

A BRIEF HISTORY OF INGREDIENTS



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BRITISH FOOD

The concept of British food means different things to different people, but by looking at the history of the ingredients that made up the British diet, and the influences that dictated the way they were prepared it becomes apparent that Britain's reputation for a history of bland food is unjustified. Indeed, the early 18th century cook and author John Nott, wrote that British food was: "not only for the support of Life, but also gratifying the most sensual Appetite, that no neighbouring Nation can boast of a Superiority, nay, nor even pretend to compare with us, as to an Equality".

From the Middle Ages food was highly flavoured with a wide variety of herbs and spices. Salt and vinegar were used to pickle and preserve fish, oil and vinegar dressed salads, and many vegetables would have been cooked with sugar, butter and vinegar. By the 18th century improved cattle breeding resulted in meat with a high fat content, which was sweet and sweet and flavoursome. This improvement coincided with a decline in the use of spices.

Britain, as an island nation, has historically embraced influences from other countries, whether through trade with the Far East, the fashion for employing French cooks, or intellectual idealism influenced by the Renaissance and classical antiquity. For the wider population diet evolved from a wide range of regional influences such as economic, landscape and climate.

The industrial and technological advances of the 19th century resulted food production on a commercial scale, resulting in a greater variety of food available to the wider population. However this, along with the many food substitutes that were being developed, led to an inevitable deterioration of the quality of food available especially to the urban poor. The diet of the nation suffered further during the two world wars of the 20th century, when the tradition of British food was almost lost, leading to the widely held misconception that Britain has no tradition of food. Evidence of the ingredients and recipes from the past suggest otherwise.

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DAIRY

Generally known as 'white meat', dairy produce, including eggs, seems to have been eaten extensively by all classes during the medieval period, but with the rising prosperity of the 14th century it became regarded as inferior food, fit only for the poor. Fresh milk was considered fit only for children, the old and invalids. Goats and ewes milk were originally more popular than cows. Although rarely drunk by wealthy adults in its raw state, milk was used to make hot drinks called possets or caudles, creamy pottages and custards. Rich cream and curdled cream were a particular favourite. Butter was produced on the manor as was cheese. Even a medieval peasant kept a cow if he could: curds and whey, butter-milk, heavily salted butter and cheese formed part of his staple diet.

With the Elizabethan period came the enclosure of much common land and many peasants were forced to give up their cow, however for the gentry the dairy was an important component of the domestic household. Milk was mainly used to make rice and sago puddings, rich posset drinks of milk or cream, mixed with sack or brandy and thickened with eggs, ground almonds or grated Naples biscuits and syllabubs. Cream was universally eaten. 'Cabbage cream' was made up by layers of clotted cream, with sugar and rosewater, a fashionable flavouring, sprinkled between the layers. The poor continued to eat butter with their bread and salt fish, but with the gradual decline of fresh milk they became more dependent on it as part of their diet. Butter was also increasingly consumed by the rich who used it liberally in every branch of cookery, a trend that was to last until the 19th century. Cheese was increasingly important and some foreign cheeses were imported such as parmesan which was favoured in Elizabethan times.

Cow's milk superseded all other during the 17th century, although ass's milk was drunk by invalids. Butter, which was cheaper than fat, was by now used extensively for all types of cooking including pastry and cake making, frying, in cereal pottages and buttered ales, and it was also added to all forms of boiled food, either during cooking or added to the dishes before serving. Boiled salads, herbs, roots, meat, fish, hashes and fricassees were all liberally buttered. Curds, made into cheesecakes and fritters declined in popularity as the consumption of cheese grew. After the Restoration, Continental influences led to a greater use of cheese in cooking.

Cream in the 18th century was added to a wide range of dishes, both sweet and savoury, such as fricassees, ragouts and braises, and also to puddings such as snows, flummeries, syllabubs and ice-creams. Cheese grew in popularity, usually eaten at the end of the meal in well off households, and new varieties continued to be developed, such as Stilton which Daniel Defoe described as the English Parmesan. Cheese was also used to flavour food such as omelettes, cauliflower and cardoons, and as a topping for macaroni. It was a useful component of supper dishes such as Welsh, Scotch and English Rabbit which appeared for the first time in Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery* in 1747.

By the 19th century ice creams were being produced commercially and were available to the wider population. Fresh milk was pasteurised, a common practice from the 1890s. A method of producing powdered milk was developed in 1855 which became the basis of food for infants and invalids, and condensed milk arrived from America. Margarine was developed in the 1860s by a French chemist as a cheap substitute for butter, originally made from beef suet and milk, later vegetable oils were added reducing its nutritional values. In 1870 the first cheese factory was established, all cheeses having been made on the farm before this time. The main varieties of cheese were Cheddar, Cheshire, Stilton, and double and single Gloucester. However, these were not favoured by polite society, who preferred fresh cream cheese. According to Mrs Beeton, bread and cheese as a meal was 'fit only for soldiers on march or labourers in the open air...'

