How to Make a Feast Manual

(a.k.a. "Brain Book")

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Preparing a medieval feast for a large number of people can be a very challenging task, especially for those who do not normally work in the foodservice industry. I have found that by keeping all of the information relevant to a feast's preparation in a single binder, I have a much easier time running the kitchen. It has also helped to defuse potential disasters when unexpected problems have popped up.

My feast manuals typically contain the following:

1. Menu and Recipes
2. Shopping List and Budget Worksheet
3. Packing List
4. Cooking Schedule
5. Plating Guide
6. Equipment Inventory

This document provides step-by-step instructions for preparing a feast manual, with a detailed example for each portion. It is my hope that it will be useful for others who are as organizationally challenged as I am.

- DM

Part 1 - Menu and Recipes

My first Feast Manual consisted solely of this section. I knew I needed copies of the entire menu and a complete recipe for every dish to be served.

By putting these in sheet-protectors and having them in a three-ring binder, the recipes could be pulled out individually so that multiple dishes could be worked on in separate parts of the kitchen.

I also got into the habit of printing out a second (or third) copy of this section to put at a prominent place at the event site, to allow the guests to know what was going to be served. This allowed people with dietary restrictions to check the recipes for problem ingredients, and had the added benefit of keeping people from interrupting the cooks with an endless stream of questions.

To make this section, print a single-page menu that lists all the courses and dishes in the order that they will be served. If the dish has a foreign or uncommon name, include a short description.

Then print a single-page recipe for each dish. If you need to scale up the recipe to serve the number of guests (i.e. the recipe serves 8 and your feast will be serving 80) then mark the scaling factor (e.g. "10x") clearly in the upper-right corner.

While the menu and recipes are pretty straightforward, there are some important aspects to keep in mind:

1. DO NOT make changes to the recipes during cooking! This could add problem ingredients that could cause allergic reactions for unsuspecting guests. If something goes wrong in the kitchen and a dish absolutely must be changed, make sure the change is announced during service.

2. It is helpful for the guests to highlight possible problem ingredients for each recipe, such as dairy, eggs, meat, wheat, and nuts.

3. DO NOT list a dish as being vegetarian if there are "hidden" animal ingredients, such as lard, gelatin, or chicken broth.

Part 1 - Example

A Supper for a Meat Day

Menu

On Table:
      manchet bread
      soft cheese
      fruit preserves

First Course:
      Pegions Stewed (stewed chicken)
      Onion and Parsley Salad
      Chervis (carrots and parsnips)

Second Course:
      Cormarye (roast pork)
      Wortes (cabbage)
      Rice Lombard

Third Course:
      Applemoyse with Snowe
      Wafers
      Walnuts

Beverages:
      Non-alcoholic wine (a.k.a grape juice)
      Lemonade

8x

Cheese

Making fresh (a.k.a. "green") cheese is actually very easy. It takes very little time and is well worth the effort.

> 2 quarts milk
> 1/4 cup vinegar
> salt
> cream (for texture)

Heat milk to 195°F - if you don't have a kitchen thermometer then heat the milk slowly until it just starts to simmer. Remove from heat and add vinegar. Stir gently and let sit for 10 minutes. Strain through cheesecloth, wrap, and squeeze out as much whey as possible. Allow to drain for about an hour. Unwrap cheese and mix with a little salt and cream until desired flavor and texture is reached. The cheese can also be flavored with herbs, garlic, figs, dates, etc....

Serves 10

Pegions Stewed

This is an amazingly simple recipe that is good served hot or cold. While it calls for pigeon, I use chicken legs and thighs - they're a lot cheaper and easier to find, and the dark meat is a close enough match for taste and texture. It goes exceptionally well with Onion Salad.

