

# Regional Foods

## Summary

Foods that are indigenous to various regions of the United States.

## Materials

Any good comprehensive food and nutrition textbook.

- *Guide to Good Food*

, Velda L. Largen. Goodheart, Wilcox Publishing. (This is an excellent reference for world and United States regional foods.)

## Background for Teachers

If students can discriminate the cultural and geographic influences of regional foods as well as prepare some of them, their understanding of people and the foods they eat will increase.

The AMERICAN INDIANS lived here for thousands of years before colonists or immigrants came from other parts of the world. The Indians lived in harmony with nature. They relied on hunting and fishing. They gathered wild fruits, seeds, roots, and grasses or flowers for seasoning. Some tribes were extraordinary farmers. The cooking methods and exact foods depended on the tribe and location.

Because the American Indians were such excellent farmers, they cultivated 50% of all the foods the world grows today. Some common foods they ate included fowl, potatoes, cornmeal pudding, pineapple, corn, beans, Johnny Cake, peanuts, a corn bread called spoon bread, tapioca, wild rice, cranberries, squash, pumpkins, avocados, tomatoes, and chili peppers. These foods were supplemented with wild meats.

During Columbus' time, the Indians ate healthier foods than did the Europeans. The foods they prepared became the foundation for American cooking.

When the first COLONISTS came to America they stayed together in groups. Most of them settled in areas with climates similar to those of their homelands. They came for many reasons i.e., to avoid debtors' prison, by religious choice, to flee from starvation/plagues, to gain wealth, and in some cases as slaves.

The colonists who came in the 1600s and 1700s brought with them cooking traditions of their homelands. Once here, they had to combine their traditions with the foods that were available locally. The Indians taught them to plant crops. Local lobster, crab and other fish were used in chowders. Beef was preserved by salting and drying. Pumpkin and corn were used to make bakery goods and puddings. Squash and beans were cooked with molasses and served with thick slices of brown bread. The colonists made Sally Lynn, a slightly sweetened yeast bread. Wild blueberries were used to make blueberry grunt.

The upper portion of the northeastern United States is often called the NEW ENGLAND STATES.

This region includes Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. The land in these states is very rocky, mountainous and forested. The winters are very long.

These states were first settled by the English who had to be a thrifty, conservative people in order to stay alive. They didn't waste anything. Wild game\_\_\_rabbit, turkey, and deer\_\_\_and the foods they grew were cooked in an iron pot, or Dutch oven, on hot coals in large fireplaces. The fireplace usually took up one wall in the center of the home. It was used for warmth and as a gathering place in the winter. Iron hooks in the fireplace kept the food at the proper height.

Succotash (corn and lima beans), cornmeal mush, pudding, Johnny cakes were made from dried corn. Johnny cake was originally named "journey cake" because it kept well on long trips. Foods were

smoked, salted and dried to preserve them. The Indians taught the New Englanders to tap sugar maple trees for syrup. They also taught them to soak dried beans overnight. The maple syrup was added to make Boston Baked Beans.

The New England Boiled Dinner, a common dinner, allowed settlers to work while the food was cooking. It consisted of meat and whatever vegetables were on hand. If it was not all eaten, it was ground up and fried for another meal. It was then called Red-Flannel Hash because the beets turned it red like underwear. Sea foods and vegetables were also cooked in chowders.

The other states of the Northeast, called the MIDDLE ATLANTIC STATES, include New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland. The climate in these states is much milder than in New England. The soil has fewer rocks. Many more fresh vegetables and fruits grow in the climate. Dutch immigrants settled here. They introduced cookies, doughnuts, sauerkraut, molasses cake, gingerbread figures, waffles, coleslaw, cottage cheese, and griddle cakes. They were excellent bakers. German immigrants, known as the Pennsylvania Dutch, also settled in these states. They were thrifty farmers. They came up with dishes to use all that they had; i.e., pigs' feet, smoked beef tongue, stuffed heart, sausage, and bologna. They ate a lot of soup, potato pancakes, noodles, and dumplings. Each meal included seven sweets and sours (pickled vegetables, spiced fruits like peaches, watermelon rind, relishes, jams, preserves, salads, and apple butter).

The Pennsylvania Dutch prepared all of their foods in the summer and stored it during the winter. They were also wonderful bakers of cakes, pastries, and Shoofly Pie, a pies crust with a molasses and brown sugar filling.

