

DUTCH COOKBOOK

The secrets of Dutch regional cuisine

For Lotte Wolf

A touch of Dutch

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DUTCH CUISINE

It is often claimed that Dutch cuisine doesn't really amount to anything much. I couldn't disagree more. When you take a closer look you will see that the Netherlands boasts an incredible range of culinary delights, both traditional and modern.

Traditional Dutch cuisine

The traditional cuisine of the Netherlands is closely tied to the country's history and has been shaped by its fishing and agricultural practices as well as overseas trade, in particular the import of spices from our former colonies. Most people associate the words 'Dutch cuisine' with well-known national dishes like *stamppot* and *snert*. In this book you will discover that the Netherlands also boasts many other, lesser-known regional dishes, each of which has an intriguing story to tell.

Modern Dutch cuisine

Today there is also a new movement known as 'Modern Dutch cuisine'. The country's most celebrated chefs, in particular, are making a great effort to lift Dutch cuisine to the next level. In doing so they are committed to using 80 per cent Dutch products, 80 per cent vegetables, less meat and fish and all parts of the animal. The seasons also play a crucial role when chefs are setting their menus, while traditional recipes also provide a rich source of inspiration for new and adventurous dishes.

Local food

'What's for dinner?' is probably the question that has been posed most often over the past sixty the

years in family kitchens up and down the country. The answer to that question has changed considerably over those years, too. Whereas my grandmother kept her own chickens, grew her own fruit vegetables and shopped local for everything else she needed, these days we can choose from over 150,000 products from every corner of the world in our supermarkets.

After the Second World War, the industrialisation of society and the use of artificial fertilizers led to an astonishing rise in food production levels. Our local system quickly became a global one, with the result that we became more and more detached from the sources of our food. To such an extent, in fact, that today we often have no idea where the food we eat comes from. The stuff staring back at you from your plate could have travelled anywhere up to 30,000 kilometres to get to your table. Food for thought, to say the least.

In the course of my travels around the Netherlands while researching this book, my mouth fell open in sheer amazement on more than one occasion when I saw just how much of our vegetables, fruit, fish, meat and cheese we export abroad: often even more than 80 per cent! At the same time, we import enormous amounts of products from other countries too, indeed often the very same produce as what we export ourselves. For example, Dutch onions regularly make the long trip to Africa, while our supermarkets stock onions from as far away as New Zealand.

In the Netherlands we have fabulous local products that can easily hold their own with the Italian 'Denominazione di Origine Protetta' and the French 'Appellation Contrôlée'.

The Netherlands is the second largest exporter of agricultural goods in the world.

While writing this book it dawned on me that I had a mission: to get you, the reader, to start shopping and eating local. In my humble opinion, all that whizzing of produce to-and-fro around the world is simply not necessary. First of all, homegrown food is tastier and fresher than the stuff that has to cross several continents to get to your table. Juicy Dutch pears picked in the autumn are undoubtedly better than the sour specimens of pineapple that come all the way from Chili (and that are tasty there but not here).

Local produce is also much more sustainable, as it travels shorter distances and has a smaller carbon footprint. When you choose to shop local you will also close the gap between you and your food. Knowing how something is produced helps you to make more sustainable choices. You will opt more often to buy organic products (that are in season) and will begin to see just how important the concept of biodiversity really is.

The recipes in this book use as much local produce as possible*. Some of the ingredients are specific to certain regions, like for Drents heather lamb or asparagus from Limburg. You can, of course, substitute these for lamb and asparagus from your own area.

*I hope you understand that it was impossible for me to include all of the local products available in the Netherlands in this book. For example, there are over 800 different cheesemakers in the country, and although I like Dutch wine, beer and spirits too, there are simply too many different producers to include them all. That said, if there is a product that you feel is typical of your region and that deserves more attention, please let me know and I will share it on social media!

KEEN TO KEEP IT LOCAL TOO?

- Choose products that are in season and have not been imported. Try growing your own vegetables, fruit and herbs on your balcony or in your garden. You will soon see how rewarding that can be.
- Buy from your local farmer, at the market or in an organic supermarket. These are the best ways to source local produce. Make a habit of stopping when you come across a farm advertising fresh products for sale.
- Order local seasonal products and meal kits online. In the Netherlands you can order from Lindenhoff, Willem & Drees, Crisp or De Krat, for example.
- Check the country of origin of products in the supermarket.
- Look in the deep-freeze and canned goods sections as well for products that have not been imported.
- Buy a foraging guide and go plucking in the wild.

