

Shakespearean Recipes

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Introduction

The Elizabethans had three main meals a day like us. Breakfast was eaten earlier in the morning, usually between 6 to 7, dinner at midday, and supper between 5 to 8 evening. The kinds of food eaten depended very much on wealth and status. Poor people, in general, had humble and unvaried diets, whereas the rich of Elizabethan England ate well and enjoyed all kinds of meat, including beef, pork, lamb, mutton, bacon, veal, and deer, and fancy fowl such as peacock, swan, and goose. Their diet also included freshwater and sea fish, which included the varieties such as salmon, trout, eel, pike, and sturgeon, and shellfish such as crabs, lobsters, oysters, cockles and mussels. For the poor, bread was the ideal food and it would be eaten with butter, cheese, eggs, and pottage. Poor people could not afford much red meat, like beef or pork, so tended to eat white meat, like chicken, rabbit or hare, and birds they could catch like blackbirds or pigeons. As Queen Elizabeth made a law in 1563 that compelled everyone to eat fish on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, hence the poor also regularly ate fish. This law was made to support the fishing industry.

Popular Recipes of Shakespearean Age

As water was considered unsafe to drink, the Elizabethans drank ale instead. Even children drank ale as it was not very strong. Strong ale was reserved for times they wanted to make merry! The rich drank ale too, but also wine, which was very expensive. Popular wines were claret, malmsey, and sack. They drank milk of sheep as well as cow, but was mostly used to make butter, cream, and cheese. As well as a good meal, the Tudors were fond of desserts. They enjoyed pastries, tarts, cakes, cream, custard, and crystallized fruit and syrup. The rich, who could afford to buy sugar, were very fond of sugary desserts, so much so that their teeth turned black! In fact, having black teeth became such a status symbol that people would deliberately blacken their teeth, so it looked like they were rich enough to buy sugar! Marzipan, known as marchpane, was also popular. For special feasts, or banquets, the rich would have all kinds of novelties made out of sugar and marzipan, such as animals, birds, fruits and baskets. They would also sometimes have wine glasses, dishes, playing cards, and even trenchers made out of a crisp modelled sugar called sugar-plate.

Food as a Status Determinator

The food eaten by people always differentiate them by their status. Even today wealthy people prefer to eat variety "Thali"(multiple food items) but the downtrodden people mostly have a simple food, mostly a single recipe for the whole day. The same situation prevailed even in the Elizabethan era and it was well depicted by Shakespeare in his plays. Poor people in Elizabethan Age had a humble and unvaried diets with lot of vegetables, whereas the rich people enjoyed all kinds of meat, soup, starters, expensive fruits and desserts.

Feast is a huge and delicious meal served in a party or celebration. Probably, the word feast and its description in Shakespeare's plays portrays the grandeur of Elizabethan kitchen and its food recipes. There are at least 2000 culinary references in his works and the word "feast" is mentioned in more than 100 places. "The Winter's Tale" helps us to know the entire food style of the Elizabethan age.

The delicious food recipes mentioned in Shakespearean plays depict the culture and identity of the people of that age. Among the delicious food recipes, this paper deals with the following recipes and its usage and impact in the society. They are: Shrewsbury Cakes, Gooseberry Foyle, Periwinkles, Marchpane, Posset, Sallet, Warden Pies and Junkets.

Shrewsbury Cakes

A Shrewsbury cake or Shrewsbury biscuit is a classic English dessert named after Shrewsbury, the county town in Shropshire. It is prepared from dough which contained sugar, flour, egg, butter, dried fruit and lemon zest. Shrewsbury cakes were served as dessert.

In *Twelfth Night*, Sir Toby Belch mentions about the Shrewsbury Cake as:

"Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous,
there shall be no more cakes and ale?"

Usage of cakes mentioned by Sir Toby is believed to be Shrewsbury Cakes. William Congreve mentioned Shrewsbury cakes in his play *The Way of the World* in 1700 as a simile.

Gooseberry Foyle

A **fool or Foyle** is an English dessert. Traditionally, fruit fool is made by folding pureed stewed fruit (traditionally gooseberries) into sweet custard. Modern fool recipes often skip the traditional custard and use whipped cream and adds a flavouring agent like rose water. The origin of gooseberry fool dates back to the 15th century. The reason why the word "fool" is used as the name of this fruit dessert is unclear. Several authors derive it from the French verb *fouler* meaning "to crush" or "to press".

In Henry IV Part 2, Falstaff will declare, ... all the other gifts appertinent man, as the malice of this age shapes them, are not worth a gooseberry.

Though this recipe is mentioned only once in Shakespeare's plays, gooseberry fool is depicted as an excellent Elizabethan dessert.

