty of time to become so meltingly tender that it easily falls apart. Towards the end of the cooking time, the heat is increased and the *rillettes* take on their characteristic golden caramel colour and intensely rich, roasted aroma.

Rillettes are sold in small pots or tins and best enjoyed slathered on toasted slices of country bread, perhaps with the tang of a few crisp *cornichons* or a dollop of onion jam to contrast with the robust flavours. You can also try *rillettes* in a sandwich or an omelette with red onions, but another wonderful way to use them is in a classic *tarte tourangelle*, which is similar to a quiche. Simply line a fluted flan tin with ready-made shortcrust pastry, prick with a fork, scatter with a thin layer of breadcrumbs and fill with *rillettes*, *rillons* (candied cubes of pork belly) and pieces of Saint-Maure de Touraine goat's cheese. Make a custard with three eggs and 350ml cream, pour over the ingredients and bake for approximately 40 minutes at 180°C. *Très, très bon!*

serve with...

Both the *rillettes* and *tarte tourangelle* are delicious with a white, mineral Saumur or crisp Vouvray

