

A Guide to Period Food

We tend to think that the food that we eat has always been eaten by us. The traditional Australian foods of a sirloin steak, chips, corn, pumpkin, and peas with maybe some healthy salad with celery and radish must have been with us forever. This is wrong. Even such common foods as silverbeet are only in period if you come from the right part of Europe. To assist autocrats I have (with the encouragement and assistance of the Barony) compiled an annoying list of what is period to eat. It is no good having an Elizabethan breakfast if the things you are eating were not known to Elizabeth. I hope this will aid you in working out what is period when you look at what you will put in the feasts you throw. Please note that this is still a work in progress and additions and corrections are invited.

Many myths prevail in regard to food. As an example, sirloin steak is a cut of meat readily dateable to the reign of James II according to urban legend dating back to 1655 (where it refers to Henry VIII). In fact the word traces from French and the cut (and term) is period.

Out of Period

Corn, pumpkin, all squashes, and marrows are all from the Americas and were not used as human food in Europe in period. Corn was smaller, harder and often black, blue or purple. Although it was adopted early for food, I have found no references for it being served in period. Deep fried root vegetables (such as chips) are unfortunately unknown, although some deep fried foods are not.

Out of period herbs include: bergamot, curry leaves, fagara, Kaffir lime, lemon grass, lemon verbena, mango powder, paprika (1650), screwpine, star anise and wasabi.

Many popular spice mixes were unknown in period. These include five-spice powder, spiced salt, most commercial chilli and curry blends, quatre-epices, melange classique and any Cajun spice mix.

Out of scope fruit include: avocado, blueberry (as we know it today), boysenberry, Cape Gooseberry, carambola, cranberry, custard apple, cumquat, grapefruit, guava, kiwi fruit, loganberry, loquat, lychees, mandarins, mango, passionfruit, plantain, rockmelon and strawberries (both in modern form).

Despite tasting good, muffins are out, as are bagels, croissants (1686), damper, Danish pasties, doughnuts, grissini (crunchy bread sticks), and tortillas. Cakes such as angel cake are modern and the first chocolate cake is 18th century. Carrot cake is even more modern and sponge cakes can be traced to a French cookbook of the mid-17th century.

Camembert dates only from 1791. Other late cheeses include: Bavarian Blue, Blue Castello, blue vein, Colby, Danish Blue, Havarti, Jarlsberg (in its modern form), Lancashire, Leicester, Monterey Jack, Philadelphia Cream Cheese, Port Salut, Stilton, Tilsit, Triple Cream cheeses.

Nuts that should not be used include Brazil nuts, cashews, coconuts, macadamias, peanuts and pecans.

Block chocolate is absolutely only brought in the early 19th century. Prior to this it was taken as a very bitter hot drink in Spain (and places that robbed her ships) and taken up in Italy in the 17th century. Cortez was first given it in 1519. Fudge is also out. Unfortunately, the confectionary marshmallow also only came in in the late 17th century.

Cassata, despite Italian claims, did not take its current form until the 1700s and the word didn't refer to a dessert until the late 1600s. Its name comes from the Latin for cheese, which it was originally made from.

A - Z breakdown

Alcohol was known in the form of beer, mead, wine and cider since pre-period times. Distillation was invented by Arabs circa 700 and was known in the West by 1100 in Salerno. In 1500 the first book on the subject, Hieronymus Brunschwig's *Liber de arte distillandi*, is published.

Allspice was one of the first herbs brought back by the Spanish on Columbus' second voyage. It was prized treasure when captured and was served in the period forms of chocolate (all of which were drinks). Often called pimento.

Almonds were sent by Jacob to Joseph as a present along with pistachios. (Genesis XXV)

Apricot: from Arabic '*al-birquq*' or apricot. Arabic is in turn traceable back to Byzantine Greek and thence to classical Latin '*praecoqua*', literally 'precocious' and specifically precociously ripening peaches. The Arabic was passed onto the 14th century Portuguese '*albricoque*' and Catalan '*albercoc*'. Seen in 1578 in English spelled '*abrecox*'.