    3-4 pounds chicken
    2 cups broth
    1 clove garlic
    1 Tbsp. parsley
    1/2 tsp. marjoram
    1/2 tsp. sage
    1/2 tsp. powder fort
    1/2 tsp. salt
    pinch saffron

Place all ingredients in a large pot and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer until done - about 20 minutes. Serves 12

Source [A Noble Boke off Cookry (Holkham MSS 674), R. Napier (ed.)]: To mak pegions stewed hew pegions small and put them in an erthen pot then tak erbes and pilled garlike and chope them to gedur and put them in good brothe put ther to whit grece poudur and vergious colour it with saffron and salt it and stew it well and serue it.

Source [Forme of Cury, S. Pegge (ed.)]: Peiouns Ystewed. XX.II. VIII. Take peions and stop hem with garlec ypylled and with gode erbes ihewe. and do hem in an erthen pot. cast þerto gode broth and whyte grece. Powdour fort. safroun verious & salt.

Source [Liber cure cocorum, T. Gloning (ed.)]: Peions istued. Take peions and hew hom in morselle smalle, Put hom in a erþyn pot, þou shalle. Take pilled garlek and herbys anon, Hack hom smalle er þou more don. Put hom in þo pot, and þer to take Gode brothe with wyte grece, þou no3t forsake. Do powdur þer to and gode verius, Coloure hit with safron, and salt inow. Þou put in pote þese þynges alle, And stue þy peions þus þou schalle.

8x

Onion and Parsley Salad

I've found a number of variations of this recipe served as a garnish for boiled seafood and other meats. While I use garlic here, some recipes leave it out, and others have called for cinnamon or cloves.

    1 medium onion
    1 bunch parsley
    2 cloves garlic (add more or less to taste)
    2 Tbsp. red wine vinegar

Chop the onion and parsley well and mix. Mince and add garlic. Add enough vinegar to moisten everything. Mix and allow time for flavors to mingle. Serves 12.

Source [Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books, T. Austin (ed.)]: Sauce for peiouns. Take percely, oynouns, garleke, and salt, and mynce smal the percely and the oynouns, and grynde the garleke, and temper it with vynegre y-now: and mynce the rostid peiouns and cast the sauce ther-on a-boute, and serue it forth.

Chervis

Menagier de Paris calls this recipe "CHERVIS", which from context is evidently a kind of root vegetable. Cotgrave's Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues defines chervis as being either a skirret or a parsnip.

> 10 parsnips (approx.)
> 1/4 cup figs, finely chopped
> 1/4 cup raisins
> 1/2 tsp. fine spice powder

Peel parsnips and cut into long pieces, discarding any woody center parts. Place in boiling water and cook until just tender. Drain and place into a pie crust. Add figs, raisins, and sprinkle with spice powder. Cover with top crust and bake at 350°F until done. Serve cold.

Source [Le Ménagier de Paris, J. Hinson (trans.)]: CHERVIS. The earliest appearing from the ground and freshly pulled, harvested in January, February, etc., are the best; and the freshest are known by the fact that they break off, and the old ones when pulled from the ground bend. You must clean them and remove the bad parts as with turnips, then you must wash them thoroughly in warm water, then parboil a little, then put them to dry on a towel, then flour them, then fry, then arrange nicely on little plates, and put sugar on them.

Cormarye

This is an exceptionally simple and very tasty recipe. The combination of coriander and caraway, a bit unusual for medieval English recipes, gives the meat and the sauce a strong, complementary flavor.

> 2 lbs. pork loin
> 1 1/2 tsp. coriander
> 1 1/2 tsp. caraway
> 1/2 tsp. pepper
> 1/2 tsp. salt
> 2 cloves garlic, minced
> 2 cups red wine
> 1 cup broth

Mix spices and garlic with wine and pour over pork in a roasting pan. Cover and bake at 350° until cooked through, basting regularly. Strain the drippings from the roasting pan into a saucepan, along with the broth. Bring to a boil and simmer for about 15 minutes. Serve sauce with pork.

