

Fondue: History

During the frigid Swiss winters snow covered mountain valleys isolated villages and towns. Consequently fresh food became scarce. Townspeople had to rely upon locally made foods. These were produced by area cheesemakers in the summer months. During winter months these cheeses became dryer and more unpalatable. Out of necessity came a wonderful dish, the fondue. It's named derived from the French word fondue - meaning to melt or to blend. This was exactly what the stale cheese needed to make it more digestible. The cheese was melted in an earthenware pot called the caquelon. Local wines and seasonings were added and even the stale bread tasted delicious after it was swirled in the creamy cheese sauce.



Although communal eating from one pot implied a shortage of cooking equipment and utensils among the poorer peasants, it was also symbolic of community dining. Each person kept their corner of the pot showing consideration and kinship, a Swiss custom still respected to this day.

Entree Fondues like beef fondue were started in the middle ages in France, where area wine makers would send their grape pickers out of the vineyards for long hours at a time. Because food would go bad during the long day, instead they would set up pots in strategic areas of the vineyard and cook their meals as it became convenient during the day, ensuring a traditionally leisurely lunch that could be enjoyed hot and fresh.

Today's fondue traditions include such delicacies as tenderloin of beef, boneless skinless breast of chicken, shrimp, scallops, and even salmon. The diner sits at a pot of either cholesterol free oil or fat free broth as the meats are brought out raw, with an assortment of sauces for dipping. Fondue has become a way for the modern fast food diner to sit back, relax and enjoy hot fresh food at a leisurely pace.

by Chris Como

