

# The Original Deviled Egg

## Kansas City, Missouri

How deviled food got its name seems straightforward enough. Before refrigeration, food preservation relied for centuries on a number of techniques including hot spices. The word “devil” was in use by 1800 to refer to foods made hot by mustard, cayenne peppers, or vinegar. Deviled foods—particularly eggs—are on the wane in Europe, but in America, after the introduction of mass-produced mayonnaise and mustard, they became essential to picnics and big summer parties. Even the antifat, anticholesterol movement of the late twentieth century failed to extinguish the American soft spot for deviled eggs. To celebrate this, the Southern Foodways Alliance held a Deviled Eggs Contest in 2004. Entries ranged from the simple (from finalist Robert Croft of Kansas City, Missouri, with just “mayonnaise, sweet pickle relish, a tad of dry mustard, perhaps a little black pepper, and the salt adjusted depending on the saltiness of the mayonnaise”) to the exotic (Madras curry and shad roe) to the quirky (jalapeños and salsa). Regardless of the variations, modern deviled eggs have one common ingredient: a surfeit of jarred mayonnaise. However, the earliest American recipes for deviled eggs, like this one adapted from *Common Sense in the Household: A Manual of Practical Housewifery* (1882), do not use mayonnaise at all.

6 large eggs, hard boiled, cooled, peeled, and halved lengthwise  
1 tablespoon unsalted butter, melted  
1 teaspoon white vinegar  
¼ teaspoon mustard powder  
⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper  
¼ teaspoon kosher salt  
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
¼ teaspoon sugar  
1 bunch watercress, washed, tough stems discarded and leaves roughly chopped, for garnish

1. Gently remove the egg yolks from the whites and place them in a small bowl. Add the butter and mix to a paste. Stir in a dash of the vinegar, the mustard powder, and the cayenne.
2. Spoon or pipe the egg yolk mixture into the egg white halves.
3. In a medium bowl, mix the remaining vinegar with the salt, black pepper, and sugar. Add the watercress and toss until coated with the vinegar mixture. Arrange the watercress on a serving platter and nestle the deviled eggs onto the greens. Serve.

Serves 6

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