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FISH

Fish was almost as vital as bread to the medieval household and eaten in enormous quantities, due in part to the church ordaining that on certain days meat should not be eaten. Andrew Boorde wrote in 1542 that: 'Of all nations and countries, England is best served of Fyssh not only of all manner of sea-fyssh, but also of fresh-water fyssh, and of all manner of sorts of salt-fyssh. 'Fresh fish would come from either from the manor's fishponds, such as bream, pike or eels, or those that lived by the sea would have had sole, mullet, crabs, oysters, and even whale. Fish was preserved in a variety of ways, herrings for example were salted, mackerel was smoked mackerel, and cod was dried.

Fish days continued into the Tudor period, however, religious motivations were superseded by the practical incentives of encouraging the seamen. William Cecil, Chief secretary of State declared ' Let the old course of fishing be maintained by the strictest observations of fish days for policy's sake; so the sea coasts should be strong with men and habitations and the fleet flourish more than ever.' Therefore, during the reign of Elizabeth I Wednesdays and Saturdays were declared fish days. Due to its perishable nature and slow transport systems at the time sea fish was rarely brought far inland, and most freshwater fish would have come from the estates fishponds. It was also at this time that sailors from the West Country began fishing off Newfoundland for cod and other fish. Red and white herrings would have been salted at sea before they had landed, and Mediterranean anchovies were pickled in brine. For ordinary people in particular fish meant salted, smoked or pickled herrings, or dried cod, known as Stockfish. Pickled herrings and salt-fish were usually boiled and eaten with mustard or butter. During the summer months river fish and eels were available to all.

Both fresh and salted fish would have been made into well-seasoned broths and stews. An Elizabethan broth of carp for example might be flavoured with spices, dried fruit, oranges, verjuice or vinegar and butter. Stuffed fish were spit roasted, and pieces of fish might be toasted in front of a fire. Fish continued to be served on sops of bread, garnished with gooseberries, grapes, barberries (fruit from the Berberis bush) or redcurrants, or slices of orange or lemon. Fish pies were eaten during lent, made with herrings, eels, salmon or sturgeon, plus butter, spices and dried fruit.

By the 17th century ships were provided with tanks to keep their cargo of fish alive and to transport it to London. Turbot and lobster were kept alive in rock pools until they were ready to be transported in such a way. Inland, fish ponds still played an important role in providing the manor house with fresh fish. Carp and sturgeon were particularly popular fish during this period.

The English pickled much fish, in particular the anchovy, an influence from Portugal. By the end of the 17th century, anchovies were used as a *garum*, a fermented fish sauce, and they were also added to a sauce in imitation of a product that was first imported from somewhere in the East: 'And now we have a new Sawce called Catch-up, from East India, sold at a Guiney a bottle.' Anchovies were also added to meat dishes, as were oysters which at this time were considered a delicacy and cooked in a wide variety of ways.

Pickling was a method of preserving fish: sides of salmon, sturgeon or pike, large eels and congers were split length ways, rolled and soured in vinegar wine or beer, a version of the pickled herring available today. Some fish was fried prior to being pickled in vinegar, known as 'caveached', and would be served as a side dish for the second course.

Potted fish was a fashionable and useful method of preserving, with recipes for potted eels, salmon, lampreys, smalts, mackerel, lobsters, crabs and shrimps

Fish eating habits changed during the 18th century. With improved transport enabling a wider distribution of sea fish, most varieties of freshwater fish went out of fashion, and many fish ponds were transformed into ornamental lakes. Salmon and trout from the rivers were abundant and the sturgeon was still popular. Fish was relatively expensive, but shellfish was as popular as ever, especially oysters which by now were cheap and enjoyed by both rich and poor. Crayfish were abundant, as were cockles which were eaten boiled, curried or made into sauces.

Dried and salted fish were still eaten, smoked haddock from the North became widely available, and anchovies remained in great demand. Pickled sprats, herrings, oysters and salmon were within reach of the poorer people, replacing salt fish on which their diet had previously depended. By the middle of the century West Indian green turtles were imported in tanks of fresh water, to be cooked in 'the West Indian Fashion', By the end of the century fish would be packed in ice for long distance transport, a method first practiced on Scottish Salmon which were sent down to London.

The availability of cheap Norwegian ice, and the railway during the 19th century brought fish to a wider audience and fresh sea-fish began to appear in bulk in the markets of towns and cities across Britain, leading to a decline in salted and pickled herrings, once one of the chief foods of the inland population. With ice to keep the fish fresh, deep sea trawlers ventured as far afield as Iceland returning with an abundance of fish. This resulted in fish becoming more affordable to the working classes for whom it became a staple part of their diet, having the advantage of being quick and easy to cook. Street seller brought up the majority of the cheaper fish such as plaice, herrings,

sprats, mackerel, shrimps, whelks, cockles, winkles and red herrings and would hawk them around the streets of London, whelk stalls being set up on almost every street corner.