Artichokes were loved by the Romans, but did not enjoy wide popularity later until Catherine de Medici introduced them to France in 1533. It had re-appeared in Florence and Naples in 1465 and Venice in 1473. Henry VIII loved them for their alleged aphrodisiac qualities. Derives from *al-kharshūf* (used pre 930). The so-called Jerusalem artichoke was brought to Europe by Columbus, starting out in Italy. It is likely that its use spread faster than that of potatoes.

Asafoetida (Asafetia, Devil's Dung, Hiltit) is a resin from a type of giant fennel and is known from Roman times, when it was very popular and quite expensive. It is used extensively in Arab and Indian cooking and to make Worcestershire sauce (which is not period, but resembles a thin version of the fish sauce used by the Romans and Indians).

Asparagus was well known in the Classical world. Ravenna was famed in the Roman era for the size of the stems cultivated there (up to 1.4 kg each).

Aubergine: from *al-bādhinjān*. They entered Spain during the conquest.

Bananas are thought to be one of the earliest cultivated fruits and were well loved by the Greeks and the Arabs. They were spread by the Arabs to Spain and Portugal.

Baps are 16th century Scottish bread rolls.

Basil known to Arabs and Byzantines, but unknown in the West until the 16th century when it spread among monasteries.

Beans, at least the common variety were a late appearance. They came to France in the late 16th century and in England from 1594. They were not commonly eaten until the 19th century. Broad beans are, however, one of the oldest vegetables known and can be traced back, as a cultivated plant, to the Bronze Age lake villages of Switzerland. Known everywhere.

Bean sprouts, both mung and soya were common in Asian cooking. Unknown elsewhere.

Beetroot was eaten in one Roman recipe. Other than that, only the leaves were eaten until the 15th Century when the root starts being used in England. The rest of Europe starts eating it in the 16th century. Sugar was obtained from some varieties within period and it was eaten in the Middle East.

Blackberries, for a change, were well known only in the north of Europe.

Borage: first mention by Constantinus Africanus in the 11th century in North Africa. Supposedly from 'araq' = "sweat inducer"

Brioche breads are only period if made with brewer's yeasts. Bakers yeasts were not used until the 18th century.

Broccoli was well known to the Romans (it was the favourite dish of Drusus, son of Tiberias) but it appears to have only been re-introduced to Italy in the 16th century. Known prior to this in Asia Minor.

Brussels sprouts are a very period vegetable, being known from the 13th century in the areas around Brussels. They were an exotic and almost unknown food outside this area, only coming to England in the 19th century.

Cabbage was spread by the Celts throughout Europe as a loose-leaved plant. The smooth hard headed varieties came in about 800AD although both sorts were common until the 13th century. Both red and green varieties were well known.

Candy: term derived from qandi, sugared. Arabic is from Persian 'qand' = "cane [sugar]"

Cannabis seed was served fried as a desert by the Romans. Caution, this is now illegal.

Capsicum was one of the first New World foods to enter our tables. It was used in Spain from 1493 and from the 1590s in the Balkans and Central Europe. It is not available for use in Western Europe, England or Arab lands. The hotter varieties travelled with the milder forms, although their use as condiments were not widespread until after 1600.

Caramel probably was not known until the 17th century in Europe, but may have been available in India much earlier.

Caraway: from karawiyā, caraway seed. Spelled "caraway" in English in the 1390s in a cookery book

Carob:: from kharrūb, the edible bean of the carob tree. Carobs were used in medieval medicine and the word is in medical books by for example Ibn Sina, Al-Razi, Lanfranc of Milan, and Guy de Chauliac.

Carrots were first mentioned in their current form in 12th century Spain. They spread to Italy in the 13th century and France, Holland and Germany in the 14th. During this time its leaves were used in the hair as a decoration. They reached England with refugees in Kent and Surrey during Elizabeth I's reign and was not commonly available.

Cauliflower was known in the Eastern Mediterranean from earliest times, it is first recorded in England from 1686 as Cyprus colewarts.

Celery was well known in period but was only used as medicine. It was a smaller and more bitter plant, often called smallage. Celery did not appear in food until 1623 when the French started adding it to soups and stews. It could appear at a feast in a small dish as a digestive aid for those with overly acid stomachs.

