

CLAYBOURG MONTHLY NEWSLETTER –February 2010

French Cooking Adventures, Food & Cookware News, Eco-conscious Living
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Mardi Gras
February
16th

MARDI GRAS, a French expression literally meaning "Fat Tuesday"

Mardi Gras (pronounced mâr•dē grâ) came to America with the arrival of the French explorer Iberville in 1699. Iberville landed in what is today Louisiana, just south of New Orleans, the heart of America's modern-day Mardi Gras celebrations. In fact, his landing is believed to have coincided with the French Mardi Gras celebration, a French catholic tradition that has been celebrated in Europe since the Middle Ages, explaining his choice of name for his point of entry: Point du Mardi Gras.

Mardi Gras is the last day of feasting before Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. **Carnival** (in French Carnaval), often synonymous with Mardi Gras, derives from the Latin expression "Carne levare", meaning "farewell to the flesh/meat."

The most famous carnivals in France are held in Nice (south of France) where you can admire floats covered with colorful flowers or in Dunkerque, city in the northern region of France, where giants parade. The kids watching these parades are often disguised (like for Halloween in the U.S) and collect candies distributed during the parade of floats. However, in France, we don't eat the King Cake at a Mardi Gras party, which is served only on the twelve days after Christmas (known as Epiphany), but we enjoy "beignets," instead

The word **Beignet** (pronounced bey-YAY) comes from the early Celtic word bigne meaning "to raise." Beignets are fried raised pieces of yeast dough sprinkled with sugar. Beignets are like a sweet doughnut, but the beignet is typically without a hole. Beignets have been associated with Mardi Gras in France since at least the 16th century, and many recipes for beignets appear in French works around the same time. So, celebrate Mardi Gras this year, the French way, by eating beignets.

BEIGNET DE CARNAVAL RECIPE (MAKE 24 PIECES)

Ingredients:

- 1 ¾ oz. of sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 2 organic eggs, room temperature and beaten
- 5 tbsp. of butter
- 1/2 cup of organic milk
- 13 oz. of all-purpose unbleached flour
- ¼ oz. of active dry yeast
- Zest of organic orange or lemon (optional)
- Vegetable oil (enough to cover beignets while frying)
- Confectioners' sugar for dusting

Preparation: In a small bowl, sprinkle yeast over ¼ cup of lukewarm milk, stir to dissolve and let stand for 5 minutes until it "bubbles." Melt the butter in the remaining milk over medium heat. In a large bowl, combine flour, salt and sugar and add the yeast. Pour in the eggs and milk over the ingredients, add zest and knead until smooth and elastic. Form dough into a round ball, place in a lightly greased bowl, cover with kitchen towel, and let rise until it doubles in size (1 to 2 hours) depending on room temperature. Roll out on a lightly floured board to 1/2-inch thickness. Cut into approximately 3-inch squares or circles and let sit for additional 30 minutes. In a deep fryer or large pot, heat vegetable oil to 360 degrees F. Fry the beignets (2 or 3 at a time) 1 to 2 minutes or until they are puffed and golden brown on both sides, turning them in the oil with tongs once or twice to get them evenly brown; beignets will rise to the surface of the oil as soon as they begin to puff. Note: If the beignets don't rise to the top immediately when dropped into the oil, the oil is not hot enough. Remove from oil and drain on paper towels, then sprinkle heavily with powdered sugar. Serve hot. Bon Appetit!!!

GREEN TIPS: Bring your own Lunch at Work

Avoid eating processed foods and plan to bring your lunch at work; it will help your health, wallet and the environment. Taking leftovers is the easiest way to make your lunch bag and stew/casserole leftovers are the best because they will probably taste even better than it did right from the oven. For casseroles recipes, check our website <http://www.claybourg.com> and to get more ideas check our blog at www.thehoplasquare.com.