The MIDWESTERN STATES include North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio. These states were settled by many nationalities as people moved west. Prairie lands were used to farm corn and wheat, major crops in the midwest. This area of the United States is called the breadbasket of the nation because of its rich soil and good climate. The pot-luck dinner and buffet are common in the midwest. Cooking was simple and hearty—beef, pork potatoes, dairy foods, home baked breads, cakes and pies.

The SOUTHERN STATES include West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. The people of the southern states came from France, England, Spain, and Africa.

The mild climate was ideal for large plantations. The crops consisted of tobacco, sugarcane, rice, cotton, and peanuts. Not many fruits and vegetables were grown. Some of the forest resources were used for food, i.e. dandelion greens. Corn was the staple food used to produce cornmeal, cornbread, hominy and grits. Grits were served at breakfast. Beans, turnips, pigs, chickens, and baking powder biscuits were also common.

There are several forms of southern food. Soul food is a combination of foods prepared by slaves and influenced by foods of Europeans and whites. Some slaves were allowed to have small vegetable gardens and chickens. They utilized deep-fat frying. Fishing and hunting were also allowed. Slaves could eat all the catfish, rabbit, opossum, and squirrel they could catch or hunt.

During the harvest time, slaves were given very little meat. During the rest of the year, they were given only the scraps from hogs and cattle that the whites did not want, i.e. pigs feet, tails and ears. Chitterlings, the intestines of hogs that were cleaned, boiled with spices or deep fried, are a common food. Other soul foods include corn, squash, black-eyed peas, okra, greens and yams.

Creole cooking is centered in New Orleans, Louisiana. French, Spanish, American Indian, and African peoples influenced Creole cooking. Indians used file (fee-lay), a powder made of ground leaves, to thicken soups, stews, and sauces. Africans brought okra with them and made gumbo which is a mixture of okra, meat, poultry, seafood and vegetables. The okra made it thick. Jambalaya, a Spanish food, is fish, poultry, and meat simmered in tomato sauce and served over rice.

The SOUTHWESTERN/WESTERN STATES include Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, and Nevada. The people who settled this region were self-reliant and

resourceful. The Indians and Mexicans of this region had a strong influence on the foods. Beef and barbecuing were important. Son-of-a-gun-stew was made from the left-overs of slaughtered beef on a drive. It would include tongue, liver, sweetbreads (stomach) and heart. Chili originated in Texas with beef, marjoram, and red peppers. It did not contain beans. Corn, squash, berries, chilies, pumpkins, and beans grew in the hot sunny climate.

The PACIFIC COAST includes Alaska, Washington, California, and Oregon. The population in this region is the most varied in the United States. California has many Mexican and Oriental people. Californians are restless and want variety in life. People from the other three states of the Pacific coast are less interested in new and different ideas. The soil provides a variety of fruits and vegetables. Fishing is popular.

Gold prospectors brought a fermented bread dough to California called sour dough. The prospectors who traveled north to Alaska were called sourdoughs. Only the very northern part of Alaska is icy cold. Caribou, rabbit, bear, king crab, and wild berries are common foods of Alaska.

The HAWAIIAN ISLANDS are home to Polynesians, Japanese, Chinese, and New Englanders. The most common industries in Hawaii are sugar cane, pineapple and tourism. Sugar cane plantation owners found that Hawaiians would not work in the fields so they brought people from China. A common feast associated with religious ceremonies in Hawaii is called a luau. Poi, a food common to Hawaii, is smooth and pasty; it is made from the taro plant. Tofu (bean curd) is also popular.

### Instructional Procedures

#### LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

##### OPTION #1

To introduce the unit, show the students food pictures. As the students view the pictures have them try to guess the concept illustrated. Hold up each picture and say, "This is an example", or, "This is not an example." All traditional Indian foods are the examples. All other foods are the non-examples. Show the examples and non-examples in a random order. The Indian foods could include pictures of potatoes, pineapple, maize, beans, peanuts, tapioca, squash, pumpkins, avocados, tomatoes, chili peppers, and meat. Food pictures of any other type can serve as the non-examples.

##### OPTION #2

After discussing American Indians and colonists, have pairs of students write one five-line limerick poem that describes the life, geographic location and food of the people. Have some of the student pairs write about the Indians and some write about the colonists. To get students started, write the rhyme scheme and an example on the board. A spokesperson from each pair can read the completed poem aloud.

