

Introduction to Medieval Food

Overview of Types of Foods

Bread: In period, there were several grades of quality, with the whitest bread being the highest quality: from wastel or pandemain, to manchet or cocket, to brown or treet, to maslin (mixed with another grain, rye or barley) to horsebread. The baking of bread was a profession all its own, and bakers organized into guilds just as cobblers and carpenters did. Bread baking was heavily regulated, and very few recipes have survived. The leavening used was generally sourdough or barm (yeast leftover from brewing ale). A starting place to learn more: <http://www.whirlwind-design.com/madbaker/breadfaq.html>. A great source is Elizabeth David's book "English Bread and Yeast Cookery". Bread is an easy straight-from-the-grocery-store contribution for a potluck. Look for artisan or ethnic breads (for instance the round crusty loaves) rather than bringing Wonder Bread though.

Meat, Fish and Fowl: Medieval aristocrats ate a much greater variety of both game and domestic animals, fish and fowl than we do today. Game meats include rabbit, pheasant, venison, boar, larks, and herons. Domestic meats include chicken, capons, beef, salt pork, lamb and mutton. Fish of all types, from salmon, trout, mackerel, sardines, cod and whiting to porpoise were eaten in far greater amounts than will be found at a typical SCA feast. As to methods of preparation, roasting is more impressive, but boiling in a pottage more economical. Today we distinguish soup and stew by the thickness of the broth. Different terms were used in period to distinguish types of pottage. A broth or brewet is a pottage in which meat or fish is the prime ingredient. A civet is a pottage flavored heavily with fried onions. A sop can be eaten without a spoon by soaking bread in it. About the only common meat you would find in today's supermarket that might be inappropriate for most of the SCA period is turkey, a bird found only in the New World. However, turkey is often used in SCAdian cooking as a substitute for birds like swans that were served at aristocratic tables. Popular potluck contributions you can bring right from the deli include: a roasted chicken, cold sliced meats (avoid the heavily processed ones) and sausages.

Vegetables, Grains, Fruits and Nuts: Unless dried or pickled, these were available to the extent that they were grown locally and only in season. A number of types we use today were not known until the New World was "discovered", and so are not period for those with medieval SCAdian personas. Many people will tell you that New World items are "not period" with no disclaimer. Of course this is not true for people with later period personas: Elizabethans and Cavaliers, for example, may well have encountered some of the New World items. Things you can do for a potluck even if you don't have a kitchen: green salad (baby greens or spinach with herbs and spring onions, tossed with oil and vinegar), pickles of various vegetables, relish tray.

Old World: Greens (Wortes): cabbage, Swiss chard, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, chicory, endive, radicchio, spinach, sorrel, watercress, lamb's lettuce, dandelion, nettles, rocket, mustard greens, turnip greens, beet greens. **Roots:** rapes (turnips) - the staple, salsify, radish, celery root, pasturnakes (carrots and parsnips), skyrwates/skirrits (water parsnip), scallions, onions, garlic, leeks. **Beans and Peas:** peas, split peas, white beans, fava beans (broad beans), lentils, chickpeas (garbanzos). **Stalks and Vegetable Fruits:** asparagus, celery, fennel, mushrooms, marrows/gourds (mostly varieties we would call summer squash and zucchini), cucumber, eggplant, artichoke, olives. **Grains:** wheat, oats, barley, rye, buckwheat, rice, millet. **Fruit:** apple, crabapple, pear, quince (very common), cherry, peach, apricot, nectarine, damson (plum) and prune, fig, date, pomegranate, orange, lemon, grapes, raisins, melon (such as honeydew and muskmelon/cantaloupe), rhubarb, strawberry, currants (very common), gooseberry, bilberry, wild blackberries (but not cultivated), mulberries. **Nuts:** almonds (a staple), filberts (hazelnuts), chestnuts, walnuts, acorns, sesame seeds, pistachios, pinenuts.

