

New England Food & Cooking

The problems the early New England colonists faced were many. They had to struggle for survival in the midst of a land of plenty. Despite grueling hardships, within a short period of time homes were built, fields were cleared and sowed, and orchards and gardens were planted.

Although their food supplies were limited at first, colonial cooks learned to make some very tasty dishes. As soon as they began to receive such imported items as baking powder, yeast, and sugar, many delicious recipes developed. Some of the finest cooking in American history has come from Colonial New England.

Basic Foods

Everyone who arrived during the early 1600s had to become accustomed to three foods available in this new land. These foods included **corn, pumpkins, and beans**. For the early colonists, corn and pumpkins were often the difference between survival and starvation. Colonial cooks learned how to use them in ingenious and inventive ways. Meat, fish, and bread were an important part of the early settlers' diet, as well.

Meat: The early colonists were surprised by the abundance of game. In England hunting was a privilege reserved for the rich. The Indians taught the colonists how to hunt game and catch fish. Some of the animals eaten were deer, duck, turkey, rabbit, geese, and pigeon. A common meat dish was New England boiled dinner, a one-pot meal that simmered all day over an open fire. It consisted of vegetables cooked with meat and broth. Common vegetables included turnips, carrots, onions, and cabbage. Later potatoes were added.

Seafood: In New England waters, seafood was plentiful—especially lobster, clams, oysters, and cod fish. A popular soup made from seafood was fish chowder. New England fish chowder consists of some kind of seafood in a thick, creamy soup flavored with salt pork and diced potatoes.

Breads: The most common bread was known as cheate bread, a thick sourdough version, and cornbread, made from cornmeal, flour, and water.

Vegetables: The term "vegetable" was not used in the 16th century. Edible plants were called "sallets." The most widely used sallets included onions, artichokes, carrots, turnips, cabbages, and beets.

Fruits: The Pilgrims found a number of native fruits that included blueberries, cranberries, blackberries, raspberries, and gooseberries. As soon as they could, they planted apple orchards. In addition, the colonists also found walnuts, chestnuts, and hickory nuts.

Desserts: Puddings and pies were two basic types of desserts made by early cooks. Especially popular was Indian pudding, an authentic American treat made from cornmeal, milk, and molasses. In the fall season, pumpkin pies were a favored treat. Fruit pies, made from native fruits, were also baked. During the early years in America, an apple pie was rare because apples were unknown in America at that time and needed to be imported from England. Sweeteners included molasses and maple syrup.

Name _____

Date _____

New England Food & Cooking Worksheet

Use the boxes below to outline some of the basics of early New England foods.

Three Earliest Foods:

Meats:

Seafood:

Breads:

Vegetables:

Fruits:

Nuts:

Desserts:

Sweeteners:

Common meat dish:

Common seafood dish: