

The Zodiac Cooks - Recipes from the Celestial Kitchen of Life, Part 2

by Penny Thornton

Now, here's the story of how Penny got to write *The Zodiac Cooks*. This is where we left off in Part 1.



[...] I might never have thought of taking my gastronomic passions any further had it not been for an invitation to join the television *Food Network* in New York.

To fill you in. In 1995 I spent six months writing and presenting a daily spot for the *Food Network*. My job was to focus on the main planetary events of the day and create recipes that went with them. In one of those synchronicities that we astrologers know so well, a couple of weeks before I was invited to work on the *Food Network* I had found an old book in a collection belonging to an Antiquarian friend of mine that gave the astrological correlation to pretty well every type of flora and fauna on planet Earth.

Once I left the *Food Network* I doubted I would ever need the ancient little book I had borrowed again, but fast-forward twenty years and it became the basis for *The Zodiac Cooks*.

I had been flirting with the idea of writing an astrological cookery book for some years when browsing through Barnes and Noble one afternoon (Broadway and Sixty-fifth Street, now, sadly, no longer) I came across a little book entitled, 'Kafka's Soup'. The author, Mark Crick, had given fourteen famous writers – Jane Austen and Homer among them – the task of writing a dinner recipe.

And there it was: my epiphany. I would take the twelve signs of the zodiac and allow them to put together a three-course meal in their own unique style. That way the flavour of the sign would seep through the text. (In my first draft I had the zodiac signs speaking directly to the reader but as soon as I injected my own voice into the mix it became muddled. Put another way, I was trying to make a turducken and ending up with a dog's breakfast. In the end, simple and straightforward won out.)

It took ten long years for my epiphany in New York to become *The Zodiac Cooks*. During those ten years I abandoned the project several times – once after a run-in with “Hollywood's most closely guarded secret” (so secret in fact no one had ever heard of her) who required £50,000 up front to start work – and rescued it when friends and family urged me on. It wasn't until the Capricorn chapter that it occurred to me I was on a journey – a journey that had already taken me from an astrologer with a passion for food to a cook for whom sauces, soufflés and sabayons were standard fare.

Enjoy!

AIR

How to boil water - Aquarius

BY ONE OF THOSE STRANGE COINCIDENCES I just happen to be in the world of Aquarius, the Water Bearer, as I work on this chapter. Out of my window, way in the distance, I can see the spires of Gamla stan rising imperiously above the Baltic and, a little closer, the granite cliffs that border the sea



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and upon which the city of Stockholm stands. Scandinavia is a quintessentially Aquarian part of the globe. It is a land of stark contrasts - think ancient runes and ultra-modern Ikea for a start. Then there are the deep, mysterious fjords and the remote, glacial mountains; it's a place where the sun barely rises for a good part of the year and never yields its relentless light for the remainder. It's the sacred ground that brought forth the Vikings, the birthplace of ABBA and the home of the Nobel Prize.

As befits a sign of stark contrasts, Aquarius is ruled by two planets of entirely opposing natures – Saturn, the conservative and Uranus, the non-conformist. Maybe this explains why you can never be too sure which one you're going to meet on any given day, and in the case of the Aquarian cook, whether you'll be presented with meat and two veg or chicken liver brûlée.

Despite the Water Bearer's association with fish farms and wine bars – drinking holes of any sort, actually – its element is not water but air, and like all air signs, Aquarius prefers foods that are light and tantalizing to the eye and the taste-bud. Soufflés, syllabubs, mousses and meringues. Zucchini flowers, broccoli and spinach. Air-dried meats, salt-cod, pork, duck and shellfish. Beets, root vegetables, sloes and quince, sage, garlic, and capers, wintergreen, holly and hemlock! These are Aquarian things.

Water-bearers are complex individuals both in and out of the kitchen. One moment your Aquarian cook will espouse the virtues of classic French cuisine, paying homage to every culinary step, and another exhibit a thoroughly ad-hoc approach to the whole business, throwing everything but the kitchen sink into the pot. And then there are the food scientists – those who extol the chemistry of cooking and thrive on invention; those who love to blend cuisines - foods that ought to have no business in the same sentence, let alone the same dish. It must surely have been an Aquarian who opened the first fusion restaurant. Maybe it was called the Cuba-Chino, or La Thai-Mancha! Actually no, it was the Chinois in Santa Monica opened by Cancerian, Wolfgang Puck in 1983. But I bet Mr Puck has Aquarius rising, and he certainly has his Mercury conjunct Uranus.

