



Bread is one of the oldest prepared foods, dating back to the Neolithic era. The first bread produced was probably cooked versions of a grain-paste, made from ground cereal grains and water, and may have been developed by accidental cooking or deliberate experimentation with water and grain flour.

Yeast spores are ubiquitous, including the surface of cereal grains, so any dough left to rest will become naturally leavened. There were multiple sources of leavening available for early bread. Airborne yeasts could be harnessed by leaving uncooked dough exposed to air for some time before cooking. Pliny the Elder reported that the Gauls and Iberians used the foam skimmed from beer to produce "a lighter kind of bread than other peoples." Parts of the ancient world that drank wine instead of beer used a paste composed of grape juice and flour that was allowed to begin fermenting, or wheat bran steeped in wine, as a source for yeast. The most common source of leavening, however, was to retain a piece of dough from the previous day to use as a form of sour-dough starter.

The trade of the baker, then, is one of the oldest crafts in the world. Loaves and rolls have been found in ancient Egyptian tombs. In the British Museum's Egyptian galleries you can see actual loaves which were made and baked over 5,000 years ago. Also on display are grains of wheat which ripened in those ancient summers under the Pharaohs. Wheat has been found in pits where human settlements flourished 8,000 years ago. In the Stone Age, people made solid cakes from stone-crushed barley and wheat. A millstone used for grinding corn has been found, that is thought to be 7,500 years old. The ability to sow and reap cereals may be one of the chief causes which led man to dwell in communities, rather than to live a wandering life hunting and herding cattle. A major advance occurred in 1961 with the development of the Chorleywood Bread Process, which used the intense mechanical working of dough to dramatically reduce the fermentation period and the time taken to produce a loaf. The process, whose high-energy mixing allows for the use of inferior grain, is now widely used around the world in large factories.

#### **Cultural and political importance of bread.**

It is a foodstuff of great historical and contemporary importance. In many cultures bread has a significance beyond nutrition. The Lord's Prayer, for example, contains the line "Give us today our daily bread"; here, "bread" is commonly understood to mean necessities in

general.

The word *companion* comes from Latin *com-* "with" + *panis* "bread". During the 1950s, the beatnik community used the term bread as a euphemism for money. In Cockney Rhyming Slang, bread means money and is derived from the phrase bread and honey. The word bread is now commonly used around the world in English speaking countries as a synonym for money (as also is the case with the word dough.)

A "bread-winner" is a household's main contributor and has little to do with actual bread-provision. For example, this goes along with the phrase "putting bread on the table".

A remarkable or revolutionary innovation is often referred to as "the greatest thing since sliced bread". In the USSR in 1917, Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks promised "Peace, Land, and Bread." The term "breadbasket" is often used to denote an agriculturally productive region. In India, life's basic necessities are often referred to as "roti, kapra aur makan" [bread, cloth and house].

The political significance of bread is considerable. In Britain in the nineteenth century the inflated price of bread due to the Corn Laws caused major political and social divisions, and was central to debates over free trade and protectionism. The Assize of Bread and Ale in the thirteenth century demonstrated the importance of bread in medieval times by setting heavy punishments for short-changing bakers, and bread appeared in the *Magna Carta* a half-century earlier.

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#### HUMOUR

Fruit is a vegetable with looks and money. Plus, if you let fruit rot, it turns into wine, something Brussels sprouts never do. ~P.J. O'Rourke