



Origins of Common Holiday Foods

and Nutritional Considerations

NUTRITION CONNECTION



A history of some of the most treasured seasonal foods to spice up the holidays

Every year as the holidays approach, we think of favorite foods shared with family and friends. We associate foods with memories, and each person has their own unique remembrances. How did these seasonal foods and drinks become popular at our holiday tables? How do they fit in with helping individuals achieve or maintain their nutrition and health goals?

This article will present the origins of a few of our favorite holiday foods, along with nutritional considerations to keep in mind. Most holiday foods can be “fit” into the menu plans, especially with some recipe refinements such as healthier ingredients. Have fun sharing the history of some of these treasured foods with your clients, and enjoy seeing their reactions when traditional seasonal favorites are served.

GINGERBREAD

When people think of Christmas, gingerbread men and houses often come to mind, yet few people know the history of gingerbread. The term *gingerbread*, meaning “preserved ginger,” has been used since the 15th century. The word is now broadly used to describe any type of sweet treat that combines ginger with honey, treacle, or molasses.

During the Middle Ages, people used ground ginger root to disguise the taste of preserved meats. Henry VIII used a ginger concoction to help build resistance to the plague. The first known recipe for gingerbread came from Greece in 2400 BC. Chinese recipes were developed by the 10th century, and by the late Middle Ages, Europeans created their own version of



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gingerbread. The hard cookies became a staple at medieval fairs in England, France, Holland, and Germany. Queen Elizabeth I is credited with the idea of decorating the cookies. The shapes of the gingerbread eventually started to change with the seasons, and decorated gingerbread became synonymous with all things fancy and elegant in England.

Gingerbread arrived in the New World with English colonists. Virginia voters sometimes used the cookies to sway fellow citizens to vote a certain way. The softer version of gingerbread became more common in America. George Washington's mother served her recipe for gingerbread to Marquis de Lafayette when he visited her home.

Nutritionally, individual recipes and products vary.

Specific ingredients must be considered to determine the actual nutrient content. Gingerbread products in general are low-fat compared to other "desserts." However, they are a source of saturated fat, carbohydrates and sodium, which should be considered when focusing on client health.

APPLE CIDER

It's said that Julius Caesar and friends found the British drinking cider in 55 BC. Europeans brought the tradition to the New World, where cider was such an important beverage that the trees Johnny Appleseed was planting were actually for cider making.

In the early 20th century, the combination of improved refrigeration technology and the teetotalism movement

allowed people to drink the unfermented juice of apples, which led to Americans calling an unfiltered juice cider (the rest of the English-speaking world continued to use "cider" to mean an alcoholic beverage, though).

Apple cider has quite a history in the United States. The first apple trees made it to Boston in 1623 and they were widely planted by the early 1800s. Cider, hard cider in those days, was a drink from the old country which quickly established itself here in the 18th and 19th centuries. Before the development of preservative techniques, fresh cider rapidly and naturally fermented into hard cider. This was considered a way to "store" your apples after season and viewed as a safe and family drink. In fact, cider was regarded as safer than drinking water, due to the lack of effective water treatment. Presidents like John Adams popularized the health benefits of cider as it became the drink of choice for early Americans.

Nationally, in the last 10 years, cider has begun making a comeback. In 2004, national hard cider production was reported at 4.25 million gallons; in 2011, that number had more than doubled to 9.2 million gallons!

Apple cider is the name used in the United States and

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GINGERBREAD NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION*

Gingerbread Cake: 1/9 of 8-inch square cake contains about 263 calories; 12 gm total fat; 36 gm carbohydrates; 242 mg sodium; 0 dietary fiber; 3 gm protein.

Gingerbread Men Cookies: A large cookie (3 oz.) contains about 340 calories; 10 gm total fat; 59 gm carbohydrates; 160 mg sodium; 1 gm dietary fiber; 14 gm sugar.



**As with all items noted in this article, nutrition facts vary by individual recipe.*



APPLE CIDER NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

1 cup provides about 120 calories; 0 fat; 60 mg sodium; 30 gm carbohydrates.

parts of Canada for an unfiltered, unsweetened, non-alcoholic beverage made from apples. Though typically referred to simply as “cider” in those areas, it is not to be confused with the alcoholic beverage known as cider in other places, which is called “hard cider” in the U.S. and Canada.

While apple cider is considered low in sodium, a large percentage of calories come from sugars. Recently there has been increased popularity surrounding the benefits of using apple cider and apple cider vinegar products. While these products can be part of a healthy diet, they should not be viewed as a magic weight loss cure or to control chronic health conditions. Consult a physician regarding product safety.

CRANBERRY SAUCE

Cranberries are harvested mid-September to mid-November, making them perfect to consume during the holiday season. Marcus L. Urann first canned the berries in 1912, and cranberry sauce was first offered to consumers in North America in Hanson, Mass. Cranberry sauce was a way to extend the short selling season, creating a jellied treat that acted as a sauce when warm. Cranberry sauce can be used with a variety of meats, including turkey, pork, chicken, and ham.

