

# Fantastic Family Feasts: Traditional Meals from History

What does your family eat for holidays or special events? Families worldwide have wonderful feasts and meals they make for celebrations. Let's explore some fantastic traditional family foods from different cultures and time periods.

In Ancient Rome, a popular feast food was dormice. Dormice are tiny mice that Romans considered a tasty delicacy. They would fatten up the dormice on nuts, then cook them in a sauce or stuff them with pork. Romans also enjoyed sweet deserts like honey cheesecake baked with flour, eggs and goat cheese.

During the Middle Ages in Europe, most people ate simple foods like bread, stew, and ale. But noble families held impressive feasts in their castles. Knights dined on roast goose, duck, and wild boar killed during hunts. Huge pies held live birds that would fly out when the pie was cut. Jesters performed and musicians played lutes to entertain diners.

In Asia, the Lunar New Year is a major holiday. Families gather for big feasts with symbolic foods. Fish and dumplings represent prosperity for the new year. Noodles mean long life. Red fruits like kumquats stand for luck and good fortune. Eating these traditional foods brings families together.

Many Native American tribes held feasts after successful hunts and harvests. In the Northwest, salmon was a staple food. Tribes developed special methods to smoke and dry the fish so it could last through the winter. Corn and squash were also commonly eaten. Pumpkins, beans, berries and nuts added variety to the feasts.

In the pioneer days of American history, families worked hard to cook hearty feasts. Main dishes included venison or rabbit stew. Squash and root vegetables like turnips came from the garden. Cornbread, biscuits and pies provided carbohydrates. Wild berries like huckleberries made a sweet tart dessert. Feasts took all day to prepare over a campfire.

The Jewish faith has many traditional holiday foods. At Passover seder feasts, families eat symbolic items like lamb, bitter herbs, salt water and charoset dip. Challah bread and matzo ball soup are essentials. Favorite treats are Haman's ears, or hamantaschen cookies shaped like triangles. The foods retell the ancient story of the Jewish people's liberation.

As you can see, traditional family feasts reflect history. The foods come from the ingredients and crops native to a culture. Cooking methods fit the time period.

And the symbolism passes family stories between generations. So when you sit down for your next family meal, think about all the history on your plate!

## Glossary

- symbolism: when something represents an idea or concept
- delicacy: a fancy, expensive food considered a treat
- staple: a basic, commonly eaten food that is a major part of the diet
- liberate: to set free from control

## Questions

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did noble families eat at feasts during the Middle Ages in Europe?
  - a) Fish and dumplings    b) Dormice and cheesecake
  - c) Roast goose and wild boar    d) Challah bread and matzo ball soup
2. What does charoset dip eaten at Passover represent?
  - a) Tears and hardship    b) Sweet joy    c) Liberation    d) Protection
3. Based on the article, why were pies with live birds impressive at medieval feasts?
  - a) The birds would dance.    b) It took great skill to catch the birds.
  - c) It was unique and entertaining.    d) The pies tasted better.
4. According to the article, what makes traditional feasts special?
  - a) Rare ingredients    b) Symbolic foods    c) Fancy cooking methods
  - d) Huge portions
5. How does the article show that traditional foods connect families to their history?
  - a) Families eat exotic ingredients.    b) Preparation methods are outdated.
  - c) Stories and meaning pass between generations.
  - d) Holiday meals are the same worldwide.
6. What is the main idea of the article?
  - a) Jewish food traditions are unique.    b) Salmon was a Native American staple.
  - c) Families worldwide have traditional holiday feasts.
  - d) Cooking took a long time in pioneer days.

## Answer Key

1. c
2. b
3. c
4. b
5. c
6. c