

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

## The Pilgrims' Real Thanksgiving Menu

By Colleen Messina

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If you popped into a time machine and set the dial for 1621, with any luck you would arrive at the first Thanksgiving dinner. You might expect to see Pilgrims and Indians eating turkey, cranberries, and of course, pumpkin pie. The traditional picture of the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving is interesting, but sadly, it's not true. Learning about the original thanksgiving gives us new reasons to be thankful.

What do you think of first when you think of Thanksgiving? The turkey! The Pilgrims had turkey, but they also served other meat, including venison, or deer. They had different kinds of wild fowl, too, like ducks, geese, and even swans. Meat had to cook for hours on a spit over a fire. Roasting won the Most Popular Way to Cook Award in the 17th century since no one had an oven. Someone had the important but boring job of sitting by the spit and making sure that the meat cooked evenly. Aren't you thankful for ovens?



Another menu item that the Pilgrims served was seafood. They ate cod, bass, herring, bluefish, and lots of eels. Clams, lobsters, mussels, and oysters were probably part of dinner, too. Unfortunately, they didn't have butter for their seafood, and catching all those lobsters and fish was a lot of work. Aren't you thankful for canned tuna fish and butter?

Pilgrim children probably didn't hear the phrase "eat your vegetables" too much. The Pilgrims had only a few kinds of vegetables at Thanksgiving, like squash, beans, and dried Indian corn called maize. Only a few odd colonists tried to grow potatoes in their gardens, so no one had invented mashed potatoes yet. They didn't have hot buttered rolls because they didn't have ovens. Aren't you thankful for the Pillsbury dough boy and mashed potato lakes full of gravy at Thanksgiving?

The Pilgrims brought a small amount of sugar with them on the Mayflower, but not much was left for the Thanksgiving feast so they didn't have pies, cakes, and breads. They had cranberries, but not enough sugar to make a real sauce. Their only sweet dessert was wheat pudding. They didn't have mince meat and pumpkin or apple pie, ice cream, or even candied yams. The smooth custard pumpkin pies we eat today hadn't been invented yet. Later, when they did try to make pumpkin pies, they sliced the pumpkins like apples and put them in a crust. Aren't you thankful for smooth, delicious canned pumpkin for pies?

Even though they didn't have much sugar, the Pilgrims did use many spices. They had salt at the table, and they loved cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and pepper. They liked onions, leeks, and strawberry leaves as well as watercress and yarrow. They also used herbs with unusual names like liverwort. The cooks didn't follow fancy recipes, and they didn't measure using teaspoons or tablespoons. They just tossed a pinch of this spice or that herb into the pot until it tasted just right. Aren't you thankful that your juicy turkey isn't filled with liverwort stuffing?

Another thing that might surprise you is that the Pilgrims didn't have good table manners by today's standards. They might seem prim and proper to us when we read about them, but they had different customs at the dinner table. They didn't use forks. Instead, they ate with their fingers or with spoons and knives instead. They wiped their hands on big cloth napkins that were also used to pick up chunks of hot food. Instead of having plates served individually, foods were put in bowls on the table with the best dishes being placed next to the most important people.

The Pilgrims celebrated their first Thanksgiving with different foods and traditions than we use today. As you enjoy a juicy turkey with stuffing and cranberry sauce, you can remember how simple the real Thanksgiving was long ago. One thing we do share with the Pilgrims is the tradition of being thankful for everything we have...and for special treats like pumpkin pie.

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### Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. How did the Pilgrims cook their meat?
  - A. on a spit over a fire
  - B. deep frying
  - C. baking
  - D. stir frying
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. In which year did the Pilgrims celebrate the first Thanksgiving?
  - A. 1621
  - B. 1261
  - C. 1611
  - D. 1600
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Which utensil or dish was not used by the Pilgrims?
  - A. knives
  - B. spoons
  - C. forks
  - D. plates
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What was the term for dried Indian corn?
  - A. popcorn
  - B. maize
  - C. corn on the cob
  - D. polenta
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Which food was definitely not on the menu of the first Thanksgiving?
  - A. lobsters
  - B. mashed potatoes
  - C. deer
  - D. wheat pudding
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. What kind of meat is also called venison?
  - A. fish
  - B. chicken
  - C. elk
  - D. deer
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The Pilgrims used many spices in their food.
  - A. False
  - B. True
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Which of the following is a synonym for thankfulness?
  - A. happiness
  - B. gratitude
  - C. prosperity
  - D. resolution