My motto is: local by choice, import by necessity.

MY JOURNEY

I've always been a bit of an oddball. When everyone else goes left, I invariably go right. Sometimes I feel a bit like Pippi Longstocking, but then with an electric motorbike instead of a horse. I tend to do things differently compared to most other people. Even the first words I uttered as a baby were different, to say the least: not *Mommy and Daddy* but *ice cream*.

I was born in Limburg to a Frisian father and a mother from Drenthe and spent much of my youth travelling up and down the country. After studying Journalism at Leiden University, I went to work as a PR assistant at a publishing company in Amsterdam. It took me only six months to realise that I was sitting at the wrong end of the telephone line. I wanted to be a writer myself and write, in particular, about food. I promptly quit my job and embarked on a career as a freelance journalist.

Given my lack of professional culinary experience, I decided it would be a good idea to take a look behind the scenes in the

restaurant world and to write about what I saw there. Fortunately, my rather haphazard plan was an instant success. I was asked to contribute to the Jamie Oliver magazine and to help write material for trainee chefs. By interviewing chefs across the entire culinary spectrum I ended up writing the textbook that I had always wanted to learn from myself.

At the end of 2017 my *Amsterdam Cookbook* was published in both Dutch and English. I had criss-crossed the city many times looking for authentic recipes and culinary tales for the book. It was such a success that it wasn't long before photographer Hans de Kort and I were joking that it was high time we started working on a follow-up. At the time

I was busy trying to secure my motor-cycle driving licence, so in all my enthusiasm I said to Hans, 'A book about Dutch cuisine, on a motor-bike!' Amazingly, when I got around to hitting the road to research the book the Zero Motorcycles company agreed to lend me one of their electric machines, which dovetailed perfectly with my plan to do everything as sustainably as possible.

This cookbook is the result of what turned out to be a fantastic adventure. In addition to lots of information about food in the Netherlands, the book contains thirteen chapters dedicated to the country's twelve provinces and the Wadden or Frisian Islands. Each chapter begins with an overview of the province's exclusive local products* and traditional dishes. At the back of the book you will find a list of addresses where all of these products are available.

In each chapter I go into more detail on a number of dishes and recipes, picking from both the more traditional and the new Dutch cuisine, all of which are made using as many local ingredients as possible. Thanks to the many trips I made to visit farmers, fishermen and chefs, among others, I am able to offer the reader a quick peep into the kitchens of the Netherlands. All captured for posterity in the fabulous photos taken by Hans.

So, fancy riding pillion as I take you on a culinary trip around the Netherlands? Hop on!

Laura de Grave

foodwriter.nl



Dutch cookbook

Dutch cookbook

* In choosing the local products in this book I drew inspiration from the Slow Food products in the Ark van de Smaak, products with the official regional product logo Erkend Streekproduct and the list of Dutch products protected under European law. My final choices were swayed by factors such as biodiversity and quantity.





LIMBURG

Just south of the town of Weert, which serves as the gate to Limburg, the flat Dutch countryside changes into one of gently rolling green hills. This part of the country is well known for its culinary heritage. From the asparagus grown in the province's sandy soil to the mushrooms cultivated in the deep caves of the south.

Regional dishes

1. Asparagus with Livar ham
2. Limburgse vlaai
3. Maastrichts zoervleis

Special local products

1. Green asparagus
2. Cave mushrooms
3. Kollenberger spelt
4. Limburgse grottenkaas
5. Limburgs kloostervarken
6. Limburgse Morello cherries
7. Limburgse syrup
8. Mergelland mutton
9. Rommedoe
10. White asparagus

Also sold as 'Geuldal lamb'

Hervé cheese (also known as 'rommedoe' in and around Maastricht) used to be made both in South Limburg and in Belgium. These days all of the cheese is made by our neighbours to the south, but the Limburgers are still very proud of it.