More expensive fish such as sole, turbot, John Dorey, salmon and lobster were enjoyed by the middle and upper classes. Turbot, known as the 'pheasant of the sea', was a particular favourite of the Victorian dinner party, boiled whole and served with lobster sauce.

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FRUIT AND NUTS

In the Middle Ages fresh fruit was regarded with suspicion, it was believed to be the 'cause of putrid fevers'. However, fresh plums, damsons, cherries and grapes and later, peaches were in fact consumed by the rich but only at the beginning of a meal as an appetiser. Small wild strawberries eaten with cream were much appreciated in the country as Andrew Boorde wrote in 1542: 'Raw creame eaten with strawberries or hurtes [whortleberries] is a rural man's banquet'. Strawberries, cherries and pears were grown with great success at Sir Piers Edgcumbe's estate at Cothele in Cornwall and transported along the River Tamar, a trade that was to continue until very recent times

After the Norman Conquest, new varieties of apples and pears from France were introduced to British orchards. Pondgarth, the enclosure containing the fishponds at Fountains Abbey, was enclosed by 8 acres of orchard known as East Applegarth, and west of this were three more orchards called the West Applegarths. The cellarer, who was responsible for storing and purchasing food for the monks, supplied pears, medlars, apples and plums for the abbots table. Pears were considered a luxury, and medlars, unlike most fruit, was thought to comfort the stomach. One of the earliest *named* apples was the 'pearmain' recorded soon after 1200. The 'costard', a very large good-keeping apple became popular also in the 13th century, it was sold in the streets by 'coster mongers'. Many of the apples went towards cider making.

Additional cultivated fruit trees were damsons, bullaces, mulberries and quinces. The 13th century writer Walter de Bibbesworth includes hedgerow fruits in his list of fruiting trees that were sometimes cultivated in the gardens such as hawthorn, sloe, briar rose and cornel cherry.

Most fruit in medieval times was cooked to make it more digestible. Apples, quinces and pears were baked in pastry 'coffins' with sugar, or honey and spice, or pulped and put into tarts. Boiled and sieved apples were made into a popular sweet pottage called 'appulmos', which was thickened with breadcrumbs, sweetened and spiced. Strawberries, mulberries, cherries, plums and bullaces also went into sweet pottages.

Fresh fruit accompanied meat, fish and poultry dishes. Verjuice, an acid liquid rather like a mild vinegar, produced from unripe fruit such as grapes, crab-apples and wild gooseberries, was a common ingredient, the name derived from the French *vert* for green and *jus* for juice. It had a variety of uses from neutralising the flavour of meat and fish past their best, to tenderising tough meat, or making vinegar based sauces. Wine, malt and cider vinegars were also used in 14th century recipes.

Exotic fruits began to arrive in Britain in the 13th century through trade with southern Europe where the bitter 'Seville' type oranges, lemons and pomegranates were cultivated. Quince marmalade came from Portugal as did succade, a type of marmalade using lemons or oranges. The juice of oranges went towards making sauces or pottages, while the rind was used to make a preserve with honey or sugar syrup.

Also imported at this time were 'raisins' of Corinth [red or white currants], prunes, figs and dates, much prized by the wealthy. Meatless pottages such as 'figgery' made from figs, raisins, pine nuts, spices and breadcrumbs boiled in wine were served during Lent.

Nuts, including walnuts, sweet chestnuts, hazelnuts and cobnuts were grown to eat whole after a meal. Almonds were the most versatile luxury, imported into Britain on an enormous scale. They were added whole to dishes or pounded to form a paste to use as a thickener for pottages and sauces. Marzipan, or 'marchpane' made from ground almonds was probably created in Italy in the 14th century but quickly became popular all over Europe.

The Elizabethans grew an increasing variety of fruit, apricots being a new arrival from Southern Europe. Gardening techniques introduced from Europe also encouraged the growing of fruit such as apricots, figs and quinces against South-facing walls. Melons were introduced from France and the tomato, or 'apple of love' because of its supposed aphrodisiac qualities, was brought back from Mexico, but grown as a curiosity rather than to eat, until the 18th century. Barberries, the small fruit of the Berberis bush, became a popular garnish and began to be grown regularly in gardens. Most of the newer introductions could not be grown in the colder northern counties.

During the 16th century raw fruit continued to be regarded with suspicion except for peaches of which Sir Thomas Elyot in his *Castel of Helth* of 1541 declared that they 'do lesse harme and do make better juice in the body, for they are not too soon corrupted being eaten'.

Nut trees continued to be a feature of Elizabethan garden, including filberts, hazelnuts and walnuts. Almonds continued to be imported in large quantities.