I have a first-hand experience of Aquarius. I was married to one. In fact it was down to my Mr Aquarius that I became an astrologer in the first place, and because of him I learned some kitchen sense. He taught me everything I needed to know about making a roux and living in a bipolar world. We first laid eyes on each other in a wine bar – *naturellement*. I was with a large group of people, one of whom he knew – Aquarians can run into old friends anywhere on the planet - and in half a heartbeat he had joined our table. He paid an extravagant amount of attention to one of my girlfriends while displaying a singular lack of interest in me so it was something of a surprise when he asked me out for a date the following day. (This is classic Aquarian behaviour, by the way: if Water Bearers really like something, they move as far away from it as possible.) There followed the quickest courtship on the Earls Court Road. Within three weeks he had driven the 300 miles to meet my parents and formally request my hand in marriage. They were impressed and I was in too much of a head spin to tell wise from wrong.



Aquarius may be an air sign, and therefore at home in the realm of the mind and out of its depth in passionate waters, but it is Fixed, and all Fixed signs must be in control. At best, they are Top Chefs incarnate but at worst tin-pot tyrants.

My Aquarian husband did not appreciate being given advice. In part this was to do with his belief that no one knew more than he did but also because it made him look weak. This combined with the need to be in control made him a very awkward customer with whom to deal, and certainly to be married. Requiring a major injection of capital for his business from his fan club – my parents – he subjected himself to a meeting in which he agreed to swingeing cuts in expenditure and a new CEO – my father. Hands were shaken, backs slapped and promises made. Half an hour later, all bets were off. “No one’s going to tell me how to run my company.” Bankruptcy soon followed.

Now, before you run away with the idea that Aquarius has no redeemable features whatsoever, allow me to right the balance. If you're looking for someone who will never judge you, someone who will cook you a three-course meal at two in the morning, or at least

go without sleep listening to your sorry stories, an individual who will treat a homeless person like royalty and a duchess like a domestic, Aquarius is your guy. This is one of the most un-snobish, true and humanitarian signs of the zodiac. They are worth their weight in uranium.

I don't want to be accused of sexism, but there is a big difference between the male and female of the species. Picture in your mind Vanessa Redgrave and Jennifer Aniston and you'll see why I say Aquarian women define the word cool. While women tend to be creatures of their emotions, the detachment and emotional restraint of Aquarius adds to the allure of the female of the species. In the company of Ms Aquarius one feels brushed by a warm, fragrant breeze – emotional extremes, when they occur, are always in the privacy of their inner sanctum. Not for the Aquarian woman is the in-depth psychological interview conducted in front of the TV cameras.

Think for a moment of Ina Garten, one of my food heroes, is she not the epitome of cool? Floating around her kitchen in the East Hamptons as if on castors, she smilingly takes you through the steps of her deceptively simple dishes. She welcomes you into her world yet you instinctively sense that come too close, assume too much, and that cool breeze will form a layer of frost.

In keeping with her Aquarian roots, Ina's joy of cooking is underpinned by a respect for the science of gastronomy. She is one of the only celebrity cooks I know who uses a teaspoon to measure cracked black pepper. Indeed, before she entered the culinary world she was a budget analyst handling nuclear policy for The White House. "I'm really a scientist. I follow recipes exactly—until I decide not to. And then I'll follow something else exactly. I may decide I could turn this peach tart into a plum tart, but if I'm following a recipe, I follow it exactly." (*Epicurus magazine*, 2010.)

Although I have not featured one of Ina's recipes here – her *Coeur à la crème* is to be found under Libra – I am going to pass on one of her cooking tips that put roast duck – an Aquarian bird - back on the Thornton menu. Since duck is very fatty, roasting inevitably leads to a smoke-filled kitchen and an oven-cleaning exercise the following day. From Ina I learned you should poach the duck in stock for 45 minutes, skimming the fat as it rises to the surface, then, after draining and patting the duck dry, it can be roasted in a searingly hot oven for 30 minutes.