Cereals were well known. The ancients used barley, oats and millet (in that order) as well as rice. Medieval times added wheat and rye.

Cheddar was most likely made from ewe's milk during most of our period (and still readily available as such in Tasmania), but some cow's milk production was established by Tudor times. It was the main English cheese under Elizabeth.

Cheshire is a form of cheese mentioned in the Domesday Book and recorded as being enjoyed by the Roman 20th Legion. Blue Cheshire is rare in period, but was also used to treat wounds.

Chillies were written about in 1495, and described as being extensively cultivated in Iberia in 1569.

Cinnamon is a native of Sri Lanka (or Serendip). It is the bark of a tree and was one of the most sought after products of the Spice Islands in the 15th and 16th century.

Coffee seems to have been drunk in Persia since the ninth century. It was first cultivated around 675 in Arabia. Abu ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna, was acquainted with coffee around the year 1000. The first European to mention coffee is Prospero Alpino of Padua. In 1580 he went to Egypt, then under Ottoman rule.

Cubeb is a plant related to pepper which was commonly used in Europe as a medicine and spice until the end of the 16th century when it was supplanted by allspice.

Cucumber was well known to the Arabs and available in the rest of the Mediterranean.

Dill has a name coming from the old Norse *dilla*, "to lull". It was used to sooth the digestive system and as a magical herb against witchcraft. Not cultivated in England until the 16th century.

Eggplant was common in India and China and was used in period by the Arabs. Known in France from the 16th century.

Emmental cheeses were known in period, but were only very small in size. They did not become the much larger modern Swiss cheese until the 16th century.

Fontina is cited as one of the great cheeses in 1477. Originated in the 13th century and made, in period, from ewe's milk.

Endive has been known from Roman times as a salad vegetable.

Fennel was used in period in Mediterranean countries much as we would use celery. Mentioned from Anglo-Saxon herbals on as a medicinal plant. Used in food in Britain by the fourteenth century.

Fruit jellies are mentioned by Nostrodameus (1555) as being made with cherries. He also mentions them as expensive.

Galangal is mentioned in monastery accounts in the fourteenth century.

Garlic was god in Egypt, but Alphonso of Castile, in 1368, instituted an Order of Knighthood, one of the rules of which was no garlic could be consumed under penalty of not appearing before the sovereign for a month.

Gingerbread has been eaten in France since the Eleventh century when the Gingerbread Fair was first held in Paris. The local monks would sell their own gingerbread, shaped into little pigs. This may have been what gave Queen Elizabeth the idea of ordering little ginger cakes (the first gingerbread men) to be baked in the shapes of portraits of those she knew.

Gourds were often eaten in classical times. They may have provided the root word for *gourmet*.

Grains of Paradise (also known as Guinea Pepper, Guinea Grains and Melegueta Pepper). This is not a pepper, but is related to cardamom. It is a West African herb that was well known in Europe from the fourteenth century, particularly in Iberian cooking. Very popular in old recipes for spiced wine.

Haricot beans were allegedly introduced to Europe by Alexander the Great.

Honeycomb (as in the confection - not the natural product) is believed to have originated in India several hundred years ago. It was not available outside that area.

Honeydew melons have been cultivated in the Nile valley for millennia. Introduced to Italy in the 15th century and France by Charles VIII in 1495. It became so popular that many are reputed to have died from overeating them (including Pope Paul II).

Horseradish was used from the 13th century as a medicine and condiment and leaf vegetable in Germany and Denmark. It spread to England in the 16th century.

"Indian figs" were introduced to Europe after Columbus. In reality these are not figs, but the fruit of the prickly pear cactus.

Juniper berries are almost ignored in England, but are used extensively on the continent for sauces and marinades, particularly with venison.

Kale was common in Eastern Europe from the earliest times. It became common across the Baltic fringe. It was unknown in England until the 18th century.

Kohlrabi was first actually described in the mid-16th century although it was certainly available earlier. By the end of the century it was common everywhere in Europe except England where it did not become very popular.

Leeks have grown wild in the Eastern Mediterranean for 3000 years. The Romans spread them throughout Europe and nobody has found a way of getting rid of them.

