

Cooking Glossary



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Alkanet - a group of plants whose roots give off a red dye; used primarily as a coloring agent, but according to some early herbalists, "it helps old ulcers, hot inflammations, and burnings by common fire."

Almond Milk - a cloudy liquid prepared by steeping ground almonds in water, broth, or wine; acts as the liquid base and/or thickening agent in a wide variety of medieval dishes. Its medicinal values are praised by Boorde, who claims that "it doth comforte the brest, and it doth mollyfye the bely, and provoketh uryne."

Avens - the herb was used in salads and the root to impart a clovelike flavor to ale. Avens was considered "the blessed herb" and according to the *Ortus Sanitatus* (Garden of Health), printed in 1491, "If a man carries the root [of avens] about him, no venemous beast can harm him."

Barm - the foamy yeast that appears on the top of malt liquors as they ferment; ale barm was commonly used as the yeast element in breads and batters.

Blaunderelle - a variety of white apple. According to Boorde, apples "doth comforte the stomacke, and doth make good dygestyon, specyally yf they be rostyd or baken."

Borage - a blue-flowered plant with hairy leaves that taste somewhat like cucumber; used primarily in salads. "Borage," Boorde says, "doth comforte the herte, and doth ingender good bloode, and causeth a man to be mery."

Bream - a European fresh-water fish related to the carp; any of various salt-water fishes, as the sea bream.

Bullace - a purple wild plum.

Calver Salmon - exact meaning unknown; possibly refers to the fresh salmon sliced and prepared in a special way, perhaps pickled.

Chamomile - any of several plants of the aster family, with scented leaves and small daisylike flowers; the dried leaves and flowers were used in herbal cures, and Boorde recommends rubbing the body with oil of chamomile to cure palsy.

Chibol - a type of small onion no longer cultivated.

Chickweed - a weed with juicy stems and small white flowers; the juice of the chickweed was drunk to heal cramps, convulsions, and palsies.

Clarified Honey - honey whose impurities have been forced to the top by boiling and removed by skimming. Many medieval recipes recommend clarifying honey by combining it with wine. As the wine fermented, a scum formed on top and the liquid became clear.

Clary - a plant of the sage family which cuts the grease of fatty meats and fish; in the late Middle Ages, its name was thought to mean "clair-ye" (clear eye) and ointments prepared with the herb were believed to sharpen vision. The early clary wine, a white wine so named for its clarity, is the etymological ancestor of our modern claret.

Codling - a young or small cod, perhaps salted; Furnivall notes that "ling" may be a corruption of "lying" in salt.

Coffin - a mold of pastry for a pie.

Confection - the sugar paste in which whole spices were dipped; confectioned spices were used as garnishes and eaten at the end of feasts, to aid digestion.

Cubeb - a berry from Java which resembles peppercorn and tastes somewhat like allspice.

Curlew - a large brownish wading bird.

Cygnet - a young swan.

Damson - sometimes called bullace, this bluish black plum is named for the place of its origin, Damascus.

Dittany - a plant of the mint family with oval leaves and clusters of purplish flowers; the pungent, aromatic leaves were used in salads and as a medicinal herb. The application of dittany combined with black soap was thought to aid in the extraction of "splint, iron, thorne or stub."

Dotterel - the European plover, a short-billed shore bird.

Egret - a heron with long white plumes.

Farce - stuffing; after the Middle Ages became the generic term for short dramatic pieces "stuffed" with buffoonery.

Galingale - an aromatic root; the main ingredient of galyntyne, a pungent medieval sauce. Boorde recommends galingale to "comforte the stomake."

Good Powders - potent ground spices

Grains of Paradise - the aromatic pungent seeds of a tropical West African plant. Boorde says, "Graynes be good for the stomake and the head." Grains are related to cardamom.

Greek Wine - a generic term which relates to any sweet full-bodied wine.

Gudgeon - a small European fresh-water fish of the carp family.

Gurnard - a spiny-finned sea fish having a large head and winglike pectoral fins.

Hake - any of various edible sea fishes resembling or related to the cod.

Hyssop - a blue-flowered plant of the mint family whose leaves cut the grease in fatty meats and fish. According to one medieval treatise, "when eaten it improves weak sight, relieves asthma, and expels worms, but causes miscarriage."

Lamprey - any of a group of eellike water animals with a funnel-shaped, jawless, sucking mouth; also called lamper eel.

Laver - an edible purple seaweed.

Loach - a small European fresh-water fish of the carp family.

Lombardy Mustard - a paste prepared by combining ground mustard seed with honey, wine, and vinegar.

Marlin - any of several large, slender deep-sea fishes related to the sailfish and spearfish.

