

Food Symbols of Easter

Easter originated from a Northern hemisphere pagan celebration known as Eastre. Originally a celebration of spring and fertility, today Easter has primarily become known as the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, many of the traditional foods still eaten at Easter take their origins from pagan customs.

Traditional Easter food varies from country to country, with Australia celebrating a diversity of different foods including:

Fish

Good Friday is often described as the day of "greatest grief" for Christians. Many traditions and superstitions are associated with this day but perhaps the most widespread custom is the eating of fish, said to be an alternative for meat out of respect to Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The Legend Of John Dory

The John Dory fish (which is also known as St Peter's fish in Europe) is a mild and delicate white flesh fish best when grilled whole or roasted in the oven. The delicacy of the Dory also lends itself to poaching and steaming and serving with subtle South-East Asian flavours. It is a popular choice for Good Friday feasts.

The Dory's alternate name 'St Peters Fish' refers to the "thumbprint" on the fish's side. This mark is said to have resulted from Christ instructing St Peter to go fishing, correctly predicting he would catch a fish containing a silver coin in its mouth, for him to give to the tax collector. The skin of the John Dory marked by two dark "thumbprints" is said to be where Peter held the fish to retrieve the coin.

Eggs

Of all the symbols associated with Easter, the egg (symbol of fertility and new life) is the most identifiable. Traditionally, Easter eggs were painted with bright colours to represent spring and were used in Easter-egg rolling contests or given as gifts. After they were coloured and etched with various designs, the eggs were exchanged by lovers and romantic admirers, much the same as valentines.

Different cultures have developed their own ways of using eggs in their traditional Easter foods. In Greece, crimson eggs (to honour the blood of Christ) are exchanged; Slavic peoples decorate their eggs in special patterns of gold and silver; In Italy eggs are found in soups such as Brodetto Pasquale (a broth-based Easter soup thickened with eggs) and in many different breads, such as in Calabria where a whole egg is inserted into the holes in the braid.

Easter Bunny

The easter bunny also has its origin in pre-Christian fertility lore. The hare and the rabbit were well known for their fertility and served as symbols of the new life during spring. The first edible easter bunnies (made of pastry and sugar) were made in Germany during the early 1800s. The Germans were also responsible for bringing the symbol of the easter rabbit to America.

Hot Cross Buns

Hot Cross Buns have a mixed history. Some attribute them right back to the pagan spring festival and say only later were they given the cross by monks wanting to give a Christian meaning to the tradition. Other accounts are entirely Christian in their origin, explaining the cross as a reminder of the cross Jesus was killed on.

Hot cross buns were traditionally eaten at breakfast time on Good Friday with buns baked on Good Friday supposedly having magical powers. Other superstitions include:

- Hardened old hot cross buns protect the house from fire.
- You could keep a hot cross bun that had been made on Good Friday for at least a year without it going mouldy.
- Sailors took hot cross buns to sea with them to prevent shipwreck.
- A bun baked on Good Friday and left to get hard could be grated up and put in warm milk to stop an upset tummy.

However, whatever their origin, the delicious combination of spicy, sweet and fruity flavors continues to be a traditional easter favourite.

Dove

The dove (symbol of peace and resurrection) plays a popular part in Italian Easter celebrations. In northern Italy, a specialty bread baked in the shape of a dove and studded with orange peel, raisins and almonds is eaten on easter Sunday.

Lamb

The Lamb, signifier of birth and new life, is a major component of many Italian and Greek easter feasts. Historically, whole baby lamb, was roasted or grilled over open air spits and while this tradition still persists, many today opt for the more convenient option of lamb roast for Sunday lunches and dinners.