Lemons originated in India and were brought west by the Arabs, entering Iberia in the Tenth Century. They went to Northern Europe with the Crusaders but was only recorded as growing outdoors in England in 1577. The name derives from the Arabic *līmūn*, or citrus fruit the same as Lime

Lentils were used extensively from the times of the Egyptians, the Hebrews (who used them in bread) and the Greeks.

Limes were only known in the Mediterranean in period. They were introduced to Iberia by the Moors in the Tenth Century from south China. The name derives from the Arabic *līmūn*, or citrus fruit the same as Lemon.

Lettuce is known from antiquity in the Eastern Mediterranean and became fashionable in England in Chaucerian times (being mentioned in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* in 1387. Cos lettuce appeared in the west from Italy in the 16th century.

Liquorice was widely used as a medicine, but did not become a confection until the late 16th century.

Lotus is only available in India, China and Egypt.

Lupin seeds were often eaten as a substitute for more expensive grains. They needed soaking in boiling water to make them palatable and were only a food for peasants (and cattle).

Mahlab is a herb only known to Greeks and the Middle East. Used as a flavouring in Arab foods.

Mozzarella was made in period from water buffalo's milk.

Mulberries were natives of Persia and taken west by the Greeks. They only reached England in the 1500s.

Mustard appears in the Bible and was common from then on.

Nectarines are also natives of Persia, but only reached the west in the 16th century. Its flesh was white in period.

Nigella is known today as the garden plant "love-in-a-mist". Its seeds were used as a flavouring. Most often seen today as the seeds in the Indian bread called naan.

Nougat has a recipe for pignolat in 1555.

Nutmeg and mace were first noted in Byzantium in 540AD. Their use spread west with the Crusaders, but it was not known there that they both came from the same plant until very modern times. Originally they were both used as fumigants, not becoming popular in foods until the 16th century.

Okra was first described by a Spanish Moor in 1216 who saw it in Egypt. It is popular along the southern Mediterranean.

Onion was eaten by Egyptian pyramid builders and by everyone else since. Small shallot type onions (as a distinct type) spread from Roman Gaul.

Oregano and marjoram (of which it is only one species) were only used in the Mediterranean area until after WWII.

Oranges were introduced to Seville in the Tenth Century by the Moors. The word comes from *nāranj*, orange. Arabic descends from Sanskrit *nāraṅga* = orange. The orange tree came from India.

Panettone is a Milanese fruit bread originated in the 15th century. It is a traditional Christmas gift bread.

Parsnip was known as the vegetable of the poor in medieval times in the north of Europe. It was used to add to bread in Tudor England.

Pasta is period. Cicero was fond of his flat pasta. Fettuccine was probably available, along with gnocchi. Spaghetti is mentioned in 1154 as being exported from Sicily. It did not spread much past there until the 13th century (I have a Norman recipe from this time). Tagliatelle is often ascribed to a chef who invented it in honour of his master's house guest - Lucrezia Borgia.

Pastilles of fruit paste, nuts, citrus and possibly spices were in vogue in Elizabethan times.

Pawpaws travelled from America to Asia before they made it to Europe. They would be available only very late, if at all.

The pea was introduced around by the Romans but it was a grey object (*Cicer arietinum*) that was dried and eaten boiled to a pulp or fried. The fresh green pea only came in around 1550 and its present plump form was only evolved by one of Louis XIV's gardeners. Sugar snaps and snow peas were both developed out of period.

Persimmons were available from Persia to all points east.

Pheasants are native to Asia Minor. It is unsure when they moved west, but they were definitely in England before the thirteenth century.

Pineapples are one of the many New World crops. It made it to general cultivation in Spain in the 15th century. They became a symbol of hospitality and appeared in art before they reached the table.

Pomelos were used in period much as grapefruit are today. It was first noted in Palestine in 1187 and later in Spain.

Poppy resin was used in Minoan Crete in a fashion that is illegal today. Its seeds are used extensively for desserts and sauces, particularly in Arab countries. It is possible to use the commercial seeds for these purposes quite satisfactorily..