Medlar - a small, brown, applelike fruit, hard and bitter when ripe and eaten only when partly decayed.

Orach - a garden plant with red and green leaves used as a vegetable and a salad herb.

Pellitory - a climbing plant of the nettle family whose leaves were used in salads and roots for medicinal cures. According to one herbalist, pellitory "is one of the best purges of the brain that grows. . .and an excellent remedy in lethargy."

Plover - a shore bird with a short tail, long pointed wings, and brown or gray feathers mixed with white.

Porret - a young leek or onion; a scallion

Powder - ground spice.

Purslane - a plant with a pinkish fleshy stem and small, round leaves; the leaves were used

as a potherb or in salads. Boorde informs us that "purslane dothe extynct the ardor of lassyvyounes, and doth mytygate great heate in all the inwarde partes of man."

Rail - a small wading bird resembling the crane.

Ramson - a kind of garlic with broad leaves; the root was used for salads.

Rayfish - a fish with a horizontally flat back, both eyes on the upper surface, and a slender, whiplike tail.

Roach - a fresh-water fish of the carp family.

Rocket - mildly pungent plant grown like spinach and eaten in salads. According to Boorde, rocket "doth increase the seede of man, and doth stimulate the flesshe, and doth helpe to dygestyon." Also known as arugula.

Rose Hips - the fleshy, bright-colored fruit of the rose plant.

Rue - a plant with yellow flowers whose bitter-tasting leaves were used mostly in herbal cures but occasionally in salads. Gerard notes that "the juice of Rue made hot in the rinde of a pomegranat and dropped into the eares, takes away the pain thereof."

St.-John's-Wort - a plant with brownish stalks and small, narrow leaves; the latter were used in salads and pounded into oil for healing wounds. The seeds have such a resinous odor, it was believed that if evil spirits were to take a whiff of it, they would be driven away.

Sandalwood - the pulverized wood of an East Indian tree used primarily to color food dark red.

Skirret - a species of water parsnip not available in this country and no longer cultivated on a large scale in Europe. Gerard declares that "these roots [may] be eaten boiled, with vinegar, salt, and a little oyle, after the manner of a sallad, and oftentimes they be fried in oyle and butter, and also dressed after other fashions, according to the skill of the cooke, and the taste of the eater."

Snipe - a wading bird which lives in marshy places and is characterized by a long, flexible bill.

Southernwood - a shrubby fragrant plant with yellowish flowers and bitter-tasting leaves; it was used both as a culinary herb and in medicinal cures. "Boiled in barley meal it taketh away pimples," claims an early herbalist.

Spikenard - an aromatic plant of northern India whose root was used in the preparation of medicinal ointments for curing bruises; the very smell of the plant was said to destroy fleas.

Strong Powder (Pouder Fort) - probably ground ginger or a blend of cinnamon and mace; the blend may have included any of the pungent spices such as cubeb, pepper, or clove.

Sweet Powder (Pouder Douce) - probably the ground sweet aromatic spices such as aniseed, fennel seed, and nutmeg; there is no indication that these spices were blended with sugar.

Tansy - a bitter medicinal herb whose juice was traditionally extracted from the young leaves, mixed with eggs, and baked as a "tansy cake" (or simply a "tansy"). These cakes were thought to purify the body and were often eaten after Lent to counteract the effects of fasting fare.

Teal - any of a large group of small, short-necked, fresh-water ducks.

Tench - a European fresh-water fish of the carp family.

Turnsole - a plant cultivated primarily for its use as a purple dye.

Verjuice - the juice of green or unripened fruits such as grapes and (more commonly) crab apples; a popular ingredient in cookery which often replaced vinegar. A medieval source gives instructions for making verjuice: "Gather crabbs as soon as the kernels turn blacke, and lay them in a heap to sweat and take them into troughs and crush with beetles [heavy wooden mallets]. Make a bagge of coarse hair-cloth and fill it with the crabbes, and presse and run the liquor into Hogsheads."

Vernaccia - Vernage, a strong sweet Italian wine.

Vervain - a medicinal plant of the verbena family, slightly bitter in taste. The name vervain is derived from the Celtic ferfaen, from fer (to drive away) and faen (a stone), as the plant was much used to soothe attacks of the bladder.

Warden - a hard pear with blackish bruises; prepared by baking or stewing.

Whelk - a large marine snail with a spiral shell.

White Grease - lard.

White Powder (blanch powder) - ground ginger blended with powdered sugar.

Woodcock - a small migratory game bird related to the snipe and sandpiper.

Wormwood - a strong-smelling plant with white or yellow flowers used in the Middle Ages as an aid to healthful digestion; the expression "as bitter as wormwood" attests to the extreme bitterness of all parts of the plant.