

## Recipe for Snails and Success

The snail is a mollusc in a class apart. The most well suited for eating are the big, grey white Burgundy snails (in Latin called *Helix pomatia*) and the black, Chinese freshwater snails called trapdoor snails (*Cipangopaludina chinensis* in Latin). But there are plenty of other delicious, edible snails out there so let taste be your guide.

Snails have been on the menu for a long time. Sources from the Yuchanyan site in Southern China suggest that people ate snails at least 12.000 years ago. And according to the British historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto land snails were probably among the first domesticated animals.

In Denmark, snails were popular throughout the Middle Ages. Since they were not considered to be meat people were allowed to eat them during Lent. Therefore, monasteries and manors started rearing Burgundy snails for food and to this day you can still find a high concentration of snails in the gardens around the old buildings.

Nowadays snails are especially considered a delicacy in Southern Europe, and in most regions of China too, where they are additionally used as a medicine for treatment of digestive diseases.

The consumption of snails affects in particular the meridians around the stomach, the large intestines and the bladder. Although the meridian system has never been proven scientifically to exist it is easy to imagine that it does. At any rate denying its presence is surely not beneficial for the circulation of Qi energy in the body.

Since snails have cold properties, they make the excretion of excess or harmful fluids from the body more efficient and have over the course of time been used as a diuretic. They also help to relieve fever and reduce heat exhaustion in summer. Furthermore, the fact that they are rich in nutrition with a high content of protein and a low content of fat seems to plead their cause.

Still many people refuse to accept the snail as edible food. Some find it to be hard and indigestible and argue that you might as well chew on a piece of rubber. Others believe that, when all is said and done, only the sauce makes it possible to gulp down a snail.

The truth is that the snail is a delicate and fine tasting dish, which is exactly why it needs to be prepared most carefully. If it is not cooked in just the right way it tends to lose its flavour. If it is cooked correctly, however, and seasoned with meticulously selected ingredients in just the right amount, it is delicious, tender and easily digestible.

One of my friends who is renowned for his sensitive, even weak, stomach prepared snails following the recipe below and found them to be so tasty that he ate close to fifty of them. To his great surprise he did not experience any discomfort despite his carelessness.

If one still feels a certain disinclination or even aversion to eating snails, it might help to consider them as small friends that (at a slow pace) come to the rescue when you are hungry.

For six persons you need:

- 72 beautiful snails
- 9 ounces of butter
- 0,5 cups of dry white wine
- 4 large cloves of garlic
- 18-20 sheets of gold leaf
- 4-5 ounces of coarse salt
- 2 heaped tsp. of fine salt
- A bunch of parsley
- Plenty of freshly ground pepper

Strong vegetable soup made from:

Carrots  
Parsnip  
Turnip  
Shallots  
Garlic  
Ginseng  
Ginger  
Goji berries  
Dates  
Bay leaves  
Thyme  
Star anise  
Parsley  
Salt and pepper

There are gastronomes who recommend placing the snails on a layer of salt in order to empty their gastrointestinal system before cooking them. But in fact, you can just let them fast for two days, then they take care of it themselves without the need of torture.

After the snails have fasted, they are boiled alive. Throw them into a large pot of boiling water and leave them there for a few minutes. Then fish up the snails and pull them out of their shells. Cut out the entrails with a sharp knife and then cook the delicious meat in fresh water to get the mucus off. If necessary, use a spoon to skim the mucus off. Proceed until there is no more mucus on the surface and then rinse the snails in clean, cold water. Remember to also wash the snail shells thoroughly in hot water as they will be used later.

When the vegetable soup has boiled for half an hour add the snails. Not only does the snails absorb the terrific flavour of the soup, but also all of its healthy and nutritious properties.

The carrots are by nature warm and sweet, so they create a good balance when paired with the snails and they are good for one's digestion too. In addition, together with the dates, they counteract night blindness, as they contain beta-carotene and vitamin A. The turnip, unlike the carrots, is a little cold, but it nonetheless aids digestion too and contributes to an overall good health. That is why it is often referred to as "junior ginseng". Ginseng itself has many amazing qualities. In short, it nourishes one's vitality and reinforces one's Qi energy. Ginger counteracts – as most people will be aware of – winter colds. Having a cold is rarely a success, so do not skimp on the ginger. Goji berries are sweet and should reportedly be good for the liver. In general, the amount of goji berries should be adjusted according to the amount of wine one usually consumes. Star anise is also important as it relieves flatulence, which can be excellent if one tends to consume large amounts of white bread with the snails.

Boil the snails for one to two hours in the vegetable soup to really let them take in the juice and flavour. Leave them in the soup until it has cooled completely. Chop the parsley and mix it with the butter, the crushed garlic, the fine salt and the freshly ground pepper until it is a perfectly smooth paste.

Put the snails back in the shells and stuff them with the seasoned butter mass. It can be an advantage to use a piping bag. It won't make the snails any less tasty leaving them to rest for a few hours or even overnight.

When the snails are to be eaten, place them with the opening upwards in an ovenproof dish. Arrange them on a small pile of salt so that they don't tip over while being in the oven. Sprinkle each snail with a bit of white wine, preferably using a pipette.

The opening of the snail shells is covered and closed with gold leaf, which simulates the natural calcareous "lid" that the snails create to protect themselves against winter, an unfavourable environment or the surrounding world in general.

Gold leaf is a noble metal that effortlessly and unproblematically passes through the digestive system. It makes the dish decorative by giving it a glamorous look. Gold is known to be one of the most expensive commodities in the world. In contrast, gold leaf is actually relatively inexpensive. However, one's guests may not be aware of this, and therefore a gold-plated serving could be said to show off a great deal of extravagance. On top of that, the act of literally consuming gold expresses a magnificent decadence and immoderation, causing the serving of snails to exceed even oysters in status and symbolic value.

Place the ovenproof dish with the snails in a preheated oven. When the butter in the snail shells starts boiling and the gold lids tear apart, the garlic will be cooked and the snails are adequately warm. Serve immediately and offer the guests the special snail forks and snail tongs that keeps one from burning oneself or getting one's fingers greasy.

Pour Chablis in the glasses and you can expect lots of praise.

Bon appétit!

### Sources

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