

Some Like It Hot

Mustard Magic

By Virginia Willis

Mustard can be sweet, mild, or fiery hot. It lends a clean, sharp flavor and a pleasant punch of heat to many dishes. Foods as diverse as all-American hot-dogs enjoyed at the game, mustard-crusted lamb chops at a dinner party, and even lowly chicken nuggets with honey mustard dressing all benefit from the flavor pop of mustard.

Mustard has been one of the most widely used spices in the world for many centuries. The seeds were buried in ancient Egyptian tombs and exported to Europe by the Romans who used it for both food and medicine. In fact, the word mustard comes from an ancient Roman condiment of crushed mustard seed and *must*, or unfermented grape juice. The French word, *moutarde*, is derived from a contraction of *moust*, or must, and *ardent*, meaning blazing or burning - as in hot.

Mustard belongs to the same genus (*Brassica*) as broccoli, collards, and kale: all greens strong in flavor with a touch of heat and a hint of bitterness. There are three major types of mustard seed: yellow (sometimes referred to as *white*), brown, and black. The milder yellow seeds are used to make American, or ballpark-style, mustard. The brown seeds are hotter and produce spicier condiments such as Dijon mustard and spicy Asian mustard. The spicy black seeds are

less prevalent, as brown seeds, which are more economical to grow and harvest, have replaced them.

In the kitchen, mustard has several main functions: prepared and used as a condiment, dry or prepared as an emulsifier, and dry or prepared as a flavoring agent. As a condiment, mustards are all relatively created in the same way. The seed is cut or crushed, and then its hull and bran may be sifted out, depending on the type of mustard. Smooth mustard has the bran removed while whole grain, or *ancienne*, does not. Mustard seeds are actually not pungent at all until they are crushed and mixed with a cold liquid. Often that cold liquid is water, wine, vinegar, beer, or a combination of these liq-

uids, with seasonings and perhaps other flavorings added. Prepared mustards are most often used to improve meat, fish, chicken, and sandwiches. Certain foods like *pot au feu* in France and sausages in Germany are traditionally served with a spoonful of mustard on the side.

The city of Dijon, France, historically plays a large role in the consumption of prepared mustard. During the thirteenth century, Dijon became the site of the first sizable commercial mustard business. In a country known for its great food and wine, the Burgundy region of France has one of the greatest culinary histories of them all. Dijon was home to the powerful dukes of Burgundy. The dukes were as rich and powerful as the



Mustard seeds come in a range of colors from yellow to black. It is the brown seeds that are used to create the famous Dijon mustard.

French kings and demanded the very best food for their guests and wine from the nearby Côte d'Or to complement it. The region, of course, produced then, as it does now, some of the finest wine in the world. Dijon had lots of money, lots of wine – and lots of mustard.

Mustard in the area of Dijon was made with *verjus* (the unfermented juice of unripened grapes), or vinegar, both the result of the thriving wine business. Unfortunately, over time the manufacturers did not band together to form an Appellation Contrôlée, the legal authorization for the name of the product or region in France. Such products are held to high standards and use only approved ingredients. Because of



At Maille mustard boutiques in France, fresh Dijon mustard is dispensed from taps into refillable stoneware crocks.

this, mustard produced outside of Dijon may be labeled Dijon. Perhaps the most famous is Grey Poupon. Although this product is now produced by Kraft Foods, Messieurs Grey and Poupon actually did exist and are not merely characters invented by Madison Avenue. In 1777 Monsieur Grey, who had developed a secret recipe for a strong mustard made with white wine, formed a partnership with Monsieur Poupon, who supplied the financial backing.

In the shadow of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene at Place de la Madeleine in Paris is a Maille mustard boutique. This boutique and the Maille mustard boutique in Dijon are both temples for mustard since Maille has been producing Dijon mustard since 1747. Both stores have mustard taps, much like beer taps, except the liquid gold flowing is mustard, not beer. The very fresh mustard is dispensed into refillable stoneware containers and I astonishing hot, spicy, and delicious.

From a boutique tap or off the shelf, the key to preserving the mustard's heat is to store it in the refrigerator. Because mustard quickly loses its heat, a fresher product is always better. Unless you use a lot of mustard, it is best to purchase small jars and replace them frequently.

In addition to being a condiment, mustard acts as an emulsifier. An emulsion is a suspension of small droplets of one liquid into another that is insoluble.

Simply put, it is the combination of two liquids that do not go together, such as the proverbial oil and water, or, in the case of a vinaigrette, oil and vinegar. For the formation of a stable emulsion, an emulsifying agent must usually be present. Dry mustard powder coats the droplets and helps keep them apart. Powders are not as strong as chemical emulsifiers such as egg yolk or gelatin. However, dry or prepared mustard can help keep a hollandaise sauce or a homemade mayonnaise from separating, and a vinaigrette with a substantial amount of mustard will stay blended longer than one without mustard.

