

A very American holiday

On the fourth Thursday in November, Americans celebrate Thanksgiving. This holiday started as a kind of harvest¹ festival, like *Erntedankfest* in Germany. Today, it is mainly a day when Americans get together with their families for a big feast². Thanksgiving is so important in the US that even the stores and shopping malls are closed that day – and that almost never happens! So what is this holiday exactly, and what makes it so important to Americans?



The First Thanksgiving, by Jennie Augusta Brownscombe (1850-1936)

On Thanksgiving Day, Americans remember the origins³ of their country. The history books tell us that in 1620 a group of 102 Pilgrims⁴ sailed from England to what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts, in a tiny ship called the *Mayflower*. These people were looking for a place to practice their form of the Christian religion after it had become more and more difficult to do this in England. The Pilgrims wanted to be as far from England as possible, and so they sailed to the New World. But when they arrived in November of 1620, after two long months at sea, there were no shops, no streets, no markets to greet them. The passengers from the *Mayflower* had to build their own houses and grow their own food.

The Pilgrims were not prepared for their first winter in the New World. Half of them died of cold, hunger and disease⁵. They needed help or they would *all* die. So they went to the Indians of the area. The Native Americans were friendly to the Pilgrims and taught them how to plant corn and other food. After their first harvest in the New World in the fall of 1621, the Pilgrims invited the Native Americans to a big feast to thank them for their help; now the new colony would have a chance to survive. This was the first Thanksgiving.

Although wild turkey⁶ could be found in the Plymouth area, the Pilgrims probably did not eat turkey at the first Thanksgiving feast. Historians think they ate deer, fish, duck, corn and fruit.

Today, dishes like turkey with stuffing⁷, cranberry⁸ sauce, sweet potatoes⁹, mashed potatoes¹⁰, salad and pumpkin¹¹ pie¹² are typical of a Thanksgiving dinner. There is always *a lot* of food! But food isn't everything. To most Americans, this holiday is a time to be thankful for the important things in life – family, friends, good health. And the airports are *very* busy on Thanksgiving weekend: Many Americans fly long distances just to celebrate the holiday with their families, even if they live on the other side of the country.

Thanksgiving is also a day to relax. In the morning you can watch the traditional Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on TV while the turkey is cooking. Macy's is a big department store in New York City which organizes the colorful parade. At the end of the parade Santa Claus always waves to the children: The day after Thanksgiving is the biggest shopping day of the year in the US. Thanksgiving is also a big day for football fans. There are always lots of games on TV and the men usually spend at least half the day in front of the television.

Thanksgiving wasn't always a holiday on which people had a day off from work. A woman named Sarah Hale wrote letters to the US presidents for forty years. She wanted Thanksgiving to be a *real* national holiday, like Christmas. Then, in 1863, President Lincoln made Thanksgiving a national holiday.

¹harvest ['hɑ:vɪst] = the end of the farm season • ²feast [fi:st] = a large meal • ³origins ['brɪdʒɪnz] = where sth began • ⁴Pilgrims ['pɪlgrɪmz] = a religious group from England • ⁵disease [dɪ'zi:z] = a serious illness • ⁶turkey ['tɜ:ki] = a bird like a chicken, but bigger • ⁷stuffing ['stʌfɪŋ] = sth you fill the turkey with, usually made of bread, nuts and other things • ⁸cranberry ['krænbri] = a red berry • ⁹sweet potato ['swi:t pə'teɪtəʊ] = a kind of potato from the New World • ¹⁰mashed potatoes [mæʃd pə'teɪtəʊz] = *Kartoffelpüree* • ¹¹pumpkin ['pʌmpkɪn] = an orange fruit (not a vegetable!) originally from the New World • ¹²pie [paɪ] = a kind of cake

1 Reading comprehension

How much did you understand? Tick (✓) the correct answer.

