

Sauce Hollandaise

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Hollandaise is often perceived to be the most difficult egg yolk based sauce to prepare. But, as I often remind participants during our Culinary Diploma sessions, achieving any form of culinary success involves correct application of temperature, timing and quantity.

Understanding these applications will assist in avoiding the common occurrence of curdling—often associated with Hollandaise (as well as Mayonnaise). It will also allow you to achieve the perfect volume and lightness that defines a well-prepared sauce.

Sauce Hollandaise was not always based on egg yolk. Earliest versions, dating 1750, called for butter, flour, bouillon and herbs. Later versions of the recipe suggest a longer process of pasteurizing the egg yolks in a double boiler—a savoury version of a good Anglaise.

The hollandaise I think is best uses the procedure of combining yolks with a reduction. The reduction is the 'flavour backbone' of any good hollandaise. For the reduction, take one part vinegar, three parts water, add sliced shallots, a bay leaf and a few crushed white pepper corns and reduce the mixture to 1/3 of its original quantity. Let cool before adding to the egg yolks.

In a stainless steel bowl beat reduction and yolks with a large wire whisk, immersing the bowl in a large pot filled with water remaining at a temperature just below boiling point. Beat consistently while rotating the bowl until the volume of the original amount of ingredients has quadrupled. The desired consistency could be compared to the 'peaks' often called for in baking recipes when beating egg whites.

In the meantime, the butter has been melted separately and should be around the same temperature as the yolk/reduction – about 30-35C. The butter is then added to the reduction mix achieving the desired emulsion process by drizzling the butter into the froth while whisking. The flow of butter can then be increased until all butter has been used. Shouldn't you use clarified butter? (butter simmered to evaporate water content and to separate milk solids) I hear you questioning. Yes, that's classically correct. However, I do prefer melted butter as it introduces unique flavours to the hollandaise that otherwise would be lost during the clarification process.

To conclude, I'd like relate some words of wisdom by the highly regarded Grande Cuisinier Fernand Point referring to Sauce Hollandaise. He once said that the most difficult preparations were often those that appeared to be the easiest. But I believe with the understanding of the process and some practice great culinary results can be achieved.

Jan Gundlach is the Executive Chef de Cuisine and Director of Flavours: The Culinary Centre - at the Fyshwick Fresh Food Markets. The next Culinary Diploma course starts Thursday 4 August and runs each Thursday evening 6pm – 9:00pm over six weeks. Further enquires - Phone: 02 6295 7722 or e-mail: info@flavours.com.au

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