

· Family ·

Solanaceae

A scientific vegetable
on the Côte des Légendes

THE
POTATO

Origin:
The Andes

Latin name

Solanum tuberosum

Breton name

Aval-douar ou Patatez



HISTORY

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The «papa» that once grew wild on the high plateaus of the Andes was cultivated by the Incas from the 13th century onwards. The Conquistadors discovered it during their expeditions to South America around 1530. Introduced to Spain under the name «patata», it slowly spread across Europe in the 16th century. In France, it was mainly used to feed pigs.

From the pig's porridge to the queen's plate

It was Parmentier who first promoted the potato in the 18th century. An army pharmacist, he was held prisoner in Germany and discovered the nutritional value of potatoes in his food rations. Upon his return to France in 1785, Parmentier held a dinner with the king and the queen in which he served various potato-based dishes. The root vegetable was an immediate hit and potato plants were then introduced within the royal gardens. Local residents, intrigued by the sudden interest in these curious tubers, would steal plants and thus ensure their distribution across France.

THE POTATO
on the
CÔTE DES LÉGENDES



Without wanting to steal the show from Parmentier, it is said that the history of the potato in the Côte des Légendes has its roots in Ploudaniel. It was François-Claude Barbier, Lord of Kerno, who, in 1761, discovered potatoes from the other side of the world at the Morlaix market and undertook the cultivation of this new tuber in the region.

3 potato flowers appear on the
coat of arms of Ploudaniel



From 1894 to 1946, the Potato Train ran on the old railway line from Landerneau to Brignogan, transporting passengers and goods – including plenty of potatoes, hence its name!

A combination of events led the French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (INRAE) to set up its research station specialising in potatoes in Ploudaniel in 1949, nearly two centuries later. Since 1970, 36 varieties have been created by the Ploudaniel station. INRAE's missions are to conserve, protect and develop new species. As many as 120,000 varieties of potato have been developed today.



Today, Brittany specialises in the production of new potatoes and seed potatoes.

1 - GERMINATION : FEBRUARY/MARCH

Potatoes are germinated about two months before planting.

The potato is a vegetatively propagated species: in other words, a tuber is planted instead of a seed. As such, a particular weakness of this type of vegetable is that it can be attacked by a multitude of parasites, maintained from one generation to the next, unlike seeds – which cut the parasite's cycle.

60 pathosystems can affect the potato. The best known is «powdery mildew»: the potato's arch nemesis. This fungus can destroy an entire field in less than a week! However, potatoes love Finistère: its «pedoclimate*» makes it possible to limit the proliferation of aphids – vectors of bacteria. There are 10 to 100 times fewer aphids in Finistère than in other regions of France.
*Temperature and humidity of a soil or land.

2 - PLANTING : APRIL/MAY

Tubers are planted in furrows of earth, in deep, fertile, loose and humus-rich or sandy soil, with a neutral pH.

3 - EMERGENCE : MAY/JUNE

The aerial part of the plant develops during the following weeks, with the formation of a stem and leaves.

4 - FLOWERING : MID-JUNE / MID-JULY

On the surface, it is time for the plant to flower. Underground, 10 to 20 tubers are produced from a mother tuber.

5 - TOP-KILLING : END OF AUGUST/ SEPTEMBER

For so called «ware» potatoes, top-killing is carried out at the end of summer. The stems and leaves that have turned yellow are cut off, allowing the tuber to complete its maturation. It is at this stage that the potato skin is formed.

6 - LA RÉCOLTE : SEPTEMBRE / OCTOBRE

Three weeks after top-killing, harvesting can begin.

The POTATO CYCLE

Anatomy



The new potato

This is planted in January-February and harvested during flowering, around April. It has a thin skin, a very tender flesh and a slightly sweet taste. It can be found on the markets between May and August – very early, hence its name. The production of early vegetables is highly lucrative activity in Northern Finistère, thanks to its mild seaside climate which is more forgiving on the harvests!



The production of seed potatoes

Another of Brittany's specialities when it comes to potatoes is the production of seed potatoes. Potato cuttings are tested and propagated in the laboratory when the plant is healthy, planted in April-May and then harvested between mid-August and the end of September.

Around 180,000 tonnes of plants are produced per year in Brittany, two thirds of which are exported to North and West Africa, as well as to the Middle East. They are then replanted according to the seasonality of these lands; in Mali, for example, seed potatoes are planted in November, while in northern Europe they will be planted in April.



Kouign patatez recipe

Serves 6 - 8

Ingredients

- 1 kg floury potatoes
- 200 g buckwheat (or white) flour
- 200 g semi-salted butter at room temperature
- Salt, pepper and nutmeg
- 1 egg yolk for washing

STEP 1

Peel the potatoes. Wash thoroughly and cut into even quarters.

Cook over low heat, in a large saucepan of cold salted water, for about twenty minutes.

Make sure the potatoes are cooked through, drain in a colander and mash in a food mill.

Preheat your oven to 180°C.

STEP 2

Add the chopped butter to the mashed potatoes, then the flour, until a smooth mixture is obtained.

Add salt, pepper and a little nutmeg.

STEP 3

Pour the mixture into a lightly buttered baking dish.

Level the mixture with the back of a spoon and brush the surface with the egg yolk mixed in a little water.

Score crosses on the surface of the kouign using a fork.

STEP 4

Bake in the middle of the oven for 35 minutes, until the top of the kouign patatez is golden brown.

Serve warm, accompanied by sausages, or grilled bacon and a good green salad.