Source [Forme of Cury, S. Pegge (ed.)]: Cormarye. XX.II. XIII. Take Colyandre, Caraway smale grounden, Powdour of Peper and garlec ygrounde in rede wyne, medle alle þise togyder and salt it, take loynes of Pork rawe and fle of the skyn, and pryk it wel with a knyf and lay it in the sawse, roost þerof what þou wilt, & kepe þat þat fallith þerfro in the rosting and seeþ it in a possynet with faire broth, & serue it forth witþ þe roost anoon.

8x

Wortes

This recipe of boiled buttery cabbage is quite tasty, and a great side dish for a dinner.

    1 head of (green) cabbage, shredded
    2 leeks, cut into roundels
    1/2 cup parsley, loosely chopped
    1 stick butter, clarified
    3 slices wheat bread, broken into pieces
    salt

Bring a pot of water to a boil. Once boiling, add cabbage, leeks, and parsley and cook until just tender. Drain cabbage, leek and parsley and put on top of the bread pieces. Pour butter over cabbage (more or less can be used as according to taste) and salt to taste.

Source [Gentyll manly Cokere]: To make buttyrd Wortys. Take all maner of gode herbys that ye may gette pyke them washe them and hacke them and boyle them vp in fayre water and put ther to butture clarefied A grete quantite And when they be boylde enowgh salt them but let non Ote mele come ther yn And dyse brede in small gobbetts & do hit in dyshys and powre the wortes A pon and serue hit furth.

8x

Rice Lombard

This is a very simple rice dish. The broth and saffron add a rich, warm flavor.

> 1 1/2 cups rice
> 3 cups broth
> 1/4 tsp. salt
> pinch saffron
> pinch cinnamon
> pinch sugar

Put broth, salt, and saffron into a large saucepan and bring to a boil. Add rice, cover, and reduce heat. Cook for about 15 minutes, or until rice is tender. Sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon.

Source [Middle English culinary recipes in MS Harley 5401, C. Hieatt (ed.)]: Ryse Lumbard Rynnyng. Recipe ryse & pyke þam wele, & wesh þam in .iii. or .iiij. waters, & than seth þam in clene water til þai begyn to boyle. And at þe fyrst bolyng put oute þe water & seth it in broth of flesh, & put þerto sugyre & colour it with saferon, & serof it forth.

Source [Middle English culinary recipes in MS Harley 5401, C. Hieatt (ed.)]: Rise Lombard Standyng. Recipe & make þam in pe same manere, safe take perto brothe of flesh, salmon, or congyr; & cast berto powdre of canel, & make peron lyure of brede as it is aforesaide.

8x

Applemoyse

This is a variant of Applemuse that is more like Chardwardon. It's very easy to make, and downright addictive - especially when topped with Snowe

> 3 cups apple sauce
> 3/4 cup sugar
> 3 egg yolks
> 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
> 1/2 tsp. ginger

Mix with ingredients in a saucepan. Heat until it starts to boil and becomes very thick. Serve warm or cold.

Source [A Proper New Booke of Cookery, A. Veale]: To make Applemoyse. Take a dosen apples and ether rooste or boyle them and drawe them thorowe a streyner, and the yolkes of three or foure egges withal, and, as ye strayne them, temper them wyth three or foure sponefull of damaske water yf ye wyll, than take and season it wyth suger and halfe a dysche of swete butter, and boyle them upon a chaffyngdysche in a platter, and caste byskettes or synamon and gynger upon them and so serve them forthe.

8x

Snowe

Yummy whipped-cream-like stuff!

> 1 cup cream
> 1 egg
> 1 Tbsp. sugar
> 1 tsp. rose water

Separate egg, discarding yolk. Stir egg white in a large bowl. Add cream, sugar, and rose water. Whisk until mixture will not drip out of whisk. Strain to remove whey if necessary. Serve with wafers.

