

Tudor Food Notes



In Tudor times there were no such things as a freezer or fridge. The Tudors relied on fresh food because there was no way of storing food to be eaten later. Animals were kept all year round and killed just before they needed to be eaten. This meant that the meat was always fresh. Bread was eaten at most meals.

Three-quarters of the rich Tudor diet was made up of meat such as oxen, deer, calves, pigs, badger or wild boar. Birds were also eaten, such as chicken, pigeons, sparrows, heron, crane, pheasant, woodcock, partridge, blackbirds and peacocks. The middle class merchant and minor nobility would have had a variety of courses. Manor houses from the country would add game birds.

People living near rivers and the sea ate fish. The local rivers provided fresh water fish including salmon, trout, eels, pike, perch, roach and sturgeon.

Locally grown fruit and vegetables could only be eaten when in season and were not popular foods for the rich. (Bananas and other fruits and vegetables from the Americas were not heard of at this time.)

Puddings, pastries and biscuits were very popular and these all contained some sweeteners. The finest sugar was white from Madeira and melted easily in liquid. The next grade was Barbary or Canary sugar. The common, coarse sugar, which was brown and rather gluey, was good for syrups and for marinating meat (honey roast ham is a dish from this period). Spiced wine would be served. The spices were thought to aid in digestion.

The rich aristocracy wouldn't necessarily have had different foods from the middle class, but more of it. There would be figures moulded from jelly or pastry, such as lions or crowns or birds. Each course would have had several different dishes brought out at the same time and then the people would have chosen what to eat. The courses would not have been divided up into categories like we do today.

Water was often unfit for drinking because it was contaminated with sewage. Instead of drinking water with their meals, people drank ale or mead and the rich drank wine.

Food for the Poor

The poor ate a dark bread of rye, barley, or maslin (sometimes with pea or bean flour mixed in), and herb-flavoured soup called **pottage**. This was made of peas, milk, egg yolks, breadcrumbs and parsley and flavoured with saffron and ginger. Cheese and a bowl of curds were also typical meals. They ate chickens which they could rear themselves, beef from the local market (when they had the money) and rabbits which they could catch for themselves. Poorer people used honey as a sweetener - they kept bees in hives in their gardens.

Servants in households were usually better fed, with beef or fowl for meats, better breads, pudding, salt herring, cheese, dried cod and ale (which was probably made on the estate).

Recipes To Try

French Toast - PAYN PUREUZ

Take faire yolkes of eyren, and try hem from the white, and drawe hem thorgh a streynour; and then take salte, and caste thereto; and then take manged brede or paynman, and kutte hit in leches; and then take faire butter, and clarefy hit or elles take fressh grece and put hit yn a faire pan and make hit hote; And then wete the brede well there in the yolkes of eyren, and then ley hit on the batur in the pan, whan the buttur is al hote; and then whan it is fried ynowe, take sugur ynowe, and caste there-to whan hit it in the dissh. And so serve hit forth.

Gingerbread - GYNGERBREDE

Take a quart of hony and sethe it and skime it clene; take Safroun, pouder Pepir and throw theron; take gratyd Brede and make it so chargeaunt that it wol be y-lechyd; then take pouder canelle and straw ther-on y-now; then make yt square, lyke as thou wolt leche yt; take when tho lechyst hyt, an caste Box leves a-bowyn, y-stykyd ther-on, on clowys. An if thou wolt have it Red, colour it with Saunderys y-now.

Apple Fritters - FRITTERS

Take a little faire warme water, as much sack, and take half flower half bread, mingle them altogeth: then take five or six egges and break therein whites and all, a little nutmeg, pepper and salt and cut in appels very small then take a faire skillet with suet and let it boyle on the fire and so put the batter in it.

Table Manners

As it was usual to have several people digging into a common dish with their fingers, having clean hands was important. People were advised to wash their hands out in the open where everyone could be seen. It was another matter to keep your hands clean during the meal. Manuals for manners gave a list of things people should not do during a meal, such as:

- don't put your fingers in your ears
- don't put your hands on your heads
- don't blow your nose with your hands
- men were told to refrain from "scratching"

Other bad manners advised against were:

- people blowing their noses or wiping off sweat with their napkins
- people poking around on a plate (probably looking for a better piece of food)
- putting bones back on a platter after eating the meat off. It was consider that the "proper" place for bones was the floor.
- releasing wind was also frowned upon.