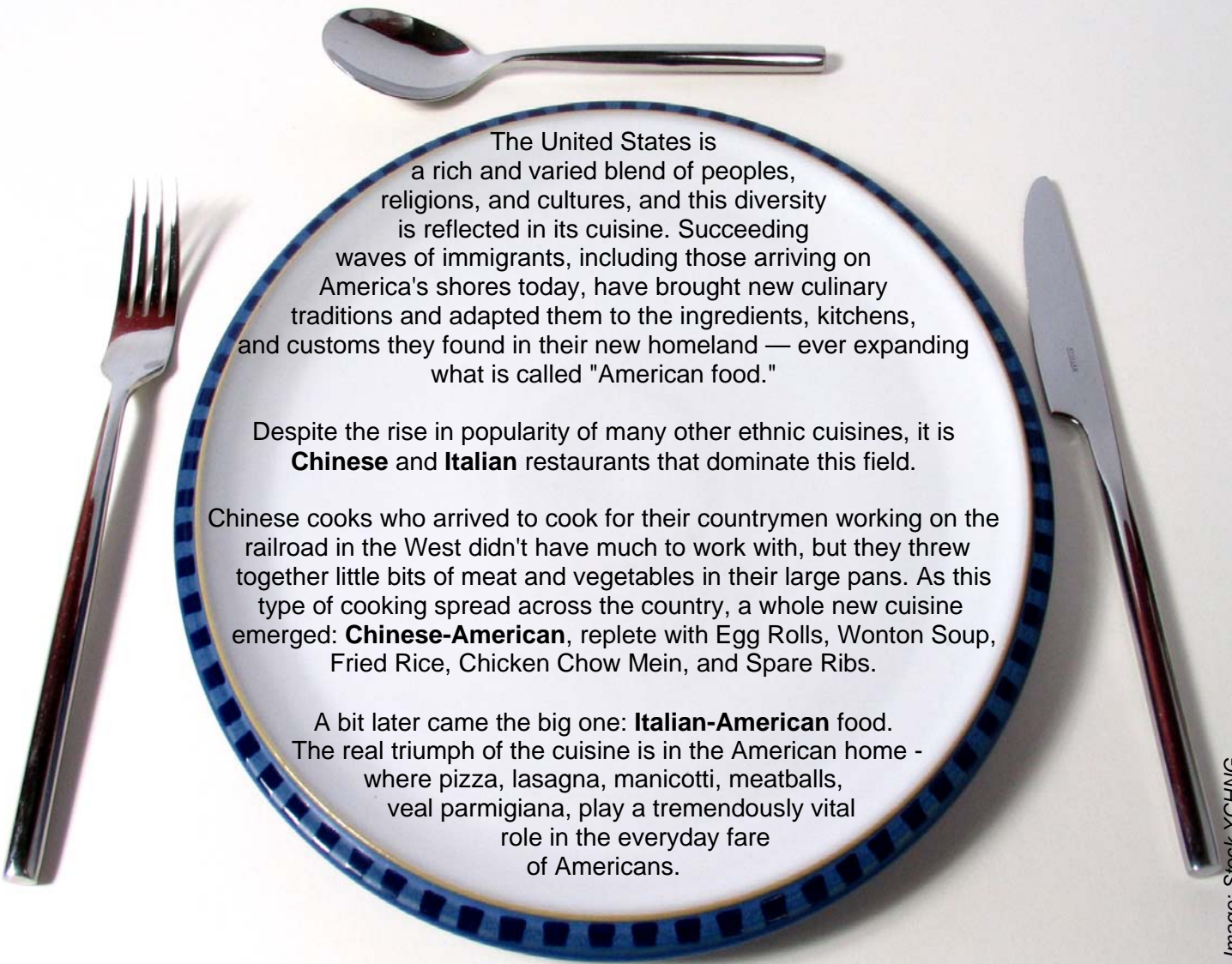




AMERICANS AT THE TABLE



The United States is a rich and varied blend of peoples, religions, and cultures, and this diversity is reflected in its cuisine. Succeeding waves of immigrants, including those arriving on America's shores today, have brought new culinary traditions and adapted them to the ingredients, kitchens, and customs they found in their new homeland — ever expanding what is called "American food."

Despite the rise in popularity of many other ethnic cuisines, it is **Chinese** and **Italian** restaurants that dominate this field.

Chinese cooks who arrived to cook for their countrymen working on the railroad in the West didn't have much to work with, but they threw together little bits of meat and vegetables in their large pans. As this type of cooking spread across the country, a whole new cuisine emerged: **Chinese-American**, replete with Egg Rolls, Wonton Soup, Fried Rice, Chicken Chow Mein, and Spare Ribs.

A bit later came the big one: **Italian-American** food. The real triumph of the cuisine is in the American home - where pizza, lasagna, manicotti, meatballs, veal parmigiana, play a tremendously vital role in the everyday fare of Americans.