1. Why did the Pilgrims come to the New World in 1620?
 - a) They wanted to visit the other Pilgrims who had already built the town of Plymouth.
 - b) They wanted to practice their religion in a place where it was possible to do this.
 - c) They had heard about Thanksgiving and wanted to learn more about it from the Indians.
2. Why is Thanksgiving celebrated in November?
 - a) That is when the Pilgrims decided to go back to England; they had to sail before winter.
 - b) That is when Macy's has always had its big parade.
 - c) November is after the harvest, and the Pilgrims were celebrating their first harvest.
3. How many of the Pilgrims died during their first winter in the New World?
 - a) Just a few of them. b) Half of them. c) All of them.
4. The Native Americans taught the Pilgrims
 - a) how to build a new ship to sail back to England with.
 - b) how to cook a turkey.
 - c) how to plant corn.
5. One of these activities is *not* typical for Thanksgiving Day. Which one?
 - a) have a big meal b) watch football games c) watch the Macy's parade
 - d) go shopping
6. Today, a typical Thanksgiving feast has
 - a) turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie. b) duck, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie. c) turkey burgers, stuffing, sweet potatoes and pumpkin soup.
7. One of these sentences is *not* true. Which one?
 - a) Thanksgiving is special to Americans because it is a day for families to be together.
 - b) Thanksgiving is special to Americans because it is the day America became a free country.
 - c) Thanksgiving is special to Americans because it is a day to be thankful for what one has.

2 Your turn: Your celebrations

- a) Does your family celebrate 'Erntedankfest'?
- b) What holidays/celebrations are there in your family where you eat special foods? (For example, what does your family eat on Christmas Eve?)
- c) Can you think of other holidays that Americans celebrate?

3 Internet task: Other early European settlements in America

The Pilgrims' colony at Plymouth is the one that American students hear the most about in their history books. But it was not the first European colony in the land we now know as the United States of America. These places, for example, were there first:

- St. Augustine • Jamestown • Santa Fe

Find out more about these places on the Internet. (Who founded the towns/colonies, and when? What states are they in today? What can you see there now? Are there any special events?)

I 1. b), 2. c), 3. b), 4. c), 5. d), 6. a), 7. b)

Lösungen:

Recipes

A Thanksgiving meal takes some time, but not too much. Just follow these recipes and you can prepare a turkey with stuffing, make your own sweet potato dish, and then bake your own pumpkin pie for dessert!

Roast turkey with chestnut¹ stuffing

4-5kg turkey
3 tablespoons (tbsp) butter
2 teaspoons (tsp) salt

For stuffing:

200g cooked chestnuts
200ml water
150g butter
4 celery stalks with the greens²
2 onions
3 tbsp parsley
1¾ tsp poultry seasoning³
½ tsp cayenne chili pepper
½-¾ loaf of bread cut into pieces
150g dried⁴ cranberries or raisins
1 egg
Optional: 75g chopped⁵ walnuts
Aluminium foil



A turkey with stuffing is always the highlight of any Thanksgiving Day dinner

1. Wash the turkey and place it into a buttered roasting pan⁶. Make sure you take out anything from the inside of the turkey. It should be empty.
2. Melt the 3 tbsp butter and pour it over the turkey. Then sprinkle the 2 tsp salt over it.
3. For the stuffing chop the celery and onions into small pieces. Melt the 150g butter in a pot and cook the onion and celery until it is tender⁷.
4. Chop the celery greens and the parsley and add them to the pot.
5. Stir in the poultry seasoning, chili pepper and water.
6. Cut the chestnuts, nuts and bread into small pieces.
7. Stir in the egg, chestnuts, cranberries or raisins and nuts.
8. Mix the ingredients⁸ well and fill the turkey with this stuffing right before you bake it. Be careful: you should always stuff a turkey just before you bake it. Don't stuff the turkey and then let it sit around.
9. Cover your turkey with aluminium foil.
10. Bake your turkey at 175°C for 3½–4 hours.
11. After 2 hours, you should baste⁹ your turkey. Take the bird out of the oven and pour the juices that have come out of the turkey over the turkey with a spoon.
12. After 3½ hours you should baste your turkey again and then remove the foil so that your bird can brown.
13. After 4 hours remove your turkey from the oven and let it sit for 15 minutes before you cut it.

¹chestnut [ˈtʃɛsnʌt] = Marone • ²celery stalks with the greens [ˌsɛlri stɔːks wið ðə ˈɡriːnz] = Stangensellerie mit Grün • ³poultry seasoning [ˈpɒʊltəri] = Würzmischung für Geflügelgerichte • ⁴dried [draɪd] = getrocknet • ⁵chopped [ˈtʃɒpt] = cut up into little pieces • ⁶roasting pan [ˈrəʊstɪŋ ˌpæn] = Bräter • ⁷tender [ˈtendə] = soft • ⁸ingredient [ɪnˈɡriːdiənt] = Zutat • ⁹to baste [beɪst] = to take the juice from the turkey and pour it over the turkey again and again