Source [A Proper New Booke of Cookery, C.F. Frere (ed.)]: To make a dyschefull of Snowe. Take a pottell of swete thycke creame and the whytes of eyghte egges, and beate them altogether wyth a spone, then putte them in youre creame and a saucerfull of Rosewater, and a dyshe full of Suger wyth all, then take a stycke and make it cleane, and than cutte it in the ende foure square, and therwith beate all the aforesayde thynges together, and ever as it ryseth take it of and put it into a Collaunder, this done take one apple and set it in the myddes of it, and a thicke bushe of Rosemary, and set it in the myddes of the platter, then cast your Snowe uppon the Rosemarye and fyll your platter therwith. And yf you have wafers caste some in wyth all and thus serve them forthe.

8x

Wafers

While this recipe is from the seventeenth century (and therefore post-medieval) it's the most authentic one I have at this point. Surprisingly there are very few medieval recipes for wafers or waffles. Perhaps I'm not looking at the right sources.

    1/2 cup flour
    1/3 cup cream
    1 egg yolk
    1 Tbsp. rose water
    3 Tbsp. sugar
    pinch cinnamon
    pinch salt

Mix ingredients together well. Spoon out into a wafer (or pizzelle) maker and cook to desired doneness. The wafers will keep for weeks in a sealed, airtight container.

Source [The English Housewife, Michael R. Best (ed.)]: To make Wafers
To make the best Wafers, take the finest wheat-flowers you can get, and mix it with Cream, the yelks of Eggs, Rose-water, Sugar, and Cinamon, till it be a little thicker than Pancake-batter, and then warming your Wafter Irons on a charcoal-fire, anoint them first with sweet Butter, and than lay on your batter, and press it, and bake it white or brown at your pleasure.

Part 2 - Shopping List and Budget Worksheet

I quickly realized how useful a complete, unified shopping list could be, and got into the habit of making one. To do so, I would go through each recipe in the order given in the menu and add the ingredients to a spreadsheet. Then I would group the ingredients, add the required amounts together, and then have a total amount to buy. I usually ended up printing out two copies–one for the brain book, and the other to actually take shopping. This latter copy is the one I'd cross things off of after I'd purchased them.

As I got more organized, the shopping list took on some aspects of a budget worksheet. I included prices for each item and totaled them up

The columns I include for this spreadsheet are:

> Ingredient
> Dish (the recipe title)
> Qty (the quantity needed per person)
> Serves (the number of servings per recipe)
> Quantity (the amount needed for the feast)
> Buy (the amount to buy - some things are sold in set quantities, like eggs)
> Unit price
> Price (what I expect to spend on the item)

When an ingredient is used in more than one recipe, each recipe gets a separate line with the "Buy" and "Price" columns left blank. Then a total line is added for the ingredient to show the needed quantity for the ingredient used in all the dishes.

Part 2 - Example

A Supper for a Meat Day - Shopping List

Ingredient	Dish	Qty	Serves	Quantity	Buy		Price
apple sauce	Applemoyse	3 cups	6	60 cups	60 cups	0.53	$31.92
bread	Bread	1 ea.	1	120 ea.	120 ea.	0.33	$40.00
bread, sliced	Wortes	3 slices	12	30 slices	30 slices	0.67	$19.95
broth	Pegions Stewed	2 cups	16				
broth	Cormarye	1 cups	8				
broth	Rice Lombard	3 cups	8				
broth (total)	(total)	6 cups		60 cups	60 cups	0.67	$39.90
butter	Wortes	0.25 lbs.	12	2.50 lbs.	3 lbs.	4.75	$14.25
cabbage	Wortes	1 head	12	10 head	10 head	1.18	$11.80
caraway	Cormarye	1.5 tsp.	8	22.5 tsp.	2 jars	5.39	$10.78
carrots	Chervis	0.5 lbs.	4	15 lbs.	15 lbs.	1.48	$22.20
chicken	Pegions Stewed	4 lbs.	16	30 lbs.	30 lbs.	2.99	$89.70
cinnamon	Rice Lombard	0.5 tsp.	8	-	-	-	(donated)
cinnamon	Wafers	0.6 tsp.	16	-	-	-	(donated)
corriander	Cormarye	1.5 tsp.	8	22.5 tsp.	2 jars	5.15	$10.30
cream	Soft Cheese	.13 cups	30				
cream	Snowe	1 cups	16				
cream	Wafers	0.33 cups	16				
cream (total)	(total)	1.33 cups		9.98 cups	3 quarts	5.19	$15.57