The science of deliciousness: the Aquarian way.

AQUARIUS RECIPE - Bacalao

Twice-baked soufflé - Gemini

THE GEMINI TABLE

Geminis thrive on variety and innovation. They are the people with the best stories to tell, the folk who put a totally different twist on an old staple, and the individuals who invite you into their homes and give you something to think about. Their table settings will rarely be repeated, as much to challenge their own creativity as to delight others with their originality.

Since this is a sign that enjoys travel and is fascinated by different cultures, you can expect to be wined and dined according to which part of the world is currently the object of your Gemini's fascination. However, I have noted there is a strong pull toward the Orient, particularly Japan. Not only does Japanese cuisine suit the Gemini palate, but the simplicity of the country's architecture and decor appeals to their sensibilities. Mercury's people also love the sense of mystery attached to the rituals of Japanese dining and the meaning behind and the placing of utensils and food vessels. And you won't be surprised to discover that of the two main horoscopes for Japan, Gemini rises in one and is the moon sign of the other.

We have encountered the *running buffet* in the previous section, an event which represents the perfect Gemini dining experience: not being confined to a set menu or pinned between two guests for the duration of a dinner party is a kind of Gemini heaven. However, this sign is as capable as any other of entertaining a group of people around a table, and they'll probably do it with a little more panache than most of their zodiac cousins.

The main focus for a Gemini gathering is not the table setting but the conversation, the social intercourse. Gemini is possibly the most garrulous member of the zodiac. You're never going to feel at a loss for words: Mr or Ms Mercury will have plenty to talk about and will encourage lively discussion and debate with all guests. However, do not expect any intimate revelations from this sign: these airy individuals love to provoke you into giving up your innermost secrets but they're not going to reciprocate. Remember the ribbon eel – it'll give you a nasty nip if you get too close. Geminis also love to goad you into making statements about controversial issues, which they will then challenge for their veracity while smiling benignly. Come mentally prepared to the table.

Given that the food is not the most important item at the Gemini dinner party, you should also come prepared for the unusual and the unexpected. Your host may supply entertainment in the form of a stage magician or a guest at the table might turn out to be a stand-up comic hired for the evening. Then again, you could be taken out between courses to see the fireflies dancing in the moonlight or watch a clip from a film, as yet unavailable to the general public. And Gemini was at the front of the queue when murder-mystery dinner parties were invented.

As with everything in Gemini land what you see is rarely what you get.



GEMINI RECIPE - Chilled carrot, coriander and orange soup

A Good Pair of Scales - Libra

What NOT to DO in Libra's Kitchen

- Anything gross.
- Start an argument.
- Wipe imaginary schmutz off the counter tops.
- Bring up the subject of ageing, even or especially with the caveat "But you're looking amazing for your age!"
- Talk about the problems you're experiencing with your septic tank.

What to DO in Libra's Kitchen

- Praise and flatter.
- Come with flowers and or chocolates, preferably in a heart shape.
- Ask for advice on finding love, keeping love and getting it back.
- Arrive suitably late.
- Share.



LIBRA RECIPE - Coeur à la crème with raspberry coulis

WATER

Cooking with Crab - Cancer

Ask most people to paint a picture of the typical home-cook and they'd probably come up with an apple-cheeked, ample-bosomed, motherly kind of creature; you'd also be looking at the archetypal Cancerian - the Cancerian of folklore, actually, because, of course, celestial Crabs, like home-cooks, come in all shapes and sizes, genders and dispositions. Some of them even become great stars and style icons - take Meryl Streep for instance, although I have it on good authority that she's also a superb cook, and the late Princess of Wales who was not.

Clarissa Dickson Wright – one half of the much-loved duo, *Two Fat Ladies* - personified many of the attributes of the Cancerian cook – quality *and* quantity being essential ingredients - although her outspoken personality and reckless lifestyle owed everything to planet Uranus which was conjunct her Sun in Cancer. In keeping with Cancer's nostalgia for the past and love of tradition, Clarissa's cooking repertoire, though diverse, in large part hailed from the great houses of Great Britain and often required truckloads of lard, butter and cream for the recipes. Food was clearly both a comfort and a passion.