The potato was discovered by a European high in the Andes in 1537, along with maize corn and beans. It was first noted in England in 1577 but did not become much used for human consumption until taken up by the Germans and French in the mid-17th century. Partly this was because it was not mentioned in the Bible and was thus distrusted. The fact that, if incorrectly stored, it is poisonous also made it slow to be adopted. It appears to have been first successfully grown in Europe in 1585 by an Italian named Clusius (per Gerard's *Herball* of 1597)

Quinces are known in Persia and the East.

Rabbits originated in Africa, but were well established in most of Europe before the SCA period. They were introduced to England from Normandy during the twelfth century, as a readily controlled food source. First records show them appearing in the Isles of Scilly. By the thirteenth century they had become a pest.

Radishes were favoured by the Romans and the Egyptians. Despite this, it did not reach the north and west of Europe until the mid-13th century.

Rice was introduced to cultivation in southern Europe by the Muslims.

Rhubarb was not eaten as food until the 18th century. Like the celery, it was well known as a medicinal plant.

Rockmelon and watermelon came from Africa and were known to the Arabs and the Middle East from pre-period. They were unknown in Europe and did not reach France or the north until introduced by Charles VIII of France.

Saffron was prized in England by the fourteenth century. It was grown from the 7th century in China, 10th in the Arab lands and Spain, and 11th in France and Germany. It takes 20,000 stamens from the crocus to produce 125g (4 oz) of saffron. From Arabic *za'farān*. The ancient Romans used saffron but called it "crocus". The word saffron is first seen in Latin in 1156.

Shallots were common in the eastern Mediterranean and were brought into common use in the west by returning Crusaders. It was reputedly grown at St Gall in Switzerland from the 9th century.

Silverbeet is the most common and earliest form of beet used, being known throughout most of Europe. The exception is England where it was not grown until the 18th century.

Sorrel was eaten by the Greeks and Romans, but did not make it to Britain until 1596.

Spinach is a Persian herb, being introduced into Spain in the 1100s and appearing (in its prickly seeded form) in *To The King's Taste* in England in 1390. In its modern smooth form it did not appear in England until 1551. From 'isbinākh' in Andalusian Arabic, and 'isfānākh' in eastern classical Arabic, from Persian 'aspanākh'.

Strawberries are sort of period as they were known to the Greeks and Romans. However the fruit were very small. The large and plump varieties that are common today are the result of hybridisation of wild raspberries with North American strains and did not exist until the 1700s.

Sugar cane was introduced to West African cultivation by the Portuguese in the 1400s. They also grew it extensively on their Atlantic islands. Prior to this the finished product was imported from the East. Derives from Arabic 'sukkar', sugar. Ultimately from Sanskrit 'sharkara'. Among the earliest records in English are these entries in the account books of an abbey in Durham: year 1302 "Zuker Marok", 1309 "succe marrokes", 1310 "Couker de Marrok", 1316 "Zucar de Cypr[us]

Sumach: from Arabic 'summāq' was widely used in the Middle East, particularly Iran. Known from Latin usage in Europe from the 10th century.

Swedes are a hybrid of cabbage and turnips and were first noted in 1620.

Sweet potato, unlike potato, was immediately used for human food. It arrived in Europe in 1526 but never became popular. Henry VIII is, however, said to have adored it.

Tamarind was known to the Arabs and used as a drink base. It reached Europe generally with the Crusaders and England in Tudor times. It was replaced in many dishes by tomatoes when they began to be used. Its name derives from the Arabic 'tamr hindī', "date of India". Entered medieval Latin medical texts from Arabic medical texts (e.g. Ibn Sina). In English the early records are 15th century translations of Latin medical texts. For those wishing to use tomato-based foods, tamarind was often the general ingredient that was replaced. It went out of favour as it was harder to grow and more expensive, not for lack of flavour. Experiment with its use, you will need one third to one fifth the quantity that is specified for tomato. If you cannot get fresh tamarind, a tamarind syrup is generally available that works very well.