In the 17th century orchard cultivation was popular, and adopted particularly by the puritans who considered the planting of fruit trees to be for the good of all. Apples were still grown predominantly for cider, considered by some as every bit as good, if not better, than the best French wine.

Fruit trees were grown as much for their ornamental qualities in the gardens of the gentry and aristocracy, reflected in the increasing number of varieties grown. John Parkinson lists in his *Paradisi in Sole* of 1629 57 kinds of apples, 62 pears, 61 plums, 35 cherries and 22 peaches. At Chirk Castle in 1651 'Damazine, and red currance and red gusberies plants' were bought for the kitchen garden, and in 1674 several peach, apricot, warden, plum and cherry trees were planted by John Clifford the gardener. The art and science of grafting, pruning and training the fruit trees were practiced to the extreme.

Citrus fruit continued to be imported from Portugal in increasing numbers. Elizabethans prepared lemons as a salad, thinly sliced, well sugared and garnished with strips of peel. By this time sweet China oranges had also been introduced but were to remain a luxury certainly until well into the 17th century. Towards the latter part of the century and into the 18th century glasshouses were added to the gardens of the great houses, enabling improved cultivation of vines, peaches nectarines and citrus. Exotic fruit was a status symbol, none more so than the pineapple which has introduced to Britain from the West Indies during Cromwell's time. The banana was introduced in 1633 but remained a rarity until the 19th century.

Most fruit was still expensive and beyond the means of ordinary people. In the 1690s, Monsieur Misson, a French visitor commented that the English rarely ate desert, unless it was a piece of cheese, fruit only being eaten in wealthy households. Fruit continued to be cooked with sugar and spices.

During the 18th century apples, pears, peaches, plums, nectarines, greengages and figs were trained along the walls of the kitchen gardens. Exotic fruit such as melons, grapes, pineapples, guavas, passion-fruit, oranges and lemons were grown extensively in the newly built glasshouses and orangeries. Avocados were also grown, and acclaimed by Edwin Lankester in *Vegetable Substances Used for the Food of Man*, 1846, as 'the most delicious [fruit] in the world.' They would have been dressed with salt, pepper, sugar and lime juice and eaten as a desert.

Orchard cultivation continued into the 18th century, Richard Bradley described his ideal orchard: 'Let two Thirds at least bear Apples, and the Remainder be allotted for Pears, Plumbs, Cherries and a Mulberry-Tree or two. The Ground thus planted may be fenced about with Hedges of Filberds and Barberries, to make it still more complete and delightful.' Commercial orchards, particularly in Kent expanded rapidly to meet the demands of the London markets. By the 19th century, newly developed transport systems enabled commercially produced fruit to be delivered throughout the country, and tinned fruit was imported from America, the most popular being pears, gooseberries and pineapples, once only available to the rich but now within the means of the middle classes.

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MEAT AND POULTRY

Although meat was a scarce component of the diet for medieval peasants, it was served in large quantities to the nobility, beef and mutton regularly, pork and veal almost as often, venison more rarely. Poultry was a common dish, geese and capons included. Venison was a high status food out of reach of all but the nobility. Because it was rarely bought or sold on the open market, but taken from parks and exchanged as gifts, it was seldom recorded in contemporary household accounts. Venison was usually roasted, accompanied by a strong pepper and vinegar sauce called 'peverade', or salt and cinnamon, or powdered ginger. Boiled venison was almost always accompanied by frumenty, hulled wheat boiled in milk with spices, served separately. Rabbit meat went into stews and pottages. Pigeon, kept by the lord of the manor in a dovecote, was consumed mainly during the winter months when there was less fresh meat available.

Pigs were plentiful. If the poor ate fresh meat at all it would most likely have been pork, although pig meat was usually preserved as bacon. Eggs and bacon were a staple of early medieval peasant food.

Meat was cooked by roasting, broiling on a gridiron, frying, boiling and stewing. Feet and ears were made into savoury jellies which were highly prized in medieval times; offal went into pottages and puddings and were stewed or fried. Suet made the pastry for pies, and the marrow was extracted from the cracked bones and put into pottages, pies and stuffings.

By the 16th century cow's milk had replaced ewe's milk as the common drink, resulting in an increase in the numbers of cattle, with beef becoming the Englishman's favourite meat. Game was plentiful and varied and included partridge, pheasant, guinea fowl and turkey, the latter two having been recently introduced into Britain and reared in enclosures. Domestic fowl were kept in the courtyard, usually the responsibility of the dairy maid. Fowl was always eaten fresh, roast goose, a particular favourite, was traditionally accompanied by sorrel sauce. Although most country households kept hens which wandered freely, their eggs were very precious to the peasant diet that they were only killed when too old to lay.