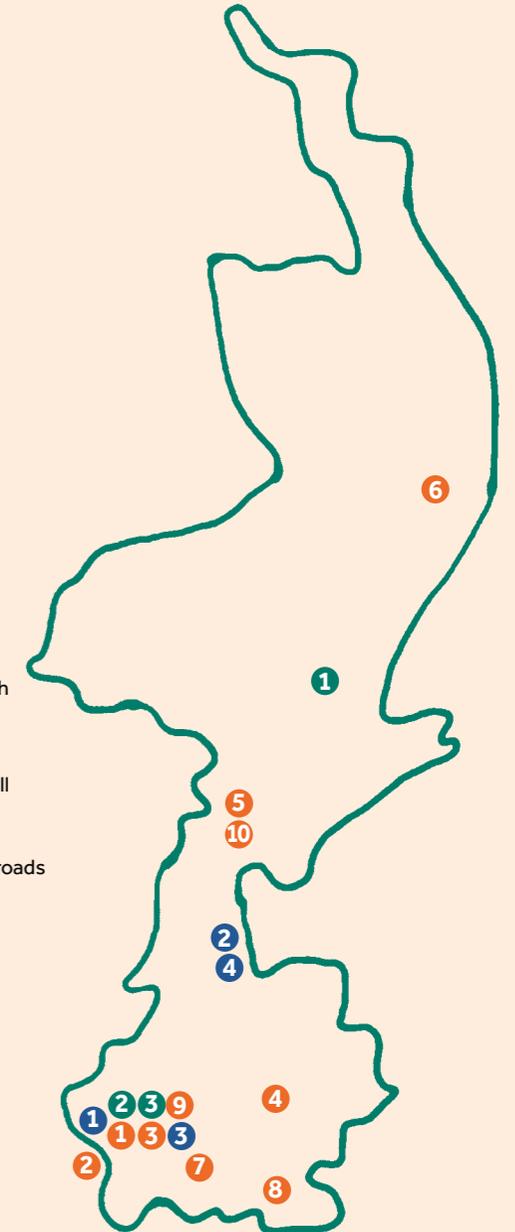
Traditional dishes

1. Knien in't zoer
2. Krombroodjes
3. Maastrichtse kalfspastei
4. Nonnevotten

From 11 April to 24 June (Sint-Jan) the roads leading to and from the A2 are always jammed with asparagus lovers.

Each year, tradition demands that during Halfvasten the bakers of Sittard throw 150,000 *kromme broodjes* off the Hill of Kollenberg where they are gathered up again by local children.

A deep-fried sweet bread roll in the shape of a dickie bow. Eaten from November 11 until carnival season starts in Limburg.



LIMBURGSE VLAAI

If there is one place you should go to try a real *Limburgse vlaai*, it is the Bisschopsmolen in the centre of Maastricht. With the sound of the water from the River Jeker rushing through the oldest working water mill in the Netherlands roaring in the background, Frank van Eerd busies himself in the bakery making incredibly delicious spelt tarts using primarily local ingredients.

History

The *vlaai* has a long and rich history. As far back as the Middle Ages, the local population of the area where Germany, Flanders and Limburg now meet were known to bake flat tarts in a so-called 'vlaayenpan'. The tarts were baked in a pan over an open fire with glowing coals piled on top of the lid so that the tart would be baked both from above and below. Down through the centuries, different variations emerged using fruit or even rice and topped with latticework or some other kind of pastry 'lid'. 'Limburg lies at the heart of Europe,' says baker Frank. 'That's why you find all kinds of cultural influences in the *Limburgse vlaai*. For example, grain and cherries were brought here by the Romans, while apricots and rice arrived courtesy of the Spanish during the Eighty Years' War.'