Part 3 - Packing List

One of the best ways to stop worrying about not forgetting something is to write it down. This goes doubly for when you're trying to organize a feast. The packing list is a simple list of all the things you want to bring that aren't necessarily obvious. While the ingredients might also go on this list, the shopping list from the previous section can be used to make sure they all get packed.

Part 3 - Example

<center>**Packing List**</center>

Food:
       cinnamon
       dried parsley
       saffron
       ember day tart (for lunch)
       chicken nuggets (for kids)

Equipment:
       large stockpots
       steamer pans
       cookie sheets
       sieve

       hot pads
       serving gear
       first aid kit
       drink cooler
       wafer iron

       clothes (to change into)
       shoes
       table cloth
       napkins
       camera

       receipts

Part 4 - Cooking Schedule

This spreadsheet helps for working out the timing of dishes and is especially useful when there are multiple courses and limited oven space. Some foods can be held before serving, while others must be served right out of the oven.

Note: Always make sure to keep foods at proper temperature to ensure food safety. Holding foods at room temperature for too long can cause a serious health hazard!

Part 4 - Example

	2:00	3:00	4:00	5:00	5:45	6:00	6:15	6:30
On Table:								
Bread				plate	**serve**			
Soft Cheese	prep			plate	**serve**			
Fruit Preserves				plate	**serve**			
First Course:								
Chicken			**in oven**	**in oven**	plate	**serve**		
Onion Salad	prep				plate	**serve**		
Carrots & Parsnips		prep	**in oven**	**in oven**	plate	**serve**		
Second Course:								
Pork	**in oven**					plate	**serve**	
Cabbage			prep	**cook**		plate	**serve**	
Rice Lombard				**in oven**		plate	**serve**	
Third Course:								
Applemoyse	prep	plate	hold	hold	hold	hold	hold	**serve**
Snowe						prep	plate	**serve**
Wafers							plate	**serve**

Part 5 - Plating Guide

When cooking a multi-course list, it often helps to have a sheet that specifies which serving gear to use for each dish, and what garnish to add (if any).

Part 5 - Example

Plating Guide

On Table:
      manchet bread - wrapped in cloth napkins (head table: linen)
      soft cheese - small white bowls
      fruit preserves - small clear bowls

First Course:
      Pegions Stewed - large white plates, fresh parsley, large forks
      Onion and Parsley Salad - oval clear bowls, small spoons
      Carrots and parsnips - medium bowls, large spoons

Second Course:
      Roast pork - large platters, rosemary sprigs, large forks (head table: fancy platter)
      Cabbage - medium bowls, large spoons
      Rice Lombard - large bowls, large spoons

Third Course:
      Applemoyse with Snowe - individual cups, mint leaves
      Wafers - small silver platters
      Walnuts - small glass bowls

Part 6 - Equipment Inventory

In cases where you are bringing a lot of your own serving gear for a feast, it is a good idea to have an inventory sheet to make sure everything goes back home with you. Make sure to update it for anything that gets broken. This will also help others pack things up in the event that you're so wiped out after the feast that you can no longer function.

Part 6 - Example

Equipment Inventory

12	large serving spoons
24	small serving spoons
10	large trays
12	large white bowls
12	small clear glass bowls
24	small white bowls
1	large silver tray
4	roasters
30	white hand towels
2	digital thermometers
4	large ladles
3	large slotted spoons