Image: Stock.XCHNG

When the Harris Public Opinion Poll asked Americans to choose foods which they think of as typically American, hamburgers and cheeseburgers (29%), apple pie (20%) and hot dogs (13%) topped the list. The only other two foods mentioned by significant numbers were barbecue (9%) and fried chicken (7%).

When asked by *Food & Wine* magazine and America Online what the quintessential American food was, most Americans picked a burger & fries (67%) over fried chicken (16%), hotdogs (14%) and ice-cream sundaes (4%).

■ Two December Tables

Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, is an eight-day holiday celebrated in December.

In America the first night usually includes a family dinner with foods such as *latkes* and *sufganiyot*.

Latkes are potato pancakes made from grated potatoes mixed with eggs, onions, and flour. They are fried in vegetable oil and served hot, often dipped in apple sauce or sour cream. *Sufganiyot* are jelly doughnuts in odd shapes, covered in powdered sugar and/or cinnamon.

After dinner the family gathers to light one of the menorah candles, and a new one is lit each night of the festival.

Statue of Liberty
Hanukkah Lamp
(Library of Congress)

The American Christmas table looks much like a Thanksgiving feast of turkey or ham, potatoes and pie.

No Christmas is complete without lots of desserts, and nothing symbolizes Christmas more than baked breads and cookies hot from the oven. Many American traditional desserts, like other Christmas customs, were started long ago in other parts of the world.

At Christmas Eve gatherings adults drink *eggnog*, a drink made of cream, milk, sugar, beaten eggs and brandy or rum. Plenty of *eggnog* or hot cocoa is on hand in colder climates for carolers, or people who go from house to house to sing Christmas carols to their neighbors.



Image: Stock.XCHNG

Text on Christmas adapted from
Celebrate! Holidays in the USA
<http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/hol/celebrate.pdf>

■ The “Zigzag” Method

Visitors to the United States from Europe and other areas of the world are sometimes puzzled by the way in which Americans use their knives and forks, particularly in formal settings. Most Americans use what is sometimes called the zigzag method, based on rules of etiquette developed many decades ago, perhaps as far back as the 19th century. This means that one cuts the food with the knife in the right hand and the fork in the left, then places the knife on the plate and shifts the fork from the left hand to the right to continue eating. The left hand is placed on the lap, out of sight, until needed for the next cut. A left hand or arm or-heaven forbid!-elbow idly lingering on the table marks one as improperly trained, or worse. (This process assumes, of course, that the person in question is right-handed. A left-handed person would start with the knife in the left hand and the fork in the right).

By contrast, the efficient "European method" involves keeping the fork in the left hand after finishing cutting the food. In another minor variation, most Americans keep their forks facing upward while placing food in their mouths; Europeans generally keep them facing down, sometimes with their index fingers extended. Theories as to why these differences developed vary, but one theory is that since the fork came relatively late to America, when it did arrive it was used more like its predecessor, the spoon; in other words, more like a scoop than a spear. As with many other cultural variations, neither method is right or wrong, but only different.

(From *Knives and Forks* by Francine Prose, published in the Electronic Journal: *Americans at the Table - Reflections on Food and Culture*: <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0704/ijse/ijse0704.htm>)

■ Do It Yourself!

Here are some Internet sources with American recipes:

The Great American Potluck
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features/immig/ckbk/index.html>

This interactive site from the American Memory Project of the Library of Congress highlights the immigrant experience through recipes.

The A&W American Recipe Collection
<http://www.governorsrecipes.com/>
Dishes from each of the 50 states.

America the Bountiful: Classic American Food from Antiquity to the Space Age
<http://www.lib.ucdavis.edu/exhibits/food/>

Epicurious: The World's Greatest Recipe Collection
<http://eat.epicurious.com/>
Thousands of recipes as well as articles and other features from *Bon Appétit* and *Gourmet* magazines.

NativeTech: Food & Recipes
<http://www.nativetech.org/food/index.php>
An extensive collection of Native American recipes.

■ American Mouths, Arab Tastes

On a recent evening at Public, a sultry restaurant in downtown New York City, the high-fashion crowd was three-deep at the bar, all waiting for their tables. But they weren't waiting for sushi, tamales, or brick-oven pizza. They were there for, well, the falafel. Yes, falafel. At this chic hot spot, packed with trendy masses, the coriander falafel with grilled kangaroo and lemon tahini sauce is one of the best-selling dishes on the menu.

The number of restaurants featuring the varied cuisines of the Arab World, from Morocco through the Levant, is currently on the rise in America. And it's not just the number of Arab restaurants that is growing, but also the festive Middle Eastern style of eating - mezze, appetizer-sized portions of different foods, and small plates - and the broad array of Middle Eastern ingredients like grape leaves, saffron, hummus, and couscous.

If you need a crash course in Arab-American culinary fusion, just take a walk down a midtown block in

New York City. There, you'll find streets crowded with food carts and quick-serve spots, all serving kabobs, shwarma and falafel.