Periwinkle

Periwinkle is zoologically, a small marine snail which belongs to the family Littorinidae. Periwinkles are widely distributed shore (littoral) snails, chiefly herbivorous, usually found on rocks, stones, or pilings between high- and low-tide marks; a few are found on mud flats, and some tropical forms are found on the prop roots or mangrove trees. Of the approximately 80 species in the world, 10 are known from the western Atlantic. The common periwinkle, is the largest, most common and widespread of the northern species. It may reach a length of 4 centimetres, is usually dark gray, and has a solid spiral (turbinated) shell that readily withstands the buffeting of waves.

In *As You Like It*, Orlando states: "Of a snail!" (IV.1).

According to Shakespeare, Periwinkles were likely cooked up and served as a kind of starters/snack.

Ambergris

Mistress Ford in **Merry Wives of Windsor (II-1)** states about someone having lied to her, but she talks about ambergris indirectly when she says,

What tempest, I trow, threw this whale,
with so many tuns of oil in his belly,
ashore at Windsor?

Ambergris is whale vomit. That's right. The Sperm Whale tosses his lunch, and it was used in Elizabethan England to season their food There's a huge industry around ambergris, with the rare Sperm Whale secretion being used for perfumes and could also be used to dilute alcohol.

Marchpane

A highly-decorated disc of marzipan, typically about 1in thick, supported on a wafer or thin cake base. Since its heyday in the 16th and 17th centuries it seems that the cake base has got thicker while the marzipan has thinned, so that Marchpane has transmuted into the iced fruit cake.

The forerunner of modern day marzipan, this edible treat was used to make ornate center pieces at events. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the First Servant sings and praises:

"Away with the joint-stools, remove the court-cupboard, look to the plate.
Good thou, save me a piece of marchpane; and, as thou lovest me,
let the porter let in Susan Grindstone and Nell."*(Act I Scene V)*

Marchpane was a popular dessert item, often involving almonds ground into a flour, made into a paste, and used as a kind of pie with various fruits.

Posset

From 16th-century and later sources, it is known **possets** are generally made from lemon or other citrus juice, cream and sugar. ... The word "**posset**" is mostly used nowadays for a cold set **dessert** based on the 16th century version of the drink, containing cream and lemon, similar to syllabub. According to Shakespeare, Posset is another dessert. This one is mentioned four times in Shakespeare's works, especially, this invitation from the Page in the "*Merry Wives of Windsor*":

Yet be cheerful knight: thou shalt eat a posset to-night at my house;
(Act V Scene 5) is the most notable one.

Posset was often flavored with Ambergis. Posset is made with sugar, eggs, and white wine, all combined into a type of pudding.

Sallet

While tracing the history of Salad/Sallet, it is found that originally it was enjoyed by ancient Romans and Greeks. As time progressed, salads became more complicated. Recipes varied according to place and time. The basis for the word salad is 'sal', meaning salt. This was chosen because in ancient times, salt was often an ingredient used for dressing a dish. The most popular salad in the days Queen Elizabeth is the Salmon Sallet as everyone was required everyone to eat fish. It was made by mixing onions, violets, and salmon to make a "salmon sallet."

Sallet is mentioned in Shakespeare's plays three times, with the most favorable review of sallet coming from Jack Cade in "*Henry VI Part I*":

"I climbed into this garden, to see if I can eat grass, or pick a sallet another while, which is not amiss to cool a man's stomach this hot weather. And I think this word "sallet" sallet, my

brainpan had been cleft with a brown bill; and, many a time, when I have been dry and bravely marching, it hath served me instead of a quart pot to drink il and now the word "sallet" must serve me to feed on." (Act IV Scene 10)

Junkets

During the Tudor period, preparation of gelatin was hard to prepare. It was used for the preparation of delicacies like jellies, and junket, were prized culinary items. Baptista Minola in "The Taming of the Shrew" has mentioned junket as a dessert during a wedding:

Neighbours and friends, thou bride and bridegroom wants
For to supply the places at the table, You know there wants
no junket at the feast. (Act III Scene 2)

Junket, a type of jam, was popular and well liked and is made by mixing gelatin, sugar, and cream then molding the mixture into a wine glass to make a wobbly dessert not unlike jello or more closely resembling flan.

Conclusion

If we analyse Shakespeare's plays, we could find that the Tudor period of history contains a wide variety of fun culinary surprises from junkets to snails that is delightful both for the food enthusiast as well as the brave adventurer. Through the plays of Shakespeare, it is well known that people in the pit were munching on walnuts, hazelnuts, plums, cherries, peaches, and raisins, as well as mussels, periwinkles, and cockles. The upper classes, ensconced in the balcony, chowed down on crabs and sturgeon steaks, along with less common fruits like peaches and figs. Most of the people consumed Oysters, which in Shakespeare's day were dredged out of the Thames and considered a staple food of the poor. Shakespearean plays are the visual portrayal of knowing about the Elizabethan food. It is the place where we come to know "to feast or not to feast" in which the word wine is mentioned in 26 out of Shakespeare's 37 plays.

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