



Serving Cultural Foods

Considering Cultural Differences

The United States of America is a land of people with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. People from a given culture or ethnic group tend to have experiences that are similar in nature, although not identical. There are variations within each group depending on socioeconomic status, social class, religion, age, education, location, and the length of time family members have lived in the United States.

Cuisines of a country are especially influenced by the country's geography, climate and history. People of different countries and in some cases, different regions, have their own unique and customary foods and ways of combining the foods into meals.

As cultural and ethnic diversity in the United States increases, it is more likely that child care providers will be faced

with the challenge of providing meals and nutrition education to persons of cultures that may be quite different from their own.

This section is intended to stimulate awareness of, respect for, and acceptance of various cultural groups. It is not intended to stereotype persons or imply that all people from the same cultural or ethnic group are identical. Typical foods and traditional meal patterns of many countries are provided. These lists are not comprehensive. Examples of foods are provided to show the importance of cultural sensitivity and to help persons recognize foods which may be common to a particular group.

Parents and community groups are excellent sources for information on cultural values and eating habits. A list of references is also included in this section.





Australia



Traditional Australian cuisine is an adaptation of British cuisine. The most popular breakfast is muesli, a combination of fruit, cereal and nuts. It is often served with toast and a beverage.

Pasties are “fast food” for Australians and are ideal for a quick lunch. These hot meat pies are made of dough and stuffed with meat and vegetables.

The tradition of afternoon tea at 4 p.m. continues in Australia. Tea is usually served with sandwiches, scones (biscuits), cookies and cakes.

Dinner is usually the largest meal of the day. In Australia, an entree means a dish served before the main course. An entree may be a small serving of fish or a small serving of pasta. The main course is usually a larger portion of meat or fish served with vegetables. Fruit salad or stewed fruit are favorites for dessert.

Brazil

Just like many people in the United States, Brazilians start their day with steaming hot coffee. For breakfast, milk coffee is usually served with fresh fruit and biscuits or bread. During the day, Brazilians may drink up to twenty or more tiny thimblefuls of coffee at one of the many small coffee stands throughout the country.

Both lunch and dinner are large meals, however, dinner is served late in the day.



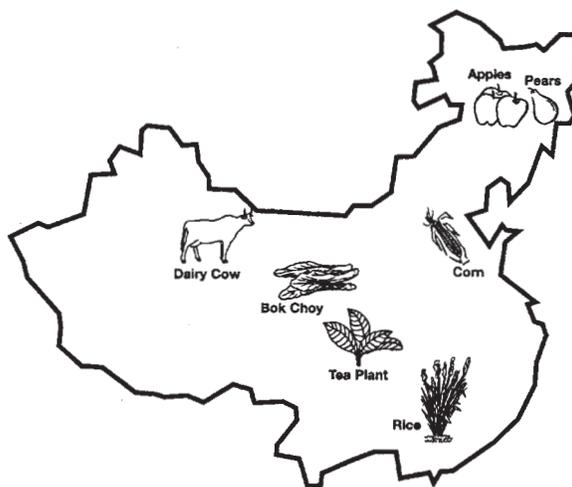
Beans are very popular in Brazil and are served often. Traditional dishes include black beans, white rice, and shredded greens served with steak, chicken or fish.

Chocolate is a favorite of Brazilians and is frequently served as hot chocolate or used in desserts.



China

In China, there is no main dish. Meals, according to the Chinese tradition, are prepared so that there is a balance of taste, aroma, texture, appearance and nutritional value. Each dish in a meal is very important as it helps to create the balance.



The Chinese eat three meals and snack throughout the day on light foods, such as hard-boiled eggs, fruit, nuts or almond cookies. Tea is served before and after meals as well as with snacks. Soup is served as a beverage during meals.

In south China, breakfast may include hot congee, which is a rice porridge, with a few salty and pickled side dishes, such as vegetables or hard-boiled eggs. In north China, noodles are preferred.

