

Medieval Meals Made Mobile

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Not every event serves an authentic medieval dinner, and most don't have a lunch available at all - medieval or otherwise. It is therefore desirable to be able to bring along a sort of medieval boxed lunch, both to enhance the atmosphere of the event, and to further promote the understanding of medieval European cuisine.

Criteria

While there are a number of medieval cookbooks, recipes, menus, and descriptions of feasts available, there is little mention of what period travelers ate on their journeys. Thus we are forced to go with "what works" - what foods travel well. To be suitable for our lunch, a recipe must meet the following requirements:

1. Must consist of foods consistent with the medieval period.
2. Must be palatable when served cold or at room temperature.
3. Must be safe to eat after hours without refrigeration.
4. Must be able to be eaten with little or no utensils.

These requirements can be easily met by a simple meal of smoked meats, bread, and cheese, however this kind of lunch is somewhat uninspired and doesn't seem to be what would be considered to be suitable for nobility. The addition of the requirement below corrects this.

5. Should consist of foods that have been (or might have been) served to medieval nobles.

With these five criteria in mind, the challenge becomes one of selecting recipes from available sources. Additional considerations are matters of personal preference (not covered here), balance of diet, ease of preparation, and cost and availability of ingredients.

Starches

The simplest and most portable of foods is - and probably always has been - bread. If it is not possible or practical to bake your own bread then a few large rolls or a small unsliced loaf from the local bakery is reasonably authentic. Remember that the whiter the bread, the better (unless you intend to be eating like a serf).

Proteins

Meats are generally the first source of protein people think of, but as any vegetarian can tell you, eggs and cheese are good sources as well.

Cheese - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/cheese.shtm

Recipe requires: milk, vinegar, salt, cream.

Make the night before, refrigerate, and transport in a cooler.

Chicken Pasty - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/chickenpasty.shtm

Recipe requires: chicken, bacon, spices, pastry (pie crust, puff pastry, or bread dough).

Make the night before, refrigerate, and transport in a cooler.

* Can be eaten without utensils.

Meat Pies - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/pyes.shtm

Recipe requires: beef, prunes, dates, raisins, vinegar, spices.

Make the night before, refrigerate, and transport in a cooler.

Ember Day Tart - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/tart.shtm

Recipe requires: eggs, cheese, onion, butter, currants, sugar, spices.

Make the night before, refrigerate, and transport in a cooler.

* Can be eaten without utensils.

Tart of Onions - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/oniontart.shtm

Recipe requires: onion, eggs, cheese, spices.

Make the night before, refrigerate, and transport in a cooler.

* Can be frozen, can be eaten without utensils.

Stuffed Eggs - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/eggs.shtm

Recipe requires: eggs, cheese, spices.

Make the night before, refrigerate, and transport in a cooler.

* Slightly messy to make, nice to serve, can be eaten without utensils.

Vegetables

Most of the medieval European vegetable dishes do not fit well into the concept of a box lunch - usually because they're intended to be eaten hot. Below are some of the exceptions.

Compost - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/compost.shtm

Recipe requires: root vegetables, pears, currants, vinegar, wine, honey, mustard, spices.

Make a day or two ahead of time, refrigerate, and transport in a cooler.

* Keeps very well, tastes especially good on hot days.

Spinach Tart - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/spinach.shtm

Recipe requires: spinach, cheese, eggs, spices.

Make the night before, refrigerate, and transport in a cooler.

* Can be frozen, can be eaten without utensils.

Dishe of Artechokes - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/artechokes.shtm

Recipe requires: artichoke bottoms, butter, sugar, vinegar, spices.

Make the night before, refrigerate, and transport in a cooler.

Sweets

Medieval European nobility ate a lot of sweets, but most were rather messy dishes that need to be served hot. The three recipes below are among the most portable I've found.

Gyngerbrede - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/gyngerbrede.shtm

Recipe requires: honey, bread, spices.

Make the night before, store and transport in a cool, dry, airtight container.

* Can be frozen, can be eaten without utensils.

Sugared Almonds - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/almonds.shtm

Recipe requires: blanched almonds, sugar, spices.

Make in advance, store and transport in a dry, airtight container.

* Can be eaten without utensils.

Rysschews of Fruit - www.MedievalCookery.com/recipes/rysschews.shtm

Recipe requires: figs, dates, pine nuts, currants, spices, pastry cups (pre-made).

Make the night before, refrigerate, and transport in a cooler.

* Can be eaten without utensils.

Equipment

A well equipped medieval box lunch might need the following:

- wooden plates
- serving spoons
- small spoons
- small wooden cutting board
- sharp knife (for cutting meats or pies)
- cloth napkins

Add the following and you have a nice setup for a sideboard:

- small serving platter
- small serving bowls
- pottery pitcher
- plain tablecloth