Dry or prepared mustard, and mustard in seed form, can also be used as a flavoring agent. In Indian cuisine, whole seeds are fried in ghee until they pop, producing a nutty flavor that is useful as a garnish or seasoning. This technique of frying spices is known as *baghar* or *tarka*. But, not all culinary techniques and processes are so exotic; we've been using mustard seed in bread-and-butter pickle recipes in the South for many years. Prepared mustard may be used as a flavoring agent for a sauce, coating, or butter. The flavors should be well-balanced, with no single element dominating. Mustard cuts through fatty meats such as duck, pork and lamb, and rich oily seafood such as salmon or mackerel. A dollop of Dijon can work kitchen magic.

MUSTARD GLOSSARY

American, also known as ballpark, mustard is made from white or yellow mustard seeds, blended with sugar and vinegar, and colored with turmeric.

Asian mustard is made from brown seeds, water, and sometimes oil. It is a fiery dipping sauce used for egg rolls and rich meats.

Bordeaux mustard is made from black seeds blended with unfermented wine. The seeds are not husked, producing a strong, aromatic, dark brown mustard often flavored with tarragon.

Dijon mustard is made from the husked brown seeds blended with white wine, vinegar, salt, and spices. It is a creamy, straw-yellow color and varies from mild to very hot. Today, Dijon mustard is the benchmark (for many) against which all mustards are measured.

English mustard is hot, made from white seeds, and is sometimes mixed with wheat flour for bulk and turmeric for color. The most well-known brand of powdered mustard today is Colman's, named for its 19th-century British miller, Jeremiah Colman.

German mustard is usually a smooth blend of vinegar and black mustard, varying in strength. It is often dark in color, sweet-sour, and flavored with herbs and spices.



A Dijon mustard tarragon sauce cuts the richness of poached salmon in Virginia Willis' salmon salad.

Chilled Poached Salmon with Mustard Sauce

The bite of the mustard cuts the richness of the salmon. This seems like the quintessential “ladies who lunch” dish, but it’s actually very flavorful and a family favorite.

Yield: 4 servings

3 cups water
2 cups dry white wine
3 sprigs tarragon, leaves picked and chopped
stems reserved
2 bay leaves
1/2 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
1 carrot, peeled and sliced
4 5-ounce fresh salmon fillets,
skinned and bones removed
1/2 cup Dijon mustard
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil,
plus more for greens
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
salad greens for garnish

Using a large shallow pot over medium high heat, combine the water and white wine. Add the tarragon stems, bay leaves, peppercorns, and carrot. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, and simmer until flavorful, about 20 minutes. Season the salmon fillets with salt and pepper. Add the fillets to the gently simmering liquid. Cover and simmer until firm, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow the salmon to cool in the liquid. When completely cool, transfer salmon to a plate lined with paper towels and dry completely. Cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 1 hour, or until ready to serve.

Place the mustard in a small bowl. Whisk in the olive oil in a slow steady stream. Add the chopped tarragon leaves. Taste and adjust for seasoning with salt and pepper. Lightly dress salad greens with olive oil and divide between four plates. Place a salmon fillet on each plate with the greens and top with the mustard sauce. Serve immediately.

Mesclun Salad with Shallot Mustard Vinaigrette

Feel free to create your own mesclun mix. I suggest baby red oak leaf lettuce, baby arugula, mâche, and bite-size pieces of Belgian endive, frisée, and radicchio.

Yield: 6 servings

1 shallot, very finely chopped
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1/3 cup olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste
1 pound mesclun

Whisk together the shallot, mustard, and vinegar. Add the oil in a slow stream, whisking until emulsified. Season with salt and pepper. Just before serving, toss salad greens with just enough dressing to coat. Taste and adjust for seasoning with salt and pepper. Serve immediately.

Mustard-Crusted Pork Loin

The marriage of pork and mustard is a long, happy one. This recipe can also be easily prepared in the oven. Simply place the loin in a roasting pan and roast in a preheated 350° oven until an instant read thermometer reads 145°, about 45 minutes to one hour.

Yield: 6 servings

3 large garlic cloves, very finely chopped
1 bay leaf
1/4 cup Dijon mustard
3 sprigs thyme, leaves only
1/4 cup yellow mustard seed
1 3-pound center-cut
boneless pork loin roast
Course salt and freshly ground
black pepper

Combine the garlic, bay leaf, thyme, and mustard in large sealable plastic bag. Add roast and turn to evenly coat roast. Cover and refrigerate at least 30 minutes or overnight, turning pork occasionally.

Place the mustard seeds in a rimmed baking sheet. Season the roast with salt and pepper. Roll the roast in the seeds to coat evenly.

Place a heatproof container of water in the grill. Heat the grill to 300°. If using charcoal, bank the charcoal to one side. If using a gas grill, do not ignite one of the burners. (Large cuts of meat require indirect heat on the grill.) Grill the loin over indirect heat in a covered grill, turning twice, until an instant read thermometer reads 145°, about 45 minutes to 1 hour. (The pork will be slightly pink in the center and this is desired.)

Remove the loin to a warmed platter and cover with foil. Let the pork rest so the juices will redistribute for about 15 minutes. While the meat is resting, the internal temperature of the roast will rise to 150° to 155° because of carryover cooking. Slice 1/4-inch thick and serve immediately.

Mustard seeds pressed onto a mustard coated pork loin create a crunchy shell that helps seal in the meat's juices.