Lunch and dinner may consist of soup, fish or meat, vegetables, rice and mantou, a steamed bread. Cakes and pastries are served for dessert on special occasions.

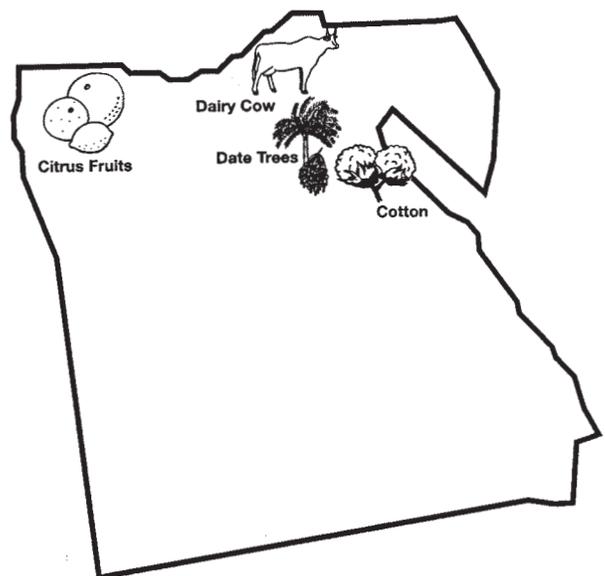
Egypt

Fava beans and aiysh baladi (pita bread) are eaten with almost every meal in Egypt. The bread is used to scoop or hold food.

Lunch traditionally includes beans, cheese, tomatoes, onions and bread. Rice, meat (usually lamb), vegetables, beans and bread are eaten for dinner. Dessert may be thickened rice pudding or bread soaked in sugar syrup and then baked until it resembles a cake.

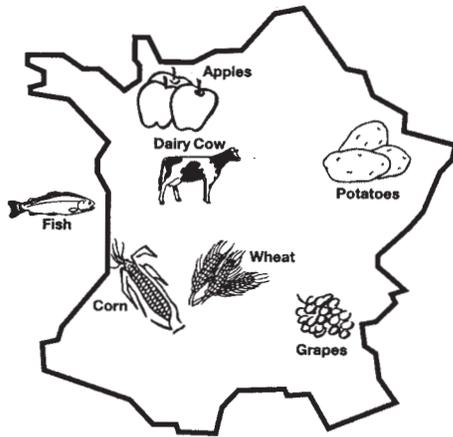
Falafel and humus are popular Egyptian dishes. Falafel is fried ground chickpeas and herbs, generally served in pita bread with sauce. Humus is a chickpea dip that combines beans and yogurt.

In Egypt, nuts and seeds are ground and used to thicken various dishes. Sesame paste, eggplant, lemon, garlic and olive oil are mixed together to make baba ghanouj, which is eaten as a spread.





France



Meals in France reflect ceremony and tradition. Meals vary greatly from one region to another because of local climates and soil conditions.

Breakfast usually consists of baguettes (crusty bread) or croissants. They are often served with jam or jelly. Either café au lait or hot chocolate is also served.

Lunch is the main meal of the day. It may begin with soup or an hors d'oeuvre, such as an egg or cheese dish. Meat, potatoes and a vegetable are also served. If salad is served, it is eaten after the main dish to cleanse the palate. French pastries are sometimes eaten as afternoon snacks.

A traditional dinner is much like lunch, except that it is smaller and eaten later in the day. Dinner usually includes soup, quiche, cold meats and cheeses. Fruit and cheese are eaten as dessert.