Hare was considered at it's best from October to Lent, and, like rabbits, might be given a 'pudding in his belly', a stuffing of grated bread, suet, herbs, and spices, roasted or stewed whole or hashed in broth or wine with herbs and onions, or baked whole in pies with the head and ears left on.

Ponds and moats were an attraction to wild fowl such as ducks and geese providing a welcome variety to the diet, especially in winter. Swans and peacocks were favoured by royalty.

Offal was eaten extensively; such as calf's foot pudding, udder, pig's ears, tongue tripe, calves head or lambs head might well appear on the most fashionable of tables. A particular favourite was lambs' stones, readily available in the midsummer months when the lambs had been castrated! Sausages were also popular.

Rabbits had begun to multiply and escape from their enclosures, providing meat for the less well off if one could be caught.

Potting meat was a popular method of preservation, particularly game, which, when baked in butter, drained then sealed under more butter, could keep for up to a year. This has remained a popular method of preparing meat. Other methods of preserving meat was by salting or smoking, particularly useful for providing meat during the winter months when fresh meat was scarce.

By the 17th century meat was gradually becoming more accessible, due in part to a slow down in the growth of the population, and more stable social conditions after 1660. The cattle-droving trade, developed in the 16th century, continued into the 17th and 18th centuries sending thousands of sheep and cattle from Scotland, Wales and the north of England down to the South, and Smithfield Market in London in particular. Much of it however arrived in poor condition and slaughtered in squalid conditions, resulting in a considerable amount of diseased meat sold to the urban population.

A century later fresh meat was available all year due in part to improved cattle feed, and people no longer depended on salted or smoked food. The emphasis was on breeding ideal stock for consumption. English meat came to have a reputation for having a 'fatness and a delicious taste.', and the English consequently became known as great meat eaters, with beef, especially when roast, continuing to be the favourite meat, as immortalised in Hogarth's satirical prints.

Game was increasingly difficult to obtain by the common man due to land enclosures and stricter game laws. Hares were now legally out of reach of all but the wealthy landowner, for who jugged hare was a speciality. Rabbit was easier to obtain due to its prolific breeding habit.

The range of game birds was narrowing, pheasant, partridge, grouse, plover, quail, lapwing, woodcock, snipe and teal were still on the menu, due largely to the rising popularity of shooting as a sport, however smaller birds were less acceptable, larks proving an exception to the rule.

With the year round availability of meat, large scale pigeon keeping declined, however the poultry yard continued to provide domestic fowl, in particular turkey.

In the 19th century, fresh meat was easily transported on the railways, supplying the cities with healthy butchered carcasses. The excessive fat content of meat in the 18th century gradually gave way to slightly leaner meat, although much more fatty than we are used to today. The selective breeding and improved animal nutrition, combined with hanging the meat for 3 or 4 days resulting in what was generally considered the best beef in the world.

For the middle classes mutton was the staple meat, lamb was enjoyed only on special occasions. Veal, more popular on the continent, was eaten in fashionable households where a French chef was likely to have been employed.

Pork was considered 'common' and unwholesome at the beginning of the century, but later it increased in popularity and suckling pig featured on many a dinner party menu. The pig however was the most useful animal for the working classes, living off scrape and providing the household with pork and bacon for several months of the year. Many people, particularly in rural areas continued to keep a pig or two well into the twentieth century.

Live cattle imports had been banned, until 1842 when the ban was lifted, resulting in imports from Northern Europe. By the 1860s cheap American bacon, beef from Germany and canned boiled beef and mutton imported from America and Australia providing large quantities of meat for the poorer classes, declining only with the development of refrigeration towards the end of the 19th century.

The poultry industry grew, and the influence of French cuisine established chicken as a fashionable dish. Eggs were imported from France in large quantities, though often arriving bad. Rabbits were classified as poultry, and although wild rabbits were still kept in warrens, for the first time Mrs Beeton mentions keeping tame rabbits for the table.

Game continued to be prestigious food as shooting became increasingly popular among the landowning classes, with a resurgence of many wild birds ending up on the table.

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SUGAR AND SPICES

It is evident that early British food must have been full of flavour by the quantity and variety of herbs and spices used, far more than today. The early medieval gardener concentrated on herbs, and the medieval cook on spices. Sage, parsley, fennel and borage were widely grown. Mustard and pepper were used lavishly in cooking as was ginger which was appreciated as much for its medicinal qualities as for its flavour. Spices were very expensive, but for the households that could afford them, cumin, cloves, saffron, mace, nutmeg, cardamom, cinnamon, coriander, pepper, ginger and galingale, an aromatic root from India, were all used, as were others no longer in common use such as grains of paradise, zedoary, and cubebs, most being imported from the Far East. Spices appear in every area of cookery: pies, tarts, sweets and vegetables, essential to disguise the dullness of salted fish, or the unpleasant taste of tainted fish or meat, although they were also used purely as a flavouring in their own right for fresh meat. Honey was used for sweetening and making gingerbread. Sugar was only occasionally used as it was a very expensive commodity.