New World: Roots: potato, sweet potato, jicama. **Beans and Peas:** pinto beans, red beans, kidney beans, lima beans, string beans (haricot), runner bean, field peas, black-eyed peas, cacao beans (chocolate), vanilla beans. **Stalks and Vegetable Fruits:** tomato, winter squash types, avocado, peppers (both bell and hot/chili types). **Grains:** corn (maize), quinoa, wild rice. **Fruit - New World, Asian and Modern:** banana, persimmon, kiwi, mango, guava, papaya, starfruit, grapefruit, lime, passion fruit,

pineapple, prickly pear, black raspberry, loganberry, cranberry, blueberry, breadfruit. Nuts: pecans, peanuts, coconuts, cashews, Brazil nuts, macadamia nuts.

Pies and Tarts: There's a huge variety of pastry items represented in period cooking. I'll mention only a couple of pastry types. A Pie or Torte is often what is known as a "raised pie": very tall with a self-standing not flaky crust. The type of pastry is known as a hot water crust, where the fat is melted in boiling water before being added to the flour. Raised pies are still known in British cooking, but pretty much unknown in American cooking. Typically they are filled with meat moistened with a broth that gels (aspic). Shortcrust pastries, the type we are familiar with, where fat is rubbed into flour and cold water used, are used for Tarts, which are generally fruit, but can also be Egg and Cheese (quiche) dishes. Shortcrust pastry is also used for making hand pies (pasties).

Eggs and Cheese: Although many egg preparations (like scrambled eggs) don't stand up to potluck use well, hard-boiled eggs are good. Cheese is another good choice. Velveeta is not period, but many varieties we enjoy today are more than appropriate to bring as a potluck contribution: Brie, Camembert, Mozzarella, Provolone, and Farmers are all good ones to try.

Sweet Dishes: Raw fruits, stewed fruits, dried fruits (which can be delicious steeped in liquor), custard, fruit pies and tarts, and sweetmeats (like sugared nuts) are all good contributions. While a tray of chocolate chip cookies or a pan of brownies would be a popular choice for a modern potluck (and in reality, many chocoholic SCAdians will probably look the other way while they empty the tray), baking soda is not period, so period recipes use other techniques (like whipping eggs). You will find more recipes for cookie-like treats later in the period. Wafers (mentioned by Chaucer), shortbread, almond cake with currants, and rosewater and anise flavored jumballs are most like our modern cookies.

Typical Flavors and Spice Mixes

Cinnamon, ginger, cloves, sage, savory, hyssop, galingale (galangal, a root similar to ginger), cubeb, pepper, mace, nutmeg, saffron, anise, fennel, parsley, mustard seeds, cardamom, cumin, long pepper, grains of paradise, coriander, rosewater.

Powder Forte (Strong Spice Mix - Peppery with no sugar):

1 Tbsp black pepper
2 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp cloves
1/2 tsp ginger
1/4 tsp saffron

Powder Douce (Soft/Sweet Spice Mix - No pepper or cubeb):

1 Tbsp cinnamon
1 Tbsp sugar
1/2 of a nutmeg
1 tsp cloves
1 tsp mace
1 tsp ginger
1/2 tsp saffron

Feast Gear

Don't assume anything more than table, seating and food is supplied when you attend a feast. Often beverages are not supplied (other than perhaps water.) At minimum, plan on providing your own: plate, bowl, spoon, mug or goblet, knife, napkin, bag or basket to carry around your feast gear, and plastic garbage bag to carry your dirty dishes home to wash. As people stay in the SCA, their feast gear becomes more elaborate, adding table runners or cloths, salt cellar, cushions, candles and candle holders, and so forth. Learn more here:

http://www.dragonslaire.org/Articles%20and%20notes/feast_gear_article.htm and
<http://www.florilegium.org/files/NEWCOMERS/Feast-Basket-art.html>

Bringing Your Potluck Item

- Use a wooden, ceramic or metal dish, or a basket, if possible. Tupperware is damaging to the ambiance.
- Provide a serving spoon, and trivet or hot pad to set a hot dish on.
- Put identification on all of your stuff.