Mister Spelt

Frank is known in Limburg as Mister Spelt. When many bakers began sourcing their grain further afield across the Netherlands around twenty years ago, Frank was the first baker in the country to use this ancient type of grain as the basic ingredient in his creations. Kollenberger spelt, which he uses to make his *vlaai*, is grown by local farmers on the hill of Kollenberg. 'Everyone knows that hill,' he explains. 'It's where they shot the famous Dutch movie *Flodder!*'

Cherry vlaai

The cherry *vlaai* from De Bisschopsmolen uses a relatively simple list of ingredients. The base consists of a yeast dough made using spelt flour, while the filling uses cherries from Limburg, including the juice, and Dutch beet sugar. After the dough and the cherry filling have been added to a modern version of the *vlaai* baking tin, the strips of dough are added in criss-cross style to the top, something they have been doing around here for centuries. After being glazed with egg and sprinkled with sugar, the *vlaai* is then baked in the oven. The size of the slices differs per region in the country. 'You can tell by the way they cut a *vlaai* which part of the Netherlands a person comes from. In North Holland they cut twelve slices, in Brabant ten and in Limburg eight,' laughs Frank.





LIMBURGSE VLAAI FROM THE BISSCHOPSMOLEN

1. Start the evening before. Deseed the cherries and retain the juice. Set the cherries aside. Dilute the cherry juice with water up to 375 ml. Transfer to a small saucepan and bring to the boil. Add 150 g sugar and stir well. Add the cornflour to a cup with 4 tablespoons of water. Stir with a fork until you have a smooth paste.

2. Add the cornflour mixture to the sugar water, stirring continuously with a whisk until it has thickened. Continue to stir while you bring the mix to the boil and then leave to simmer gently for 1 minute. Stir in the cherries and remove from the heat. Transfer to a bowl and leave in the fridge for at least 12 hours.

3. Add the flour, yeast, butter, 20 g sugar, 1 egg and the milk to the bowl of a mixer. Mix for 4 minutes using a dough hook at the lowest speed until you have a nice, consistent dough. Add the salt, turn the speed up a notch to 2 and mix for another 2 minutes.

4. Set aside 150 g of dough for the lattice top. Roll the rest of the dough into a ball for the base. Cover both balls of dough with a wet tea towel, set aside in a warm spot and leave to rise for 20 minutes.

5. Using a rolling pin, roll out the dough for the base on a worktop sprinkled with flour until it is round and slightly larger than the base of the cake tin. Grease the sides of the tin with butter. Using the base of the cake tin, draw a circle on a piece of baking paper, cut it out with a pair of scissors and place it on top of the base.

6. Spread the dough evenly over the base by lifting it and pressing it down with your thumb as you go along. Press the edges firmly down too. Cut away any excess dough around the edges. Stir the cherry filling (add a little water if you think it is too thick) and spread it over the base.

7. Roll out the dough for the top of the tart until it is 3 mm thick. Cut the dough into 3 cm strips. Weave the strips under and over on top of the filling to create a lattice and press down at the edges. Cut off any excess dough. Beat the second egg together with 2 tbsp water in a bowl. Use to glaze the lattice. Sprinkle the vlaai with the rest of the sugar and leave to rise for another 30 minutes.

8. Preheat the oven to 200 °C. Bake the vlaai in the middle of the oven for 15-20 minutes until golden brown. Remove the vlaai immediately from the tin using a cake knife.

Pastry

Serves 8
45 mins
+ 12 hours + 50 mins
waiting time
+ 15-20 mins in the
oven

Ingredients

- 750 g fresh cherries
- 190 g sugar
- 30 g cornflour
- 250 g spelt flour, plus extra for sprinkling
- 5 g dried yeast
- 50 g unsalted butter, plus extra for greasing
- 2 free range eggs
- 100 ml milk
- ½ tsp salt

You will also need:

- mixer with dough hook
- wet tea towel
- rolling pin
- cake tin with removable base (Ø 30 cm)
- baking paper

LIMBURGSE STROOP

'Mind your head!' The old historical farm-houses in the village of Eckelrade in Zuid-Limburg make it look almost like time has stood still here for generations. And the building where the Vandewall family makes its *stroop* (syrup) is no exception. The door is so low that I almost have to limbo dance my way inside. I am met by Magiel Vandewall, who is standing between two copper kettles as big as a pair of hot tubs. 'The people around here must have been pretty short back in the day,' says Magiel as I straighten myself up again.

Age-old tradition

Since as far back as the Middle Ages, people have been making their own *stroop* from fresh fruit here in the region that covers Zuid-Limburg, Rijnland in Germany and the Voerstreek in Belgium. Around 1600, the profession of *loonstoker* arose and they started making *stroop* for sale to the local population. Many of these sole traders were forced to close their businesses, however, when industrial manufacturers began to make *rinse stroop* (syrup made from sugar beet) in the 19th century. Today, Magiel runs the last-surviving family firm in Limburg that makes *stroop* in the autumn and winter using fruit from its own orchards.

