

Skate with browned butter

From Brittany, where fish are always treated simply but well, this dish is called *raie au beurre noisette*. The butter sauce, cooked till nut brown, is flavoured with vinegar, pepper, parsley and capers

MAIN MEAL Serves 4

Overall timing 30 minutes

Equipment Saucepan, frying pan

Freezing Not recommended

INGREDIENTS

4	Slices of skate	4
$\frac{1}{2}$ teasp	Salt	2.5ml
6 tbsp	Vinegar	6×15ml
4oz	Butter	125g
	Freshly-ground black pepper	
2 tbsp	Chopped parsley	2×15ml
2 tbsp	Capers	2×15ml

METHOD

- 1 Wash the skate and place in a saucepan. Cover with cold water and add salt and 5 tbsp (5×15ml) of the vinegar. Bring to the boil slowly over medium heat. Remove from heat, cover and leave to poach for 10 minutes.
- 2 Meanwhile, make *beurre noisette*: melt butter in pan over medium heat until nut brown but not black. Stir in remaining vinegar, pepper, parsley and capers.
- 3 Drain the skate well, then place on warmed serving plates. Pour over *beurre noisette*, garnish with parsley sprigs and serve with boiled potatoes.

Left: Skate with browned butter

cook's know-how

Recipes sometimes call for the addition of *beurre manié* (kneaded butter) which is used to thicken sauces, soups, gravies or cooking liquor. Make a smooth paste by mashing equal quantities of butter and flour with a fork. Drop one or two small balls of it into the pan off the heat. Return pan to heat and boil rapidly for 1 minute, whisking constantly so that it blends quickly. Repeat until the liquor is as thick as you want it. Don't worry if you make too much paste – wrap it well and store in the fridge for up to 2 weeks.

Clarified butter is ordinary butter that has been melted so that the milk solids sink to the bottom of the pan. The clear liquid that remains on top is the clarified butter and it must be strained off through a muslin-lined sieve. It will keep indefinitely stored in a screw-topped jar in the fridge. Because the solids are removed, this butter can take more heat, which is why it is used to sauté foods. In classic French cookery, clarified butter is also used in *Hollandaise* and *Béarnaise* sauces. In Indian cookery it is called *ghee*, in North African *samsa*.

Pasta al burro

The Italians like their pasta and this dish, which is favoured because it is so simple to prepare, combines it with butter and Parmesan. Use any type of pasta – spaghetti, macaroni (long or short) or shells. Adding a little oil to the cooking water will stop the pasta sticking together

STARTER OR LIGHT LUNCH Serves 4

Overall timing 15 minutes

Equipment Large saucepan

Freezing Not recommended

INGREDIENTS

14oz	Pasta	400g
1 teasp	Salt	5ml
1 tbsp	Oil	15ml
4oz	Unsalted butter	125g
3oz	Grated Parmesan	75g

METHOD

- 1 Three quarters fill a saucepan with water, bring to the boil and add salt and oil. Add pasta a little at a time (the water must not stop boiling). Do not cover. Stir frequently until cooked. Drain thoroughly and set pasta aside for the moment.
- 2 Add butter to pan over a medium heat. When hot, but not coloured, add pasta. Remove from heat and mix well using 2 forks, adding cheese a little at a time until pasta is well coated. Pour on to serving dish and serve immediately with a tomato and onion salad.

Sweet butter sauces

Hot fruity puddings call for sweet butter sauces – the Christmas pud wouldn't be so good without one flavoured with brandy or rum. All these sauces, called "hard" as they are set rather than runny, benefit from being made ahead of time. Store them in the fridge to allow the flavours to develop

BRANDY BUTTER

Cream 3oz (75g) unsalted butter till soft and light in colour. Beat in 3oz (75g) caster sugar and the grated rind of $\frac{1}{4}$ of a lemon. Gradually beat in 2–3 tbsp (2–3×15ml) brandy until the mixture is fluffy. Cover the brandy butter and chill well. This is one of the classic accompaniments of Christmas pudding and mince pies; it's also an exciting addition to bread and butter pudding – it makes any everyday pudding something special.

RUM BUTTER

Cream 3oz (75g) unsalted butter till soft and light in colour. Beat in 3oz (75g) caster sugar and the grated rind of $\frac{1}{2}$ an orange. Gradually beat in 2 tbsp (2×15ml) rum until the mixture is fluffy. Cover the rum butter and chill well. Again, it is usual to serve this sauce with Christmas pudding and mincemeat tarts and pies, but it is also splendid with pancakes or hot apple tarts.

ALMOND BUTTER

Cream 3oz (75g) unsalted butter till soft and light in colour. Beat in 3oz (75g) caster sugar and add 1oz (25g) ground almonds. Beat in 1 tbsp (15ml) sherry, then cover and chill well. Use with hot sponge puddings, and as a filling for large sponge cakes, butterfly cakes and to sandwich together sweet biscuits.

LEMON BUTTER

Cream 3oz (75g) unsalted butter until soft and light in colour. Beat in 3oz (75g) caster sugar and add the grated rind of $\frac{1}{2}$ a lemon. Gradually beat in 1 tbsp (15ml) lemon juice, then cover and chill well. Use to add delicious sharp flavour to crêpes or pancakes, and also to fill sponge cakes.