Rhyme Scheme:	Example:
lines 1, 2, 5 rhyme	All of the colonists might have died.
lines 3 and 4 rhyme	But the Indians stayed by their side. Chowder, pumpkin and squash. The cold countryside was rough, not posh. As a colonist I would have cried.

##### OPTION #3

As a lab experience ask half of the units to prepare [CORN BREAD](#). Ask the other half of the units to prepare [BLUEBERRY MUFFINS](#). Have each lab group trade half of their yield with another group so that students can taste both recipes.

#### OPTION #4

As in [OPTION #3, FOREIGN FOODS](#), have the students work in pairs or groups to research and explore a region's food history and patterns of unique foods. Assign each unit a region to investigate, report on, and prepare a food of that region.

The teacher will model a [demonstration](#) for the students by using [SPAM MUSUBI](#), an oriental food popular in the Hawaiian Islands after Spam was introduced there to feed the WWII soldiers. NOTE: This is a fun regional food to demonstrate because it is foreign to Utah's geographic region.

#### OPTION #5

As each region of the country is discussed, have the students take notes on the [REGIONAL FOODS OF AMERICA MAP](#) worksheets. Have them use different markers or colored pencils to color code each region.

#### OPTION #6

Groups of students will utilize their class notes to make up a story entitled, "A Day in the Life of Johnny, a New Englander." Each story must describe the life, geographic location, and food of the people. Have a spokesperson from each group read the story aloud.

#### OPTION #7

Students will prepare [CLAM CHOWDER](#) in the lab.

#### OPTION #8

As twenty-five statements are read, have the students hold up one of [three signs](#) to represent the region depicted in the statement \_\_\_NEW ENGLAND, MIDDLE ATLANTIC or MIDWESTERN. Each of the three signs should be photocopied on a different color paper; the teacher can tell immediately how many students hold up the correct sign. Refer to [REGIONAL FOODS NONVERBAL TEACHING](#).

#### OPTION #9

Scatter seven to ten pictures of food from the southern states throughout the room. Place a sheet of paper next to each picture. To avoid confusion, tell the students the sequence in which you would like them to view the pictures. Have the students look at each food and write down the first word that comes to their minds on the sheet next to the picture. After the students have seen and responded to all pictures, hold up each picture and discuss their comments. Emphasize that these foods originated in the southern states. Examples of foods are rice, peanuts, corn, corn meal, hominy, grits, beans, turnips, pork, chicken, baking powder biscuits, squash, okra, yams, and catfish.

#### OPTION #10

Have each unit group prepare one of the following recipes - [SHOOFLY CAKE, ANGEL PECAN PIE, or PECAN PIE](#). If the class period lasts only 45-50 minutes, the teacher may need to take the products out of the ovens for students, allow them to cool and have students eat them the next day. Have only one unit prepare Shoo Fly Cake as it has a strong flavor and most people want only a small piece. Allow all students to sample and evaluate every recipe.

#### OPTION #11

After the students have taken notes on both the South and Southwest/West Regions, give each unit or pairs of students an envelope containing twenty-five statements or foods. Have the students sort the slips of paper into one of three piles \_\_\_Soul Foods, Creole Foods, Southwest/Western. Discuss each slip of paper and have students check their piles. Refer to [REGIONAL FOODS SORT](#).

#### OPTION #12

Homework Assignment: Have the students prepare [TOSTADOS or OVEN-FRIED CHICKEN](#) at home. A parent or guardian could sign a note that describes how the assignment turned out.

#### OPTION #13

Have each unit group prepare either [NACHOS or SOPAPILLAS](#). Have the students divide up their product with another unit so students can taste both recipes.

#### OPTION #14

After the students have taken notes on the Pacific Coast and Hawaiian Islands, play [PACIFIC COAST/HAWAIIAN ISLAND CONCENTRATION](#). Refer to [CONCENTRATION RULES](#) for an explanation of how to set up and play the game.

OPTION #15

Have each unit group prepare one of the three recipes\_\_\_ [COCONUT LOAF, BLACKBERRY BUCKLE, or FRIED RICE](#). The first two recipes will need to be eaten the next day if a class period lasts 45 minutes. The teacher will need to take them out of the oven for students. The FRIED RICE can be made and eaten in one class period. Have the students share their products with the other units so students can taste all three recipes.

OPTION #16

Students will complete [REGIONAL FOODS OF AMERICA TEST](#).

Authors

[PEARL HART](#)

[Utah LessonPlans](#)