Boiling and pressing to a pulp

The day before my arrival, Magiel has spent three and a half hours boiling 1000 kg of apples and pears down to a pulp under a cloth in one of the hot tubs. Now – at nine o'clock in the morning – it looks like he is in the middle of a game of Jenga as he uses wooden blocks to build a tower in which the fruit is slowly pressed through linen cloths. 'Look!' Magiel says, holding a pear between his fingers that has been flattened from a three-dimensional piece of fruit into a thin, almost two-dimensional sliver of skin. Out of the 1000 kg of fruit he retains only one wheelbarrow

of waste product, but that waste is put to good use, too. 'I give the pressed fruit to my neighbour, who uses it to feed his cows,' he explains.

Reducing

He boils the juices in the kettle in three stages, adding another bucket of juice every ten minutes or so. 'If you pour in all the juice at once, you will lose some of the aroma,' Magiel tells me. While the deliciously smelling sweet and sour vapours are sucked away by a gigantic ventilation hood, the juices continue to boil and reduce. The colour changes gradually from light brown to ochre to almost red. Three hours later the syrup rises in a flurry of bubbles, just like when you boil milk.

Tasting

Magiel sticks a silver-coloured spoon into the syrup. Whereas only one hour previously it had the consistency of water, now it drips off the spoon in thick drops. He starts filling the syrup jars by hand. When he offers me a taste I experience the rich, soft and refreshing flavour of reduced fruit; as if one hundred apples and pears have been condensed into one small spoonful. 'It's delicious on bread and pancakes or as part of a cheeseboard, and goes great with lots of dishes here in Limburg, like *k'nien in het zoer* and *zoervleis*. And I never need to buy Italian balsamic vinegar either; I just add a little water to the syrup to make my own!' laughs Magiel.

Varieties

Magiel makes four different kinds of *Limburgse stroop*: sweet syrup containing 80 per cent pear and 20 per cent apple; a more bitter variety containing 60 per cent pear and 40 per cent apple; a quince syrup; and a sour apple syrup containing 75 per cent apple and 25 per cent sugar beet. The latter is completely different from factory-made apple syrup, which contains 25 per cent apple and 75 per cent sugar beet.





MAASTRICHTS ZOERVLEIS

Café Sjiem is located just beyond the old city gates of Maastricht, one street down from De Bisschopsmolen. In true Trojan Horse style, this little café has been stealing the hearts of the citizens of Maastricht for over thirty-five years. Its popularity can be attributed in no small part to a single dish, one you simply have to try at least once in your life: *zoervleis* (literally sour meat), a horsemeat stew made using *Limburgse stroop*.

Born out of necessity

'There are lots of different stories about where *zoervleis* comes from. But everyone agrees that it has its origins in poverty,' explains café owner Robin Berben, after greeting me by kissing my hand. People began to eat horsemeat in Maastricht around the end of the 19th century. 'They used the tougher parts to make *zoervleis* after first marinating the meat in vinegar to make it more tender.' Despite the name, the dish isn't really sour at all, thanks to the syrup, *ontbijtkoek* and sugar.

Simpler recipe

In the kitchen at Café Sjiem, they have made considerable changes to the recipe for their most popular dish down through the years. Whereas years ago the chefs had to stand for hours on end stirring huge pots of stew over a roasting hot fire, these days they put the meat with all the ingredients in the oven and cook it overnight at a low temperature, which makes the meat unbelievably juicy and tender. 'It's easier that way. And tastier too,' according to one of the chefs.

Perfect at carnival time

Robin serves the stew in mini Creuset pots at long tables where everyone can sit and eat without having to make a reservation. Delicious with homemade thick-cut fries, lashings of mayonnaise and homemade apple sauce – it doesn't get more Dutch than this. 'Dip a fry first in the mayonnaise and then in the *zoervleis*,' explains Robin. 'The perfect combination of sweet, sour and salty. And even better when you've had one too many to drink at carnival time!'