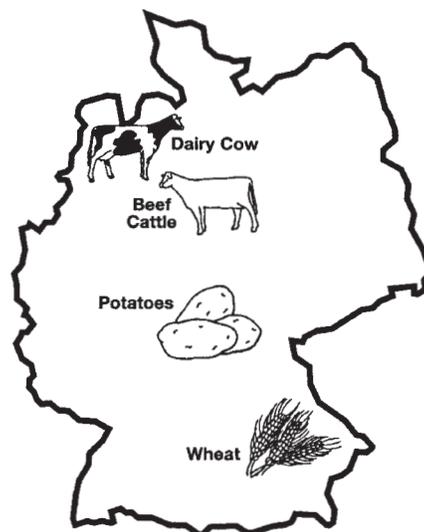
Germany

The traditional German breakfast features crunchy rolls with butter and jam or honey.

The main meal is eaten at noon and usually includes roasted meat, such as pork, served with potatoes or dumplings topped with gravy, and vegetables. Soup is sometimes served as an appetizer.

Supper is eaten in the evening. It may include bread with butter and cheese, cold cuts or sausage. Cheese with strong flavors, such as Limburger, is popular. Quark is German cottage cheese. Sausages or wursts, including liverwurst, blutwurst, bratwurst, white wurst and frankfurters are popular.

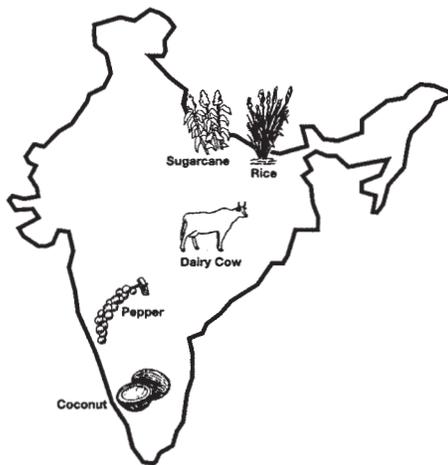
Pudding with whipped cream or tortes (rich cakes) may be eaten for dessert.





India

Meals in India are greatly influenced by religion, caste (social position) and agricultural region. Rice and wheat dishes with curry seasonings are featured at most Indian meals. In addition, several condiments are generally served. The condiments provide a variety of different taste sensations: sweet, salty, sour and bitter.



Breakfast may consist of coffee or tea made with milk and sugar, rice, bread, a pickled fruit or vegetable and cooked cereal.

An afternoon snack is usually served along with tea or coffee. The evening meal is the main meal and may be served with rice, a curried vegetable, a legume or meat dish, hot bread and raitas (a combination of yogurt, seasonings and fruits or vegetables).

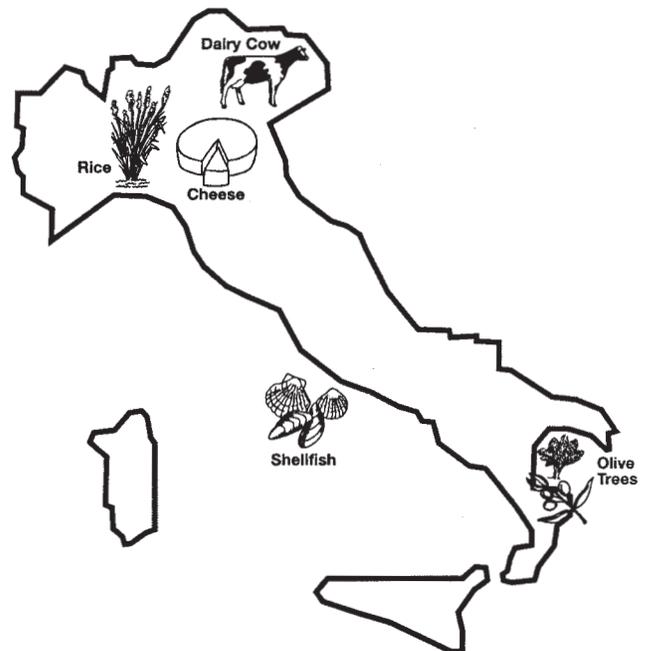
Because India has a large population of vegetarians, milk, yogurt and cheese are often used in cooking to provide a major source of protein.

