

THICKENING AGENTS

Any substitutes added to sauces, soups etc., to give them a thicker consistency and to bind them. In the case of sauces the thickening or liaison is an integral part of the mixture, for example the flour used in many sauces and the butter used in hollandaise sauce. A thickening also ensures a smooth texture and holds heavy ingredients (whether sieved or not) in suspension - without a liaison, ingredients such as lentils would separate out from a soup and settle at the bottom.

The most commonly used thickeners are types of flour, such as corn flour & potato flour. A paste of butter and flour (known as Beurre Manie) is often added to hot stews towards the end of cooking to thicken and enrich. Arrowroot is used to thicken fruit juices to make a sauce or glaze for fruit flans and other desserts.

ARROWROOT - A pure starch powder (Fecula) obtained from the pith of the roots of the Maranta plants, which is grown in Bermuda and the West Indies. It is a light, white, odorless powder, which will keep for a considerable time if stored in a dry place.

BARLEY FLOUR - This is ground and powdered pearl barley. Blended with water, it makes a good thickening for soups and sauces made with milk.

BEURRE MANIE - A liaison of butter and flour taken into 1:1 ratio and which is uncooked. Used for thickening soups, stews or casserole after cooking is complete.

BLOOD - Blood has long been used as an enriching and thickening agent in traditional British country cooking, though it is rare in use today. It is still often used in classic French dishes, such as Coq-Au-Vin, which uses chicken's blood. Pig's blood is the main ingredient of the black pudding.

CORNFLOUR (CORNSTARCH) - It is a finely ground white powder produced from corn kernels. It is lighter than wheat flour and is mainly used as a thickening agent in sauces, soups and stews, but it may also be used in some biscuits and cakes, such as Short Bread, to give a lighter, shorter texture.

DEXTRIN (BRITISH GUM) - A white or yellowish powder which is produced from starch and acts as a thickener. It is dissolved in hot water to form a glaze for brushing on bread and rolls.

EGG - Beaten eggs will thicken sauces and custard mixture.

KUZU (KUDZU) - A thickening agent used in Chinese and Japanese cooking, g, Kuzu is derived from the edible roots of a type of vine. The roots are soaked in water until only the kuzu remains. This is dried and ground into a powder and can be used in the same way as arrowroot or corn flour to thicken sauces or to make a glaze.

PANADA - Derived from the French Panade, a panada is a thick roux based sauce or paste used for bindings croquettes, stuffings and similar mixtures, and as the basis of Choux pastry and some types of soufflé. A panada may be made from flour, breadcrumbs, potatoes or rice.

PEA FLOUR - A flour produced from ground dried, matured peas. It can be used for thickening sauces & as a basis for soups.

POTATO FLOUR - The flour extracted from potatoes by means of pulverizing and washing. Potato flour is of special importance for people on a gluten - free diet. It can be used for thickening but tends to have a pronounced flavour. It can also be used in cakes and biscuits where a softer flour is required.