- If it isn't immediately obvious what your dish is, provide a label with a description and an indication as to whether it is vegetarian or contains any common allergy foods (e.g. dairy, eggs, nuts, alcohol, wheat). If you used any modern convenience foods (e.g. canned cream of XX soup) mentioning their presence is very helpful to the allergic who are probably better able than you to interpret whether their allergen food is present in the product.
- If you bring a big hunk of meat (a ham, roast, etc.), serve it pre-sliced. This will both encourage feasters to take reasonable servings, and prevent the line from stalling.

A Sample Redaction

Sops Dorre (Glazed Sops)

Soupes dorroy. Shere Oynonys, an frye hem in oyle; þanne take Wyne, an boyle with Oynonys, toste whyte Brede an do on a dysse, an caste þer-on gode Almaunde Mylke, & temper it wyth wyne: þanne do þe dorry a-bowte an messe it forth. (Harleian MS 279 recipe 30)

Soupes dorrees. Nym oynons, mynce hem, frie hem in oille de olyue: nym onyons, boille hem with wyn, tost whit bred, & do it in dishes and cast almand mylke theron, & ye wyn & ye oynons aboue, & gif hit forth. (Laud MS. 553 recipe 17)

Sops glazed. Slice onions, and fry them in oil; then take Wine, and boil with (the) Onions, toast white Bread and put it in a dish, and place there-on good Almond Milk, & temper it with wine: then do the onions in sauce about and serve it forth.

Cindy Renfrow. Take a Thousand Eggs or More: A Collection of 15th Century Recipes. Copyright 1990

1 medium onion (about 1 1/2 cups) shredded finely
 2 tbsp olive oil
 1 cup white wine
 2 slices stale white bread or french bread, toasted
 1/2 cup almond milk, made with water or white wine
 Heat the oil in a large skillet until hot. Fry the onions over medium heat until tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Add the wine and stir. Cover and simmer 5 minutes. Take two serving bowls and put a slice of toast in each. Pour half the almond milk in each bowl. Pour half the wine and onion mixture into each bowl. Serve hot.

Where to Find Recipes

A handout of 33 recipes is provided to those attending the class. It can be downloaded from <http://www.advancenet.net/~jscole/medfood.htm>

Some web sites to find out more about medieval cooking (and recipes):

A Book of Gode Cookery by Master Huen Damebrige of Wychwood -

<http://www.godecookery.com/godeboke/godeboke.htm>

Cariadoc's Miscellany by Cariadoc - <http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Medieval.html>

Medieval Recipes from all over the Net - <http://moas.atlantia.sca.org/topics/cook.htm>

Old Culinary & Brewing Documents Online - <http://www.thousandeggs.com/cookbooks.html>

Medieval/Renaissance Food Homepage - <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/food.html>

The Florilegium - <http://www.florilegium.org>

If you find the name of a recipe, you can go to www.google.com and search for it and probably find several variations online. A more targeted search is to google the Florilegium.

A few printed cookbooks are listed on the recipe handout. Here are some more sites to explore cookbooks and make a wishlist for checking them out via Inter Library Loan:

Florilegium: <http://www.florilegium.org/files/FOOD-BOOKS/idxfood-books.html>

Stewpot Bibliography (Reviews): <http://home.earthlink.net/~smcclune/stewpot/plibrary.html>

Acanthus Books: <http://www.acanthus-books.com>

Gode Cookery Bookshop: <http://www.godecookery.com/godeboke/bookshop/bookshop.htm>

Serious Books for Serious Cooks: <http://www.foodbooks.com/medieval.htm>

Poison Pen Press: <http://www.poisonpenpress.com/cookery.html>

Two mailing lists full of expert cooks passionate about period cooking and welcoming to new cooks:

SCA Cooks: <http://www.ansteorra.org/mailman/listinfo/sca-cooks>

Middle Kingdom Cooks: <http://www.netcolony.com/arts/mkcooks/>

Noted culinary scholar and former Wurm Walder Johnnae Ilyn Lewis has offered assistance. Persons with questions may contact her at johnna@sitka.engin.umich.edu