Italy

Pasta and cheese are staples in Italy. There are more than 100 different types and shapes of pasta.

A traditional Italian breakfast is usually bread with coffee and hot milk. Crusty bread is part of all meals.

The afternoon meal is the most formal meal and features several courses. It usually begins with antipasto (an appetizer of salads, pickled vegetables, cheeses, cold meat and fish). This is followed by soup or pasta. Pasta may be served with or without sauce or stuffed with meat and cheese. The main dish is served next and is usually fish, pork or chicken and vegetables. Cheese and fruit are generally served for dessert. The evening meal is usually light.



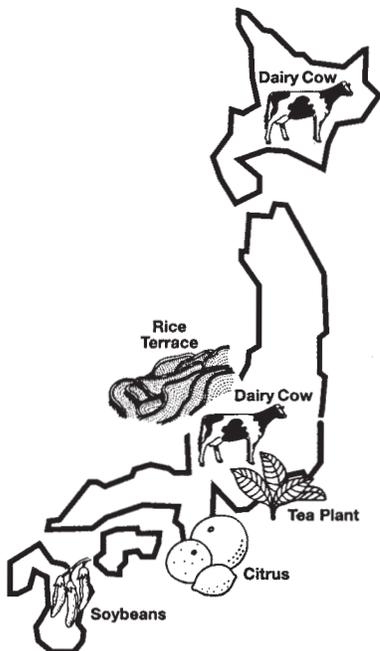


Japan

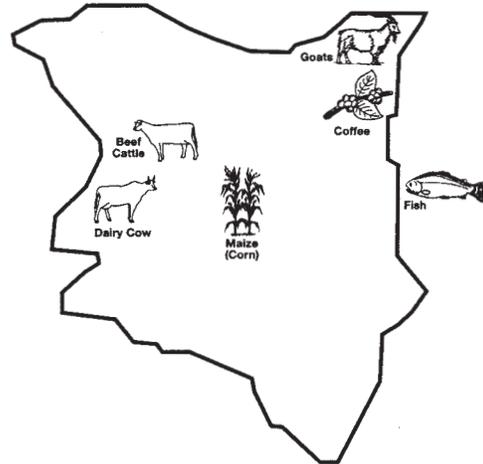
Traditionally, the Japanese eat three meals a day plus a snack. Rice is the most important part of each meal. Fish and vegetables are also important to Japanese meals. Fish may be eaten raw, sun dried, broiled, fried or cooked with soup. Seafood or seaweed is often made into a stock, which is used in many different dishes.

Typical meals in Japan may contain rice, a form of soybeans, such as tofu, fish, seaweed and pickled vegetables. Cabbage, cucumber, eggplant, and radishes are the vegetables most often served pickled in Japanese cuisine. Dessert is usually fresh fruit, a light gelatin or ice cream.

Noodles are also served often in Japan. Soba noodles are made of buckwheat flour and udon noodles are made of wheat flour.



Kenya



Meals in Kenya vary from region to region because of the many different ethnic groups.

Breakfast may consist of chai (tea made with milk and sugar) and bread. Milk is also used to make uji (a cereal beverage).

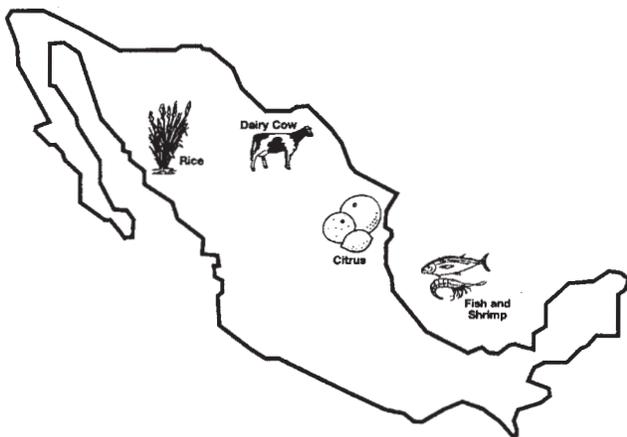
Lunch and dinner may feature irio (a mashed green pea mixture with corn and potatoes) or ugali (a thick porridge made from corn flour). Ugali is a staple food and is used similarly to bread, potatoes or pasta. It is usually rolled into a small ball and used as a scoop for food. Maize (corn) is also a staple. Charcoal roasted corn is a popular snack.