Cancerians love their home and all things domestic. Obviously, there will be exceptions to this rule, but let's not tie ourselves up in knots explaining the importance of ascendants, moon signs, sesqui-quadrates and the Arabian parts: if you're dining with a Cancerian, dating a Cancerian, working or chumming up with a Cancerian, you have to know that home is well and truly where the heart is. Take to task their family, their decor, their pets or their cooking, and you're likely to get a very nasty nip from their pincers. It could prove terminal to the relationship.

Another factor we have to get under our belts before we enter the culinary world of Cancer is that it is ruled by the moon, an object which is at once both familiar and mysterious. It is the one celestial entity we can all locate; it floats enigmatically across the night sky, disappearing behind clouds and reappearing, its face changing from day to day. And in tandem, Cancerians may appear to be ordinary and unassuming, yet they have their mysterious deeps, and their moods are as unpredictable as, well, the changing face of the moon.

You don't need to be an astrological genius to figure out that the foods and the flora and fauna of Cancer have a seaside dimension to them. Cancer is a water sign, and crabs are sea-creatures; they can scuttle about on land too, which makes them naturals for surf and turf combinations. Any produce that is succulent, sloppy and creamy has an affinity with Cancer. Aside from all fish and shellfish – especially crab and oysters – frogs and snails come under this sign's jurisdiction; as do geese, duck, hare, pork and veal. Vegetables include marrow, cucumber, courgettes, squash, lettuce, onion, endive, and all sea vegetables including water chestnuts, samphire and alaria (sea-grape). As for fruits: sea berries (also known as sea-buckthorn) mangos, melons and peaches top the list.



Cancer is not a sign given to hot, spicy foods: the spices that do belong to this sensitive sign are poppy seeds. Cancerian herbs include rosemary and purslane, moonwort, and mouse-ear. You may only be familiar with rosemary but the others grow all over the world; indeed, you will find purslane a common salad ingredient in Greek cuisine, and it was and still is used to treat female disorders and stomach aches, which, as we'll discover later, have a relationship with Cancerian health. You may not want to add mouse-ear and moonwort to your salads – they are a little too esoteric even for the committed astrological foodie.

Cooking is an act of love for all home cooks: even if the last thing you want to do is slave over a hot stove for your nearest and dearest you do it through a sense of duty, which is a form of love. But for Cancer, cooking is

the pre-eminent way of demonstrating affection. Food is not a fuel but a means of nurture and emotional sustenance. This works in two ways, of course, in that Cancerians tend to eat when they're happy (celebrating) or sad (commiserating), and they overstuff their friends and families for the same reasons. To Cancerians the milk of human kindness has a very literal meaning, often manifesting in endless supplies of rice puddings and panna cottas.

Remember your early days, when you had milk teeth, or none at all? You were given foods that slipped down your throat easily and reached their target quickly. For a while you were spoon-fed. You may have experienced the intense joy of liberation when you were finally allowed to wield your own knife and fork and chomp on a nice bit of rib-eye, but if you're a Cancer the transition from babyhood to adult is hardly seamless, and you're probably never going to lose your appetite for nursery foods.

I have a clutch of Cancerians in my family, which is why my freezer is stuffed with shepherd's pies, fish pies, fish fingers and chicken nuggets. And they're all over 29 – I'm referring to my offspring not the food, by the way. My middle son, Alex, now a pretty mean cook himself, never likes to leave each item of food separate on his plate; he mixes everything together. As for meat without gravy – are you serious? I don't believe it's a form of arrested development, more an unconscious action rooted in childhood memories of the comfort of food.

Marcel Proust would have had little trouble identifying with Alex. In his novel, *In Search of Lost Time*, he describes being transported to a period in his childhood by the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea. This episode is probably the most oft-quoted in all of Proust's works. He was, *naturellement*, a Cancerian.

While every sign of the zodiac will have certain foods and meals they associate with a special time in their lives, where Cancerians are concerned memory and emotion and food are inextricably linked. Not all of them have the literary skills of Marcel Proust, of course, but they share the ability to viscerally recall a moment in time when a familiar taste hits their taste buds.

