

Old-Fashioned Christmas Dinner Not What It Used to Be

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It has become difficult for Americans to enjoy a feast in the style of old-fashioned Christmas dinners.

The reason is that we have so many foods available on a year-around basis that only

two or three generations ago could be had "in season." Now we may sit down to a Christmas feast any day of the year.

Children who today may be urged to drink orange juice daily can hardly appreciate the

pleasure of finding the rare treat of a single orange in the Christmas stocking. Today fresh fruits of nearly all kinds are commonplace.

Candy wasn't always an everyday pleasure, either. Stores of the past offered special as-

Ferdie J. Deering

sortments of Christmas but stocked only limited kinds other times. Hard sweets with Santa Claus and Christmas tree designs were delightful

treasures.

Festive boards of the past often featured a variety of desserts but they were not a part of regular menus, as they are now. No store-bought dessert can equal our memories of such tantalizing aromas

as come from homemade pies of Christmas past.

Turkeys remain the favorite holiday meat but they are no longer limited to the holiday season. They are usually on sale, higher quality, meatier birds, frozen

and ready to be cooked. No longer is dressing the turkey an awesome holiday chore.

More than 90 percent of farmers kept chickens in earlier days but only in spring or early summer could you buy a frying chicken. Now we Americans eat fried chicken like every day was Sunday.

Fat sidemeat of heavy hogs of the past was a mainstay of rural diets before REA brought electricity and refrigeration. Salt pork was fried for breakfast and boiled with beans or potatoes for other meals, saturating the menus with salt.

Occasional catches of fish from nearby ponds or streams provided variety in summer. In the fall or winter there was a rabbit or squirrel meat, sometimes larger venison.

Some farmers still butcher their own meat but they do it almost any time of year and store it in freezers. We seldom hear of "fall butchering" and it would be hard to find a family smokehouse for

curing the winter's supply of hams and bacon.

Canned fruits and vegetables were available then, with Heinz leading the way with 57 varieties, compared to thousands on supermarket shelves now. Even so, all farm families and most city folks maintained vegetable gardens. Women spent summers canning and preserving without benefit of electric gadgets, air-conditioning kitchens, and microwave or convection ovens.

Vegetables bought at grocery stores in pre-supermarket days were not table ready. They had to be peeled, pared and cooked at home. The few "convenience foods" that existed were regarded as expensive novelties that only the rich could afford. Home baking was still a regular custom in a great many homes.

Frozen foods did not become stock items until after World War II. Military discoveries for preserving foods were converted to civilian life, although there is no evidence that recipes

for C-rations led directly to precooked TV dinners.

Last summer when there was a big hassle about use of food stamps, the USDA Consumer Information Center issued recommendations for "nutritious meals at low cost." Homemakers of 50 years ago might be shocked to see celery, tuna and other "delicacies" included. Most of the dinners included a meat dish.

It is traditional for us to overeat at Christmas feasts and on other special occasions. However, people of years gone by, soon were back on standard rations and doing harder work, so obesity didn't seem to be such a widespread problem as it is now.

These days our resolutions to get back on the diet next week or next month frequently don't stand up in succeeding rounds of banquets at conventions, big meals at restaurants with friends, and our everyday habit of eating all we want or can afford.