Tarragon: name derives from the Arabic 'ṭarkhūn'. This may derive from ancient Greek for 'dragon'. Used by Al-Razi (died 930) and Ibn Sina (died 1037). Used later in medieval Latin in a herbal medicine context. It is mentioned in Spain in the 13th century, but only made it into Gerard's Herbal in England in 1597. .

Tomatoes are of New World origin. They became popular in Italy and with the Arabs. They reached France much later and was never eaten in England in period. All period varieties were yellow.

Turkeys may have been introduced to some parts of Europe by the Vikings. There is what could readily be one depicted in the marginalia of the Bayeux Tapestry. They were later successfully re-introduced by the Spanish in 1524 and spread rapidly all over Europe, being in England only a few years after.

Turkish delight, as we know it, was not available until the development of cornstarch in the 19th century. Similar confections are however possible (ahbisa and rakis lacoum) using either ground rice or salep (which was also used to make a form of ice cream). It is recorded from the 11th century.

Turmeric: is often used as a substitute for saffron (although it is actually a relative of ginger). A medical book in English around 1425 says "cucurme" is another word for "turmeryte" (turmeric). From Arabic *kurkum*

Turnips were, unfortunately for Baldric, relatively unknown in England until Henry VIII's time when they were eaten after roasting in ashes. They had been in Flanders since the 15th century and the Near East since pre-historic times. The Greeks knew them well, preferring those from Thebes.

Vanilla is first recorded by Diaz in 1520. It was used from the second half of the 16th century as an additive to chocolate drinks.

Water chestnut, despite our normal association of it with Chinese food, had a variety (*Trapa natans*) which was common throughout Europe since pre-historic times.

Watercress is native to the Near East and eaten by the Greeks and the Persians. It did not become common in England until the 19th century.

Watermelons are readily available to Arabs.

Wheat was available in more varieties than we currently use as the Latin names *Triticum*, *Ble*, *Robus*, *Siligo*, *Trimestre* and *Zea* (spelt) attest. The word 'corn', in period, only ever refers to a wheat variety. This often leads to confusion as many think it refers to maize.

Zedoary was introduced to Europe in the 6th century as a medicinal herb used much as ginger in foods.

Although very popular in period it is now difficult to obtain. It was also used as a perfume and for its essential oils.

Zucchini is well known to Mediterranean types and was used by the Romans. Unused in northern Europe until modern times.

In Period lists

Period herbs include: anise, balm, bay, borage (common additive in drinks), capers, cardamom, cassia (essential for hippocras), chervil, chives, cloves, coriander, cumin, fenugreek, garlic, ginger, lovage, mastic, mint, myrtle, nigella, parsley, pepper, rosemary, rue, sage, salad burnet, savory, tansy, woodruff, yarrow.

Period fruits include: apple, cherry, citron, currant, date, fig, gooseberry, grape, orange, peach, pear, plum, pomegranate, raspberries.

Period bread forms include normal white and wholemeal loaves, crispbread, crumpets, fruit breads, focaccia, hot cross buns, lavash, matzo, naan, pappadams, pita, proper pretzel bread (not available in Australia), pumpernickel, puri, rye breads, sourdough.

Cheeses such as Brie are mentioned from 1217. Other period cheeses include appenzaller, cottage cheese, cream cheese, Double Gloucester, Edam (1300s), Fetta, Gjetöst, goat cheeses, Gorgonzola (9th century), Gouda, Gruyère, Kasseri, Limburger, Mizithra, Mysöst, Neufchâtel (15th century - unchanged), Parmesan (1200s - unchanged), Pecorino, Provolone, Raclette, Ricotta, Roquefort, Wensleydale.

Period nuts and seeds include: caraway, hazelnuts, pine nuts, sesame and walnuts.

Period spice blends possibly available today include garam masala, chat masala, Sri Lankan curry (if from the east), baharat (if you allow the chillies), dukka, tabil, ras el hanout, Tunisian five spice (qâlat daqqa), zahtar (from the Arab lands), Scappi's Spice mix, most pickling spice mixes, English mixed spice (if late period)

Χρωλφ (Hrölf in his only literate tongue - Greek)

References

Although many books have been used to compile this list, most have only contributed a line or two. The ones cited have made substantial contributions and are worth further reading.

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