There was a gradual decline in the variety of spices used by the 16th century although cooks continued to use the more common spices such as cinnamon, mace, nutmeg, cloves pepper and ginger. The use of saffron, once widely used to flavour and colour dishes was also declining, although Sir Francis Drake maintained that 'What made the English people sprightly was the liberal use of saffron in their broths and sweetmeats.' Salt was indispensable for preserving fish and meat. Ground almonds were used to make sweets and cakes, and in particular marzipan and gold and silver leaf was used to decorate food.

Sugar was one of the most significant foodstuffs to influence British eating habits. Dried fruit was used in ever greater quantities and sugar began to replace honey as the standard sweetener, usually sold in 'loaf' form, and was considered to be a healthy food. For ordinary people however, honey remained the universal sweetener. From the 1640s English colonists in the West Indies turned their land over to sugar cane plantations, resulting in a plentiful supply and at a cheaper price, and by the end of the century sugar consumption had increased to 4lb a head. Chocolate was introduced to Britain in 1656 originally consumed as a beverage.

The use of spices declined still further by the 18th century, plain food being preferred, especially in relation to meat and fish. However, from the early 19th century, influences from the Empire, in particular India, led to a revival of spices used in exotic dishes such as curries, adopted in particular by the army who continued to enjoy a modified version as a regular meal in the mess well into the 20th century.

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VEGETABLES

During the Middle Ages pottage, bread and ale were the three essentials of diet for most English men and women. The Physician Andrew Boorde, in his *Dyetary* of 1542, said that 'Pottage is not so much used in all Christendom as it is used in England'. Pottage was a type of soup or stew, cooked in a cauldron over the fire and contained water which might be enriched with the stock from boiled meat, fish or poultry. Various species of herbs, often referred to as 'good pottagers', were added, as were at least one or more of several vegetables, notably the leaves of colewort (*Brassica oleracea*), leeks, (*Allium porrum*), both of them grown in the garden, or the field crops peas (*Pisum sativum*) and broad beans (*Vicia faba*). The principle flavouring used was parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*). Pottage as a staple food had endless possible variations depending on the ingredients available.

Other vegetables grown at the time are mentioned in the 14th century poem *Piers Plowman* by Langland, which lists 'porret plants, parsley and scallions; Chibols and chervils, and cherries.' Chibols (*Allium fitulosum*) and scallions, spring onions or shallots, had a more delicate flavour than the widely grown common onion. At the same time, Friar Henry Daniel said of chives: 'We eat it as cress or porret', that is, as a salad or relish. Chervil might be of more than one kind but all were of an aromatic flavour, especially the sweet chervil or sweet cicely.

Salad leaves were often eaten raw despite medical opinion to the contrary. Cooking was considered to diminish the dangers of acidity, flatulence or actual poisoning which might occur. Pot herbs and salads include: Alexanders, borage, cress, watercress, fennel, groundsel, langdebeef (*Picris echinoides*), lettuce, march or smallage (wild celery), nepp (*Nepeta cataria*), orach, radish, 'Spinach', and tansy. The principal sweet herbs were calamint, coriander, dill, dittander (*Lepidium latifolium*), hyssop, lavender, mints, mustard, sage, savory, thyme and wood sorrel. The aromatic nature of these herbs would have ensured a highly flavoured dish.

Monastic gardens in particular would have provided foodstuffs and medicines for the community. Alexander Neckham compiled a comprehensive list of plants from his garden in Cirencester at the beginning of the 13th century. He advised that noble gardens: 'should have parsley and cost and fennel and

southernwood [a strewing herb], coriander, sage, savory, hyssop, rue, dittany, smallage, pellitory, lettuce, garden cress and paeonies. There should also be planted beds with onions, leeks, garlic, pumpkin and shallots, the cucumber growing in it's lap...There should also be pottage herbs, such as beets, herb-mercury, orach, sorrel and mallows; anise, mustard, white pepper and wormwood...'

At Ightam Moat in the 14th century there were six long terraced beds for growing vegetables, herbs and flowers for cooking and scenting the house. Herbs and flowers would have been mixed together to produce the salads which were so popular during this period, 'mingled well with raw oil', and sprinkled with vinegar and salt.

Cottagers and peasants would grow a few vegetables on the land around their cottage, mainly cabbages, onions, garlic, and leeks which were so popular that the kitchen garden was often referred to as the leek garden. A few rows of parsley and other herbs might also be grown and, if space allowed perhaps a fruit tree or two, such as cherries, apples or pears. Many cottagers would have a pig, hens, and even geese. Very few had a cow.