Sweet potato casserole¹⁰

1½ kg sweet potatoes
 80g butter
 1 tbsp brown sugar
 1½ tsp cinnamon¹¹
 ½ tsp salt
 100 ml milk
 150–200g chopped
 canned pineapple¹²
 50ml pineapple juice
 300g marshmallows



A sweet potato casserole with a marshmallow topping

1. Wash the potatoes and then cut them in half. Put them into a pan and cover them with water. Boil¹³ the potatoes until they are soft enough to be mashed¹⁴ with a fork or a potato masher.
2. Drain¹⁵ the potatoes and peel¹⁶ them. Place them in a bowl.
3. Mash the potatoes with a fork or a potato masher.
4. Open the can of pineapple. Save the juice from the pineapple as you drain it.
5. Add the butter, brown sugar, cinnamon, salt, pineapple juice, and milk. Beat¹⁷ the mixture until it is fluffy¹⁸.
6. Stir in the pineapple.
7. Grease a casserole dish¹⁹ with butter. Pour the potato mixture into the casserole dish.
8. Bake the potatoes for 20 minutes at 175°C.
9. After the potatoes are hot, take the casserole dish out of the oven. Place the marshmallows on top of the potato casserole and bake the casserole for another 10 minutes at 150°C. Be careful not to burn the marshmallows. They should simply melt and be slightly browned.

¹⁰ **sweet potato casserole** [ˌswi:t pəˈteɪtəʊ ˈkæsərəʊl] = Süßkartoffelauflauf • ¹¹ **cinnamon** [ˈsɪnəmən] = Zimt • ¹² **pineapple** [ˈpaɪnæpl] = Ananas • ¹³ **to boil** [boɪl] = aufkochen • ¹⁴ **to mash** [mæʃ] = zerstampfen • ¹⁵ **to drain** [dreɪn] = to separate the water or juice from the food • ¹⁶ **to peel** [pi:l] = to take the skin off • ¹⁷ **to beat** [bi:t] = schlagen • ¹⁸ **fluffy** [ˈflʌfi] = locker, leicht
 • ¹⁹ **casserole dish** [ˈkæsərəʊl ˌdɪʃ] = Auflaufform

Pumpkin pie

For pie crust:

150g flour
 ½ tsp salt
 90g shortening²⁰
 3 tbsp water

1. Put the flour and salt into a bowl and stir them together.
2. Add the shortening. You can use a fork to mix the shortening or you can use your fingers to knead²¹ the dough²². It should look like crumbs²³.
3. Add the water and knead the dough until it is a ball.
4. Roll the crust on a floured surface²⁴. The crust should be 3cm larger than the baking pan.
5. Place it in a baking pan (a pie pan if available) and pinch the edges to make them look nice.

For pumpkin filling:

560g mashed cooked pumpkin
 340g condensed milk²⁵
 2 eggs
 130g brown sugar
 ½ tsp cinnamon
 ½ tsp ginger²⁶
 ½ tsp nutmeg²⁷
 ½ tsp salt



Pumpkin pie: the classic Thanksgiving dessert

1. Cut the pumpkin into halves or quarters. Remove the seeds²⁸ and stringy parts²⁹. Cut into large portions and then peel³² them.
2. Add 2cm water to a pot and the pumpkin. Cover your pan with a lid. Cook until tender.
3. Mash the pumpkin with a fork or a potato masher.
4. Put all of your ingredients into a bowl and mix them with a mixer.
5. Pour³⁰ the mixture into the pie crust and bake the pie at 180°C for 50-60 minutes. If you want to know whether your pie is done, do the knife test: Stick³¹ a knife into the center of your pie; if it comes out clean, your pie is done.
6. Let your pie cook for 1 to 2 hours and serve it with whipped cream.

²⁰shortening [ˈʃɔːtnɪŋ] = Butter • ²¹to knead [ni:d] = to press a mixture of flour and water several times with your hands • ²²dough [dəʊ] = Teig • ²³crumbs [krʌmz] = Krümmel • ²⁴floured surface [ˈflaʊəd ˈsɜːfɪs] = mit Mehl bestreute Oberfläche • ²⁵condensed milk [kənˈdɛnst ˈmɪlk] = Kondensmilch • ²⁶ginger [ˈdʒɪndʒə] = Ingwer • ²⁷nutmeg [ˈnʌtmɛɡ] = Muskatnuss • ²⁸seeds [siːdz] = Samen • ²⁹stringy parts [ˈstrɪŋi pa:ts] = faserige Stücke • ³⁰to pour [pɔː] = gießen • ³¹to stick [stɪk] = to put in