Bananas are used in almost every type of dish. Approximately 30 varieties of bananas are available, including tiny sweet bananas, large yellow and green bananas, and fat red bananas with a tangy lemon flavor.



Mexico

Traditionally, a typical morning in Mexico includes two breakfast meals. The first one is early in the morning and includes a variety of sweetened breads with cafe con leche (coffee with milk) or hot chocolate. At the second breakfast, fruits or fruit juice, huevos revueltos (scrambled eggs), beans, chile sauce, tortillas and cafe con leche are served.



The mid-day meal is the main meal. For some people, the meal may include stew, beans and tortillas. For other people, it may consist of several different courses, including rice or pasta, a main course of meat or fish, and a green salad or vegetable. Salsa, tortillas and bolillos (rolls) are always on the table.

Desserts are an important part of the Mexican meal and may include a fried pastry called bunuelos or rice pudding.

The evening meal is very light and usually consists of sweetened bread and jams with cafe con leche, hot chocolate made with milk, or atole (a hot cornmeal drink).

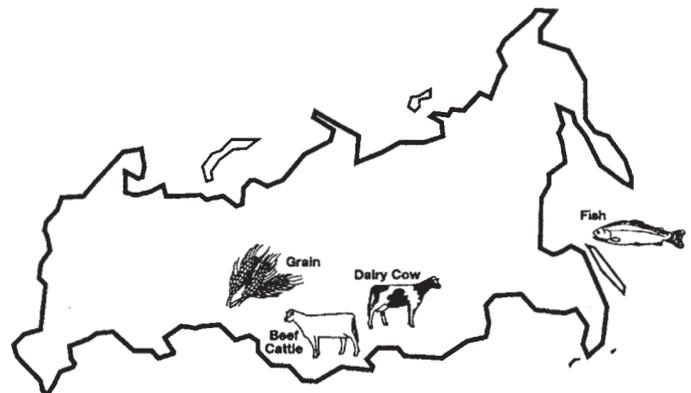
Russia

Like many other countries, Russia's meals vary greatly from region to region because of climate. In some areas, fresh fruits and vegetables are not readily available during the winter.

Breakfast may consist of bread served with butter and jam. Soft-boiled eggs, cheese and ham are also eaten.

Lunch and dinner feature several courses. The first course is cold and warm appetizers. Next, a big bowl of soup is served. In winter it is a chunky meat or fish soup, and in summer, a cold borscht or vegetable soup. A pirog (meat pie) always accompanies the soup. The main course may be a fish dish, chicken cutlets, meatloaf filled with eggs and scallions, or ground meat and rice wrapped in cabbage leaves and simmered in tomato sauce.

Popular desserts include sweet yeast dough filled with fruit and sour cream, tart or sour cream cake, or a 'Russian-style' Napoleon with ten layers of pastry drenched in custard.





Sweden

For many people in Sweden, breakfast consists of coffee or tea, bread, butter and cheese. Cereal with milk or yogurt also may be served.

Lunch and dinner are large meals. However, lunch is considered the main meal of the day and is eaten around noon.