Peas and beans were mostly cultivated as field crops and when dried were added to pottage. At least 3 kinds of peas were grown: green and white, both small varieties and grey, which were larger and often used as animal fodder or food for the poorest people. However in some cases beans were grown in gardens and eaten as fresh vegetables.

Worts, together with onions, leeks and garlic, formed the bulk of the vegetables grown. Wort probably refers to the colewort or kale, a hardy type of brassica, not cut off whole like the cabbage or cauliflower, but picked from time to time, as a 'cut-and-come-again' vegetable. Four main sowings, in May, July, November and March ensured a crop of young worts throughout the year. These were the basic vegetable consumed by all levels of society, contrary to the popular notion that the nobility ate a very different diet than the general public, although the diet of the wealthy contained more meat and fish, and finer quality bread which would have been eaten with the pottage. It is also possible that some of the very large amounts of garlic grown was made into garlic soup based on pieces of bread boiled in the stock, in the same way that is still usual in Southern Europe.

Early in the 14th century a list from the Archbishop of Canterbury's garden at Lambeth includes 2 gallon of leek seed, 2 gallons of parsley and one gallon of seed of worts. This implies about an acre of leeks, and half an acre of parsley, and half an acre of cole-wort. Among the smaller quantities of other salad and vegetable seeds were cucumber and gourd seeds, hyssop (widely used for flavouring), 'spynhach', lettuce, and 'caboche', or cabbage, the appearance of which was a sign of the emergence of new vegetables at a high social level, as is the appearance of a pennyworth of skirret seed, the first garden appearance of a root crop. Skirrets, (*Sium sisarum*) were similar to parsnips and were parboiled and stewed in butter or rolled in flour and fried. The flavour is said to be sweet with a floury texture.

There was a very marked enrichment of the diet during the reign of Henry VIII, with the nobility enjoying such delicacies as asparagus and globe artichokes, melons and apricots. Quite early in the 16th century the 'Fromond' list of 'Herbys necessary for a garden' already included 49 sorts of herbs for pottage and 19 for salad, as well as seven roots: parsnip, turnip, radish, carrot, galingale, eryngo and saffron, showing a more marked emphasis on root crops than there had been in the 14th century. Both carrots and skirrets were eaten as individual vegetables rather than simply mixed into soup. Carrots were 'roasted in the embers til they be tender' then pared and eaten with vinegar and oil. Green herbs were washed and boiled, mixed with clarified butter and poured over pieces of diced bread.

The chronicler Ralph Holinshead noted in 1548: 'melons, pompions [pumpkins], gourdes, cucumber, radishes, skirets, parsnips and turnips' were eaten as 'deintie dishes at the table of delicate merchants, gentlemen and the nobilitie who make their provision yearlie for new seeds out of strange countries.' Vegetables were grown in kitchen gardens, sometimes called wort gardens or 'Kaleyards', usually 2 acres or more, to feed a manorial household. The proper cultivation of vegetables was a well understood craft.

By the Elizabethan period large quantities of vegetables were raised in the increasing numbers of market gardens especially around large towns such as London, Norwich and Worcester. Some concentrated on cheap, high-yielding crops for the poor: parsnips, carrots, turnips and cabbages, once the fashionable food of the rich now became a mainstream staple. In *Haven of Health* written in 1584 Thomas Cogan described parsnips and carrots as 'common meate among common people, all the time of autumn, and chiefly upon fish daies.' Other market gardeners specialised in producing the latest fruit and vegetables for the richer citizens. The use of garlic, a staple of the medieval diet was gradually declining.

Protestant refugees fleeing from persecution in the Netherlands and France brought with them their sophisticated knowledge of vegetable cultivation, settling mainly in East Anglia and the South-East, and setting up market gardens using new techniques and plants. Many of the vegetable became very popular such as: asparagus, cardoons and globe artichokes, cucumbers, cauliflowers, beetroot, chard, spinach and pumpkins. Poor people removed the seed and pith from the pumpkin and stuffed them with apples and baked them, while the wealthy preferred to turn them into pies whereby the pumpkin was sliced and fried with sweet herbs and spices, sugar and egg, then put in a pastry case with alternate layers of apple and currants, resulting in the pumpkin pie that was eventually to become a national dish in America, introduced by the early colonists.

Other new vegetables came from further afield in the new world: Kidney beans, from Peru, usually served boiled and buttered as part of a 'salet', and other beans such as runners, string and haricot beans. The most useful of all vegetables to come from the Americas however was the potato. It is thought that the first potatoes to be brought back by John Hawkins from 'the coast of Guinea and the Indies of Nova Hispania' in 1564 were sweet potatoes (*Ipomea batata*), described by the Elizabethan traveller Richard Hakluyt in

1589 as 'the most delicate rootes that may be eaten, and doe farre exceed our passenepps or carrots.' It is generally agreed that the common potato (*solanum tuberosum*) was introduced by the Spaniards to Europe from South America in about 1580, and was certainly in Britain by 1597 as it was mentioned in Gerards Herbal. An early recipe from 1596 using potatoes was a tart which also contained, borage roots, quinces, dates, egg yolks, wine, sugar, spices and 'the brains of 3 or 4 cock sparrows', however potatoes took another 200 years to become a fully established field crop, whereas the Jerusalem artichoke, another similar tuberous vegetable, had much more success. During this period flowers continued to be used in salads and to flavour food, rosewater in particular was a favourite Elizabethan flavouring.