The city is also host to a number of more upscale Arabic dining establishments like Kemia Bar. The lounge is packed to capacity nightly, and features belly dancing, DJs and live drumming along with a lengthy menu of dishes like chicken tagine with lemon, olive oil and couscous.



Image courtesy of www.lebanesetaverna.com

Text adapted from **Hi International** magazine available at <http://hiinternational.com>

In a book published by the U.S. Department of State - *Writers on America* (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/writers>), Elmaz Abinader, an Arab-American author, poet and performance artist, recalls her childhood in these words:



Elmaz Abinader

Children of the Roojme: A Family's Journey from Lebanon, her first book, is a widely acclaimed memoir of one family's immigration.

She currently teaches at Mills College, Oakland, California.

Drawing me from the entrance, down the hall, to the dining room, was one of my favorite smells. It was Wednesday, the day of the week when my mother covered the table for eight with newspaper, dragged two large blue cans from the pantry, and lined up the cookie sheets. By the time I arrived home from school in the afternoon, the house smelled of Arabic bread and loaves and loaves of the round puffy disks leaned against each other in rows on the table. She made triangles of spinach pies, cinnamon rolls, and fruit pies filled with pears from the trees growing on our land. Before greeting me, she looked up, her face flour-smudged, and said, "There are 68 loaves. You can have one."

By now, my sisters have joined me at one end of the table where we pass the apple butter to each other to slather on the warm bread. When Arabic bread comes out of the oven, it is filled with air and looks like a little pillow; as it cools, the bread flattens to what Americans recognize as "pita" bread. Other bread was rarely eaten in our house; even when

we put hot dogs on the grill, they were dropped into a half of "cohbs," then covered with ketchup.

The smell was hypnotic and mitigated the melancholy I carried home with my lessons to do that night. ...

Our social interactions on the other side of the door had little weight inside the house. We had a different community who gathered on weekends and during the summer. Relatives from towns around Pennsylvania and Ohio filled our living room and dining room, circling the table crowded with my mother's fabulous array of Arabic dishes: hummus, chick bean dip, baba ghanouj, eggplant with sesame, stuffed grape leaves, shish kebob, kibbee, raw or fried lamb and bulgur wheat patties, a leg of lamb, a turkey stuffed with rice and raisins and platter after platter of side dishes. The famous Arabic bread sat skyscraper high on plates at either end.

Activity Page

Win Booklets!

To take part in a drawing for colorful English language booklets about the United States e-mail us the answer to the following question:

What is the traditional Christmas drink in America?

Send your answer to: zoom@usembassy.hu

Please state your name, address, and age.

The deadline is January 31.

Winners will be notified by February 15.

Good Luck!

ZOOM
in on america

Zoom is available online at

www.usembassy.hu/zoom.htm

Please send requests for subscription and comments to: zoom@usembassy.hu

Regional English Language Office
relomail@usembassy.hu

Information Resource Center
infousa@usembassy.hu

Mailing address:
U.S. Embassy
Public Affairs Section
1054 Budapest
Szabadság tér 12.

In A Nutshell

Food has provided many idioms to the English language. On the left, find idioms for the sentences on the right and use them in the correct form.

to spill the beans

Tired of _____, Tom applied for and obtained a better job.

in a nutshell

Nicholas was upset that he had overslept and missed his math test, but he decided that it was pointless _____.

one's cup of tea

Tiffany had planned a surprise party for her best friend, Kate, but another classmate _____ by mentioning it to Kate during a lunch break.

to work for peanuts

The teacher did not want to retell the complete story word by word, so he summarized it _____.

to cry over spilled milk

Peter declined the invitation to a Halloween party, saying that it just wasn't _____.

Find Correct Answers at: www.usembassy.hu/zoom_key.htm

Frog Legs for Dinner?

Transform the following sentences using the words in capital letters.

"How many dishes do you prepare for Christmas dinner?" asked my American penfriend Alice.
FIND OUT

Although Bridget tried very hard, she failed to cook dinner for her friends.
DESPITE

I have no objections against having frog legs for dinner tonight.
MIND

The waiter gave us a dirty look because we didn't give him a high enough tip.
IF

Glossary

With page numbers where the words appear.

array - a fine show or collection(3)

carol - a song of religious joy (2)

chic - stylish, smart (3)

crash course - a rapid and intense course of training or research (3)

cuisine - style of cooking (1)

doughnut - a small, usually ring-shaped, cake fried in fat (2)

linger - to wait for a time instead of going (2)

lounge - a comfortable room for sitting in (3)

mitigate - to make less severe (3)

pantry - a room or closet used for storing food (3)

platter - a large plate used for serving food (3)

predecessor - one who precedes you in time (2)

replete with - full of (1)

scoop - a container for moving liquids or loose soft materials (2)

slather - to spread thickly (3)

spear - a long pointed rod used as a weapon (2)

sultry - very hot and humid (3)

sundae - dish of ice cream with fruit, juice, nuts, etc. (1)

three-deep - three people waiting in line (to get in the restaurant) (3)

upscale - appealing to wealthy consumers (3)