Caution and Cancer go together like ham and cheese. This sign does not leap at the chance to try exotic combinations or foods from remote parts of the globe. If it's got Made-in-the-Homeland stamped on it, they'll try it; otherwise no. Of course, hunger eventually wears down the most die-hard traditionalist, but the celestial Crab won't enthusiastically embrace foreign fare. Then again, because this sign produces many seriously good cooks, some Cancerians force themselves to overcome their innate conservatism, trying a new taste or perfecting an unfamiliar dish in the privacy of their own kitchen. And there are two other Cancerian characteristics – persistence and secrecy. These moony people may never reveal their ambitions or their plans, but quietly, quietly, they'll get there.

My Cancerian friend – another Penny - surprised the life out of me by inviting me to an exhibition of her sculpture. I had not the remotest idea that she was chiselling away in her basement studio – in fact I didn't even know there was anything other than some waxed jackets and wellington boots behind the door to the cellar. So, one Saturday afternoon I found myself wandering around her green and fragrant garden with scores of other people clutching catalogues, and placing my red spot on a rather beautiful representation in stone of the female anatomy. It sits, unassuming, in a small window in the passageway between the hall and the kitchen in my cottage.

Unlike Scorpio, another water sign, food is only occasionally a prelude to passion but always an offering from the soul. All right, maybe this is a trifle overblown, but when Cancer cooks for you, a lot of emotion, a lot of thought and considerable care goes into each and every morsel.

CANCER RECIPE - Clam Chowder New England Style

Soup aux Poissons - Pisces

Kitchen Sense and Sensibility

There is, of course, no such thing as a typical Pisces kitchen. Pisceans are not people you can slot into neat little categories. And even if they have strong likes and dislikes these can change, and as suddenly and randomly as a sea breeze might veer from temperate to gale-force, and the waters from deep blue

to steel grey. Pisceans will escape any bracket they are put into, and argue against any advice that would appear to restrict their options. What I can say for sure, however, is that the kitchen will be a reflection of who they are.

Pisceans are a creative bunch. They experience little difficulty in expressing themselves, whether in the kitchen or out of it. In most cases the kitchen is not just a space in which food can be stored and prepared and eaten, but a place in which to meditate, journal, paint, patchwork, counsel and share soul to soul moments. There will be something unique about the area, though: it could be the whole look of the kitchen or it might be a single object. Something old, something new, something retrieved, borrowed and recycled, and something blue will probably all be present. This sign is not overly attached to childhood mementos or family memorabilia even though it has a great feeling for the past, so those charming people smiling out at you from sea-shell frames could be completely unknown to your Piscean and rescued from a thrift store.



Space age technology probably won't be much in evidence. Celestial Fish may yearn to escape the earth and explore the boundlessness of space but they won't want to surround themselves with shiny, sharp, gyrating gadgets. Plus, Pisceans have a secret regard for doing things the hard way – they appreciate the virtues of suffering - and they enjoy the intense labour of hand-beating egg-whites as opposed to seeing them whizzed around in a food-processor. You may well find ancient wooden spoons and a set of scales with metal weights in their collection.

Counter tops should shimmer like the surface of the ocean or they should be made of wood and waxed and polished to produce a satin sheen. There should be space enough to hang quaint pictures or framed objects – babies' first shoes, pressed roses or baseball cards for instance. And you may find large wooden letters spelling out HAPPINESS or LOVE. Cabinets should have mesh doors and there could be shelves staggered at different levels displaying kitchen stores, pretty pots, candle-holders and coloured glass bottles. You should also find little bowls stuffed with old receipts, coupons, telephone numbers – even the odd earring – and window ledges sporting pots of herbs and miniature watering cans and the like.

Not for nothing did Pisces gain its epithet, the dustbin of the zodiac!

PISCES RECIPE - Topsy Cake

Passion Fruit Sorbet – Scorpio

What NOT to DO in Scorpio's Kitchen

- Look like competition.
- Pay too much attention to the significant other.
- Infer you've had better.
- Attempt to settle an old score.
- Ask for a small helping.

What to DO in Scorpio's Kitchen

- Keep a low profile.
- Offer a piece of juicy gossip.
- Insist on doing the washing up.
- Ask where something came from but don't expect to be told.
- Say: "Nigella Lawson better look out."

SCORPIO RECIPE - Mushroom **Risotto**

