

Anglo-Saxon & Viking food

What people ate during the time of Ælfred the Great

Please read the fact file below, to give you some background before proceeding with the main activity. Your task at the end (with the help of an adult) is to prepare a Viking or Anglo-Saxon meal for your family using simple ingredients.

The most common foods in order of importance:

Bread

Most bread would be brown, with white bread being only for the very rich or noble. A village may own an oven which everyone uses, but most bread was likely flatbread cooked in a hot, dry pan.

Vegetables

For most people, this is food grown themselves in small garden-farms attached to the village. It is these vegetables which provide the main variety of diet. Typical crops include onions, garlic, spring onions, turnips, cabbage, parsnips, lettuce, carrots (which are white or purple and not orange at this time), leeks, radishes, peas, beans, beetroots, mushrooms, but not potatoes or tomatoes.

Dairy

Milk - from cows, sheep or goats - is a very common drink, but also can be made into butter (to which honey is often added to make honey-butter), yoghurt, soft and hard cheeses. Eggs are prized.

Meat

Meat is rare. Most domesticated animals (except pigs) are kept to produce eggs or milk or for work (a cow pulls a plough just as well as a horse) or wool (sheep). Meat is plentiful during mid-autumn when (for Christian Saxons) the animals are culled at Martinmas (the feast of St. Martin 11th November) so that not as many have to be fed over winter. Much of this meat is preserved in salt to last the winter. Hunting provides more red or white meat, hare (game), deer (venison), wild boar (non-domestic swine) and wild birds (again game) for example. The modern words for meat; beef, mutton, pork etc are Norman-French in origin, Saxons would call their meat as it was, cow, sheep and pig.

Fish

The Viking diet contains lots of fish, but Saxons would eat it also. Christians are required to eat fish for approximately a third of the year, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays are all fish days, as are certain Saint days.

There is a huge range of fish in early Middle Ages. If you live on the coast cod, hake and plaice are standard as is shell fish, inland salmon and trout.

Task One

Prepare a Viking or Saxon feast

Below are some simple recipes to make some Saxon/Viking food for your family. Choose one or more recipes and try them out. There is some cooking involved and the use of a knife, so an adult must help you. I'll give the more authentic recipes, but you may have to substitute some ingredients for others, like sugar for honey. Make a note of any substitutions for the next task. Also, try to take photos as you go along.

Flatbread

This is a basic staple of everyday diet.

Ingredients

Yeast one teaspoon (7 oz.)

Wholemeal flour 4 oz./120 grams

Bread flour 4 oz./120 grams

Salt 1 teaspoon

A good squeeze of runny honey

Lukewarm water 250 ml

1. Put a little of the water, all of the honey the yeast, in a jug and leave it somewhere warm for 5 minutes until the yeast to starts to foam.
2. Put all of the dry ingredients into a bowl and mix well.
3. Once the yeast begins to foam, add it the bowl and mix well. Add the rest of the water until a dough begins to form.
4. Using your hand knead the dough for a good 5 to 10 minutes.
5. Place the kneaded dough into a bowl and cover. Leave it to rise for one hour or until it has doubled in size.
6. Knock back the dough, divide into four balls and roll them flat (about as thick as your finger).
7. (In a hot dry non-stick pan) Cook the bread for about two minutes, flip it over and cook the other side for the same amount of time. Alternatively, you can bake them in a hot oven (200°C for 20-30 minutes).

Pottage

Pottage is any meal made in a pot over a fire but you will use a large pan and the stove top.

Ingredients

Typical ingredients would include:

Leeks, garlic, carrots, parsnips, turnip, swede, peas. This then could be thickened with *oats* or *barley*. You will need two litres of *vegetable stock*, *salt*, *pepper* and herbs such as *rosemary* and *thyme*. You can make whatever substitutions you wi

1. Cut all of the vegetables into small bite-sized pieces. This soup won't be blended like a modern soup.
2. Add a little butter or oil to the pan and sweat down the leeks. Slowly add the rest of the vegetables, except peas.
3. Put the lid on the pan and reduce the heat to low, letting the vegetables sweat for 10 minutes. Stir it occasionally.
4. Turn up the temperature and add the stock, peas, seasoning and herbs. If you're going to add barley or oats, do that now as well.
5. Once it starts to boil, lower the temperature and place the lid back on. Cook for ½ an hour or 1 hour if you have added oats or barley.



Simple Slow Cheese

Most cheeses use rennet which is an enzyme from the stomach of cows or sheep. Instead of rennet we are going to use time (approximately 6 hours), letting it change slowly into cheese.

Ingredients

½ litre of yoghurt (245g/ 8 ½ oz.)

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

2 cloves of garlic, chopped finely

½ teaspoon salt

1. Put all of your ingredients into a bowl and stir well
2. Take a clean linen cloth or tea towel and place it over a large bowl. Fasten it with string, so that it doesn't sag to the bottom of the bowl.
3. Pour the mixture into the cloth, place it in a cool place and leave it to strain for at least 6 hours.
4. The yoghurt will become firm and almost crumbly cheese.

Simple Fast Cheese

2 pints of milk

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

2 cloves of garlic, chopped finely

1 teaspoon salt

A few drops of Cider Vinegar

1. Pour the milk, garlic, herbs and seasoning into a large saucepan
2. Slowly bring to the boil.
3. When the milk is simmering gently start to add the cider vinegar, a few drops at a time. Continue the milk separates into curds (a frothy white substance) and whey (a green liquid)
4. When the milk begins to separate immediately turn off the heat and pour through a sieve, removing the whey.
5. Place the sieve under a cold tap, to cool the curd and to stop the cooking process. When it is cold and completely drained, place in a bowl and let it chill in the fridge for two hours.



Task Two

Reporting Back

Now that you have finished cooking choose one recipe, and write your own version. Including list of ingredients, equipment, and what method you used. Also include any photos you took and finally what you thought of the recipe.

Task Three

Find your own recipe

Go online with your parents and look for some more recipes from the Dark-Ages. Choose one and write up the recipe. To start you off visit the **Ribe Viking Centre** website and look at their section on food. Here's a link

<https://www.ribevikingcenter.dk/en/learn-more/viking-slow-food.aspx>

Good luck.

