

Brandade de Morue

A French salt-cod purée with olive oil, garlic & poached potatoes

1. A Little History Before We Cook

Brandade de morue is a beloved specialty from Nîmes and the wider region of Languedoc (today Occitanie). The word brandade comes from the Provençal verb brandar, meaning “to stir, to shake,” which is exactly what you do to emulsify the fish with olive oil.

Why salt cod?

Because the French have been obsessed with it for centuries. From medieval Catholic fasting days to long sea voyages, salted cod was the original pantry essential. Nîmes became a major trading hub and developed its own refined version of this dish, usually smoother and silkier than the heavier, more potato-forward Provençal brandade.

Traditionally eaten on Fridays or during Lent, today it's a comforting classic — creamy, garlicky, deeply savory, and perfect with crusty bread.

2. Traditional Brandade de Morue (Salt Cod Brandade)

Serves 4–6

Ingredients

- 1 lb (450 g) salt cod (boneless if possible)
- 1 cup (240 ml) whole milk
- 1 lb (450 g) Yukon Gold potatoes (optional but traditional in many French households)
- 4–5 garlic cloves, peeled
- $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup (180–240 ml) good extra-virgin olive oil
- 1–2 bay leaves
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Nutmeg, a pinch (optional but very French)

- Lemon juice, to taste
- Optional garnish: parsley, chives, or a drizzle of olive oil

Equipment

- Saucepan for poaching
 - Potato masher or fork (or immersion blender for a smoother texture — though purists prefer hand-mashed)
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3. Instructions

Step 1 — Desalt the cod

1. Rinse the salt cod under cold running water.
2. Place in a bowl and cover with cold water.
3. Refrigerate 24 hours, changing the water 3–4 times.

(Some brands require only 12 hours — check the package.)

This step removes the aggressive salt and rehydrates the fish.

Step 2 — Poach the cod gently

1. Place the cod in a pot with milk + enough water to cover.
2. Add the bay leaf and 2 garlic cloves.
3. Simmer gently for 10–12 minutes, until the fish flakes easily.

(Do not boil — this dries out the cod.)

4. Drain and reserve about ½ cup of the warm poaching liquid.
 5. Flake the cod and discard any skin/bones.
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Step 3 — Cook the potatoes (optional but typical in Nîmes-style home cooking)

1. Peel and cut potatoes into chunks.
 2. Boil in salted water until tender, then drain.
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Step 4 — Make the brandade

1. In a warm bowl, combine the flaked cod and potatoes (if using).
2. Add the remaining crushed garlic.
3. Begin to mash with a fork or potato masher.
4. Slowly drizzle in the olive oil, a little at a time, stirring vigorously
— think of it like making mayonnaise.
5. Add a touch of the warm poaching liquid to loosen the texture as needed.
6. Season with pepper, nutmeg (optional), and a splash of lemon juice.

You're aiming for a creamy, white, slightly elastic purée.

Step 5 — Serve

Traditionally served:

- Warm, with toasted baguette or grilled country bread
- Room temperature as a spread
- Or baked briefly with breadcrumbs for a gratin-style finish

Delicious alongside:

- a simple green salad
 - roasted cherry tomatoes
 - or olives
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4. Wine Pairing (French & American Options)

Brandade is salty, creamy, garlicky — it needs freshness and acidity.

White Wines (Best Match)

- Picpoul de Pinet (Languedoc) — the classic pairing
- White Côtes du Rhône
- Cassablanca white from Provence
- Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine (Loire)
- Chablis (for a more elegant option)

American Alternatives

- Unoaked Chardonnay (California or Washington State)
- Albariño (Rías Baixas style but American)
- Oregon Pinot Gris
- Dry Riesling from New York State

Avoid:

- Heavy oaked Chardonnay
- Sweet whites
- Red wines (the salt + tannin clash)

In Nîmes, they say a good brandade should “hold the spoon upright yet melt on the tongue.”

And if an old grandmother sees you using a blender, she might cross herself and say, “That’s not brandade — that’s fish baby food!”