

First Thanksgiving Meal

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For many Americans, the Thanksgiving meal includes seasonal dishes such as roast turkey with stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie. The holiday feast dates back to November 1621, when the newly arrived Pilgrims and the Wampanoag Indians gathered at Plymouth for an autumn harvest celebration, an event regarded as America's "first Thanksgiving." But what was really on the menu at the famous banquet, and which of today's time-honored favorites didn't earn a place at the table until later in the holiday's 400-year history?

TURKEY

While no records exist of the exact bill of fare, the Pilgrim chronicler Edward Winslow noted in his journal that the colony's governor, William Bradford, sent four men on a "fowling" mission in preparation for the three-day event. Wild-but not domestic-turkey was indeed plentiful in the region and a common food source for both English settlers and Native Americans. But it is just as likely that the fowling party returned with other birds we know the colonists regularly consumed, such as ducks, geese and swans. Instead of bread-based stuffing, herbs, onions or nuts might have been added to the birds for extra flavor.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many people report feeling drowsy after eating a Thanksgiving meal. Turkey often gets blamed because it contains tryptophan, an amino acid that can have a somnolent effect. But studies suggest it's the carbohydrate-rich sides and desserts that allow tryptophan to enter the brain. In other words, eating turkey without the trimmings could prevent that post-Thanksgiving energy lull.

Turkey or no turkey, the first Thanksgiving's attendees almost certainly got their fill of meat. Winslow wrote that the Wampanoag guests arrived with an offering of five deer. Culinary historians speculate that the deer was roasted on a spit over a smoldering fire and that the colonists might have used some of the venison to whip up a hearty stew.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

The 1621 Thanksgiving celebration marked the Pilgrims' first autumn harvest, so it is likely that the colonists feasted on the bounty they had reaped with the help of their Native American neighbors. Local vegetables that likely appeared on the table include onions, beans, lettuce, spinach, cabbage, carrots and perhaps peas. Corn, which records show was plentiful at the first harvest, might also have been served, but not in the way most people enjoy it now. In those days, the corn would have been removed from the cob and turned into cornmeal, which was then boiled and pounded into a thick corn mush or porridge that was occasionally sweetened with molasses.

Fruits indigenous to the region included blueberries, plums, grapes, gooseberries, raspberries and, of course cranberries, which Native Americans ate and used as a natural dye. The Pilgrims might have been familiar with cranberries by the first Thanksgiving, but they wouldn't have made sauces and relishes with the tart orbs. That's because the sacks of sugar that traveled across the Atlantic on the Mayflower were nearly or fully depleted by November 1621. Cooks didn't begin boiling cranberries with sugar and using the mixture as an accompaniment for meats until about 50 years later.

FISH AND SHELLFISH

Culinary historians believe that much of the Thanksgiving meal consisted of seafood, which is often absent from today's menus. Mussels in particular were abundant in New England and could be easily harvested because they clung to rocks along the shoreline. The colonists occasionally served mussels with curds, a dairy product with a similar consistency to cottage cheese. Lobster, bass, clams and oysters might also have been part of the feast.

POTATOES

Whether mashed or roasted, white or sweet, potatoes had no place at the first Thanksgiving. After encountering it in its native South America, the Spanish began introducing the potato to Europeans around 1570. But by the time the Pilgrims boarded the Mayflower, the tuber had neither doubled back to North America nor become popular enough with the English to hitch a ride. New England's native inhabitants are known to have eaten other plant roots such as Indian turnips and groundnuts, which they may or may not have brought to the party.

PUMPKIN PIE

Both the Pilgrims and members of the Wampanoag tribe ate pumpkins and other squashes indigenous to New England-possibly even during the harvest festival-but the fledgling colony lacked the butter and wheat flour necessary for making pie crust. Moreover, settlers hadn't yet constructed an oven for baking. According to some accounts, early English settlers in North America improvised by hollowing out pumpkins, filling the shells with milk, honey and spices to make a custard, then roasting the gourds whole in hot ashes.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What was the first Thanksgiving?

- A. a meal that consisted of lobster, bass, clams, oysters, ducks, geese, and swans
- B. a tuber brought from South America to Europe by the Spanish in 1570
- C. a mission that four men were sent on by William Bradford in 1621
- D. an autumn harvest celebration of the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag Indians

2. The article provides information by using a list. What does it list?

- A. Thanksgiving food
- B. places where clams can be found
- C. birds served at the first Thanksgiving
- D. four men who went on a "fowling" mission

3. The food served at Thanksgiving has changed over time.

What evidence from the article supports this statement?

- A. "For many Americans, the Thanksgiving meal includes seasonal dishes such as roast turkey with stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie."
- B. "While no records exist of the exact bill of fare, the Pilgrim chronicler Edward Winslow noted in his journal that the colony's governor, William Bradford, sent four men on a 'fowling' mission in preparation for the three-day event."
- C. "The 1621 Thanksgiving celebration marked the Pilgrims' first autumn harvest, so it is likely that the colonists feasted on the bounty they had reaped with the help of their Native American neighbors."
- D. "Culinary historians believe that much of the Thanksgiving meal consisted of seafood, which is often absent from today's menus."

4. What are some foods that were probably served at the first Thanksgiving?

- A. cranberry sauce, corn on the cob, and mashed potatoes
- B. deer, beans, and mussels
- C. turkey, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin pie
- D. ducks, geese, and roasted potatoes

5. What is the main idea of this article?

- A. There are differences between the food served at the first Thanksgiving and Thanksgiving food today.
- B. Blueberries, plums, grapes, gooseberries, raspberries, and cranberries are all indigenous to New England.
- C. Potatoes were not served at the first Thanksgiving, but there may have been Indian turnips and groundnuts.
- D. Early English settlers in North America may have hollowed out pumpkins and filled the shells with milk, honey, and spices.

6. Read this paragraph from the article.

"Whether mashed or roasted, white or sweet, potatoes had no place at the first Thanksgiving. After encountering it in its native South America, the Spanish began introducing the potato to Europeans around 1570. But by the time the Pilgrims boarded the Mayflower, the tuber had neither doubled back to North America nor become popular enough with the English to hitch a ride. New England's native inhabitants are known to have eaten other plant roots such as Indian turnips and groundnuts, which they may or may not have brought to the party."

What does the phrase "nor become popular enough with the English to hitch a ride" tell readers about the potato?

- A. People in England preferred eating Indian turnips and groundnuts to eating potatoes.
- B. People in England were planning to take the potato with them on the Mayflower but changed their minds.
- C. People in England did not like the potato enough to bring it with them on the Mayflower.
- D. People in England did not like eating potatoes because the potato had been introduced to Europe by the Spanish.

7. Read these sentences from the text.

"Wild-but not domestic-turkey was indeed plentiful in the region and a common food source for both English settlers and Native Americans. But it is just as likely that the fowling party returned with other birds we know the colonists regularly consumed, such as ducks, geese and swans."

What word could replace "But" without changing the meaning of the sentence?

- A. Particularly,
- B. However,
- C. Previously,
- D. Finally,

8. Who joined English settlers to celebrate the first Thanksgiving?

9. Name three dishes that the Thanksgiving meal includes for many Americans today.

10. What is the biggest difference between the first Thanksgiving and Thanksgiving today? Support your answer with evidence from the article.
