

Pickling Pigeons (recipe altered for a modern understanding)

WARNING: Please do not attempt this recipe at home, it comes with a risk of some very nasty (and potentially fatal) bugs – especially if you follow the original recipe's recommendation for the pickle which has a very low vinegar content.

Ingredients:

2 pigeons
Thyme
Lemon thyme
Parsley
Sweet marjoram
Pepper
Nutmegs (ground)
Mace (ground)
Salt
Pickling vinegar

Method:

Sterilise jar/equipment by boiling to help preserve the bird.

De-bone one of the pigeons, ideally without cutting the skin, to leave only the top and tail open. We ended up cutting down the breastbone and sewing back up.

Take the meat from the other pigeon and shred it very small.

Add a pinch of thyme, lemon thyme, parsley, and half a pinch of sweet marjoram to the shredded pigeon, and mix together (we used a combination of dried and fresh, depending on what we could get hold of).

Season this with pepper, nutmegs, mace and salt to taste.

Stuff the belly of the first pigeon with this mixture, and sew it up at both ends to make a parcel.

Boil the pigeon-parcel gently for an hour.

Check the temperature of the parcel to make sure it has been fully cooked throughout. Take the pigeon out and let it cool, then put it in the pickle and keep it.

[The original recipe calls for you to make a stock by boiling the bones for half an hour in water and salt. Then add 'a little vinegar' and use this to boil the pigeon-parcel, and also use this mixture as the pickle. We chose to use a modern pickling vinegar instead, because this was much less dangerous. Do a lot of research if you go against our advice and try this at home, and make sure your vinegar has a strength of at least 5%.]

Pickled Pigeons, transcribed from the Mary Wise Cookbook, 18th Century
(Warwickshire County Record Office reference CR341/300)

Take a dozen of fat Pidgeons some bones them
some not then take another dozen & take all the
meat from the strings & Skins & shread it very
small & take a small handfull of the following
herbs Common time Lemon time of sweet marjoram
½ a handfull Parsley a handfull then season
it with pepper & nutmeggs & mace & salt to
your Tast & stuff [th]e bellyes of the Pidgeons
with [th]e shread meat thus seasoned Taking
up the Vents & Necks boyl the Bones in water
& salt & let it boyle half an hour then put
in a little vinegar straining it from the Bones
grating in the Pidgeons & let them Boyl an
hour & very softly so so take them out & let
them lye while cold so keep them in the Pickle