The American cranberry grows wild from the mountains of Georgia to the Canadian Maritimes, and as far west as Minnesota. It has been cultivated in the Cape Cod area since the early 1800s and was an active industry in Maine during much of the last century. The cultivated cranberry industry then spread to New Jersey by the 1830s, Wisconsin by the 1850s, and the Pacific Northwest by the 1880s. Wisconsin was the top cranberry producer in the United States in 2018 at 5.55 million barrels, followed by Massachusetts with 2.3 million barrels.

Cranberry sauce or cranberry jam is a sauce or relish commonly served as a condiment with Thanksgiving dinner in North America, and with Christmas dinner in the United Kingdom and Canada. There are differences in flavor, depending on the geography of where the sauce is made. In Europe it is generally slightly sour tasting, while in North America it is typically more heavily sweetened.

The most basic cranberry sauce consists of cranberries boiled in sugar water until the berries pop and the mixture thickens. Some recipes include other ingredients such as slivered almonds, orange juice, zest, ginger, maple syrup, port, or cinnamon.

Commercial cranberry sauce may be loose and uncondensed, or condensed or jellied and sweetened with various ingredients. The jellied form may be slipped out of a can onto a dish and served sliced or intact for slicing at the table.

As with all recipes and products referenced in this article, the exact ingredients will determine the precise nutritional value.

CRANBERRY SAUCE NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

Commercially Canned: A ½ inch thick slice provides about 86 calories; 0 fat; 17 mg sodium; 22 gm carbohydrates; 0 protein.



LATKES

In the Jewish tradition, dairy foods are eaten during Hanukkah in honor of Judith, a celebrated heroine who saved her village from an invading army. The original latke was just a cheese pancake; however, potato latkes gained popularity in the 1800s thanks to a mass planting of potatoes in Eastern Europe after other crops had failed. Different cultures have their own versions of latkes and brought those traditions to the U.S. to not only help celebrate Hanukkah, but Christmas as well.

POTATO LATKE NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

1 serving (1 medium potato) provides about 265 calories; 14 gm fat; 56 gm sodium; 29 gm carbohydrates; 7 gm protein.



HAPPY, HEALTHY HOLIDAYS

To spice up the holidays it can be interesting to provide facts about favorite seasonal foods to our clients. We've scratched just the surface here. You can research other holiday delights, such as pumpkin pie, stuffing, eggnog, and much more. You may want to plan specific weeks to dedicate to fun and educational events surrounding the foods. Another idea is to offer healthier options of some of the more traditional recipes that help

decrease sugar, fat, and sodium. Your Activities Department might be an excellent resource to work with when planning some fun projects and events.

Food is a very special part of the holidays! As nutrition and foodservice professionals, we should do our best to help promote healthier choices while supporting overall quality of life with food and dining. **E**

RESOURCES

- *Gingerbread*: <http://www.pbs.org/food/the-history-kitchen/history-gingerbread/>
- *Cider*: Wisconsin Apple Growers Association: <https://www.waga.org/cider>
- *Cider*: Washington State University: <https://cider.wsu.edu/history-of-cider/>
- *Cranberries*: University of Maine Cooperative Extension: <https://extension.umaine.edu/cranberries/cranberry-facts-and-history/>
- *Cranberries*: Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association: <https://www.cranberries.org/history>
- *Latkes*: <http://www.pbs.org/food/features/history-of-latkes/> and <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/recipe/potato-latkes/>
- *Holidays and Observances* site with information on all U.S. and World Holidays: <http://www.holidays-and-observances.com/>
- *Reliable resources on food, healthy eating, physical activity, and food safety. Find links to information from federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and universities with expertise in food and human nutrition to help make healthful eating choices.* <https://www.nutrition.gov/>



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This Level II article assumes that the reader has a foundation of basic concepts of the topic. The desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and facilitate application of knowledge to practice.

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- Traditional holiday foods are an important part of _____ to consider in serving clients with food and nutrition services.
 - Hiring competent staff
 - Daily budgeting
 - Quality of life
- Common holiday foods can be made healthier by:
 - Reviewing the recipes and trying some healthier ingredients to reduce sugar, fat, and sodium
 - Not including them on the menus during holidays
 - Not making any changes to the recipes
- While the first-known recipe for gingerbread is dated to 2400 BC from Greece, it is _____ that is credited with the idea of decorating the cookies.
 - The Keebler Elves
 - Queen Elizabeth I
 - Ginger Lopez
- Apple cider is the name used in the United States and parts of Canada for an unfiltered, unsweetened, _____ beverage made from apples.
 - Calorie-dense
 - Clear
 - Non-alcoholic
- Marcus L. Urann first canned cranberries in 1912 and cranberry sauce was first offered to consumers in North America in Hanson, Mass. to extend the short _____.
 - Selling season
 - Shelving limitations
 - Growing season
- Commercial cranberry _____ may be loose and uncondensed, or condensed or jellied and sweetened with various ingredients.
 - Sauce
 - Extract
 - Flavoring
- The original latke was just a cheese pancake; however, _____ latkes gained popularity in the 1800s thanks to a mass planting of this crop in Eastern Europe after other crops had failed.
 - Tomato
 - Potato
 - Spinach



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