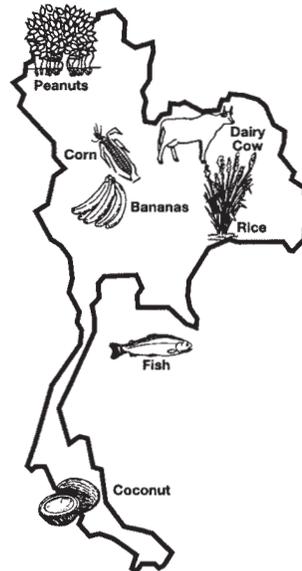
Sweden is famous for its smorgasbord, a table full of appetizers, meat, fish and cheese dishes. Smorgasbord etiquette requires that at least three trips are made to the table so the flavors of different foods are not mixed. Rice pudding is a popular dessert found on the smorgasbord.



Berries are a popular fruit in Sweden. Strawberries, cloud berries, lingonberries, blueberries and raspberries are eaten fresh, made into jams and served with cakes. Swedish pancakes served with whipped cream and berries are especially popular.

Thailand

Like meals in China, meals in Thailand have no main dish. All dishes are equally important. Thai meals are usually served with a variety of condiments and sauces. Traditionally, the Thai eat when they get hungry and snack five to six times a day. Snacks include fruits, soups and sweets and are often purchased from street vendors. Vendors also provide noodle dishes for a quick, satisfying lunch.



A typical breakfast may include bland rice soup, boiled eggs, fried rice and leftovers from the previous night's dinner.

Lunch and dinner may consist of noodles or rice, soup, vegetables, and meat, chicken or seafood.

Dessert is typically a plate of fresh tropical fruit. On special occasions, sweets made from sticky rice, agar-agar (seaweed gelatin) or coconut milk and cream may be served.



U.S.A.



As in other large countries, meals in the U.S.A. are both ethnically and regionally diverse. Americans typically eat three meals a day with snacks in between. Snacks may include fruit, chips, popcorn and cookies.

Breakfast is usually hot or cold cereal and milk. Pancakes, sausage, eggs, bacon and toast are also favorites.

Lunch is often eaten away from home. Sandwiches made with thinly sliced meat, cheese and vegetables, or peanut butter and jelly are common. Hamburgers, fried chicken or fish sandwiches, and tacos are favorites from fast food restaurants and are popular choices for people who work.

Dinner is the main meal of the day and traditionally includes meat, chicken or fish with potatoes or rice and a vegetable. Dinner is usually followed by a sweet dessert, such as ice cream, cake, pie or frozen yogurt.

Holidays

Celebrating holidays throughout the year is a wonderful way to increase children's understanding of different cultures. Ethnic foods, music, clothing, books and videos can be part of celebrations. Holidays that can be observed include:

January/February

Chinese New Year (January)
 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (January)
 Black History Month (February)

March/April

St. Patrick's Day (Irish holiday, March 17)
 Passover (Jewish holiday)
 Easter (Christian holiday)

May/June

Asian American Month (May)
 Cinco de Mayo (Mexican holiday, May)
 African American Independence Day
 (June 19)

July/August

Canada Day (July 1)
 Independence Day (American holiday, July 4)
 Bastille Day (French holiday, July 14)

September/October

Mexican Independence Day (September 16)
 Hispanic American Month
 (September 15 - October 15)
 American Indian Heritage Month (October)
 Mexican Heritage Day (October 12)

November/December

Dia de los inocentes, "Day of the Children"
 (Hispanic holiday, November 2)
 Thanksgiving (American holiday, November)
 Christmas (Christian holiday, December 25)
 Hanukkah (Jewish holiday, December)
 Kwanzaa (African American holiday)



References and Resources

Ethnic and Regional Food Practices: Chinese American. American Dietetic Association and American Diabetes Association.

Ethnic and Regional Food Practices: Hmong American. American Dietetic Association and American Diabetes Association.

Ethnic and Regional Food Practices: Jewish. American Dietetic Association and American Diabetes Association.

Ethnic and Regional Food Practices: Mexican American. American Dietetic Association and American Diabetes Association.

Ethnic and Regional Food Practices: Navajo. American Dietetic Association and American Diabetes Association.

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Information for the countries and the maps were adapted from *Foods Around the World*, Dairy Council of Wisconsin.