A wide range of vegetables were pickled, for preservation and flavour: mushrooms, broom buds, beetroot, red cabbage, capers, samphire, and the tops of young green tuff were preserved in vinegar, stale beer or verjuice, while cucumbers were boiled in vinegar with salt, pepper, fennel, dill and mace. Red beetroot was boiled and served as a salad on its own. Vegetables prepared as 'sallets' were served raw, boiled or baked and dressed with oil, vinegar, sugar and a variety of herbs. The Elizabethans added new vegetables and fruit, together with hard-boiled eggs, sliced cold capon, anchovies, and other meat or fish, to form a 'compound sallet', the fore runner of the 'grand sallet' of the 17th century. John Evelyn championed 'sallets' in his *Acetaria, or A Discourse of Sallets* in 1699. 'Acetaria' literally means 'sallets or herbs mixed with vinegar to stir up the appetite'. He advocates the use of a very wide range of vegetables including endive, 'sellery', lettuce, cress, radish, succory (chicory) and sweet fennel, and recommends dressing them with 'clear, and perfectly good oyl-olive, three parts; of sharpest vinegar, limon, or juice of orange, one part; and therein let steep some slices of horse-radish, with a little salt.' Evelyn, an intellectual who had spent time in Italy during the Civil War, was looking towards the ancient classical civilisations for inspiration.

The English enthusiasm for salads was greater than even the French or Italians. By the late 17th century they made 'Grand salads' in several forms, such as Salamongundy, which often appeared in 18th century cookbooks, later being found on the continent in the form of *Salad Nicose*.

It was during the 17th century that a revolution in modern cuisine came about inspired by the recipes of the French chef La Varenne, which changed the course of cooking from sweetly fragrant dishes to the salt-acid taste. All the great households aspired to the prestige of a French chef in their service. Eastern travel also influenced British food, in particular spicy pickles, unknown in French or Italian cuisine, however 'Indian pickle', or 'Picca Lillo' (piccalilli), with its salt-acid taste, fitted easily into the model of salads taken from ancient antiquity.

Cities were expanding at an ever increasing rate and Richard Bradley, Professor of Botany and author of the *Country Housewife*, 1727-32, calculated that the area of land under market gardens around London increased from 10,000 acres in 1660 to 110,000 in 1721. High yielding root vegetables were now the staple of the poor mans diet. The potato increased

in popularity and was widely cultivated in the North, but did not take over from bread as the staple bulk food until the 19th century. The 17th century household accounts from Kingston Lacey record a wide variety of vegetables including: Samphire, spinach, turnips, parsnips, sprouts, cabbage, artichokes carrots peas and asparagus, as well as herbs. It was at this time that the 'faggots of sweet herbs', also known as the 'bouquet garni' first came into use in British cooking.

By the 18th century, there appears a shift in the perception of British food; England was gaining a reputation for uninspired cooking. Charles Moritz, a Swiss traveller, wrote in 1782 that the ordinary Englishman's midday meal usually consisted of 'a piece of half boiled or half roasted meat; a few cabbage leaves, boiled in plain water; on which they pour a sauce made of flour and butter, the usual method of dressing vegetables in England', although, many of the gentry and aristocracy were eating vegetables cooked in more imaginative ways, and there was a growing taste for delicate vegetables such as asparagus, broccoli, mushrooms, and globe artichokes.' However, the fashion for producing vegetables out of season meant that food was not necessarily being consumed at its most flavoursome.

It was during the Victorian period that potatoes became a universally common crop, being easy to produce in bulk and providing nourishing food for the increasing urban poor who didn't possess a garden. In the wealthy households however, large kitchen gardens were built to grow ever increasing varieties of vegetables, many being bred by the gardeners on the estates. Artichokes and cauliflower still were popular in all grand houses and potatoes were served three times a day, prepared in a different way each time. Onions, leeks and garlic had fallen out of fashion, although used in soup. Garlic was occasionally used in elaborate dishes, but remained unpopular in middle class households. Salads continued to be dressed with salt, pepper, vinegar, mustard and oil, and might consist of lettuce, mustard and cress, radishes, cucumber, endive, red cabbage, beetroot, potato and celery. Tomatoes only became popular towards the end of the 19th century.

Two world wars in the 20th century had a devastating effect on the British cookery tradition, from which it has only recently begun to recover.

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