

While any honey can be flavored with a sprig of thyme, the real thing is made by honey bees from the nectar of thyme flowers and has an incomparably delicate flavor and aroma. The ancient Greeks also had a taste for thyme honey. Hymettus was overcrowded with beekeepers and their hives and passed a law requiring that apiaries on the mountain be at least three hundred feet apart. From its dense clusters of violet and purple blossoms, honey bees gather nectar and ripen it into one of the world's most fragrant and enticing honeys. When he visits his charges, he dons his beekeeper's hood and a pair of heavy canvas gauntlets and climbs a narrow iron ladder to a parapet only two feet wide. On one side of the parapet, the roof falls away to the teeming streets of the city below. On the other side, a skylight slopes upward, its cracked panes evidence of visitors' struggles to keep their balance while fending off Paucton's angry workers. Monsieur Paucton, a graphic artist who spent his career as a prop man for the opera, studied beekeeping at the Jardin du Luxembourg, where a school has been teaching Parisians about hive management for 150 years. Eighteen years ago, he ordered his first hive, which was delivered to him sealed and full of bees while he was still at work. He had intended to take it to his country place, but somehow the bees never left the opera. Hailing from the Scottish Highlands, bell heather is one of the emblems or plant badges used by Scottish clans. Its honey is dark brown, similar to buckwheat honey in the United States. Like buckwheat honey, it has a taste some people love and others find quite unappealing. The flavor has been described as astringent, penetrating, and tannic, like that imparted to wine by the oak barrels in which it is aged. Reputed to have been a particular favorite of the Marquis de Sade, it has an almost intolerably bitter taste. But It's Green, So How Can It Be Honey? There are a few strange honeys you may come across, called honeydew honeys, that owe their existence to nonflowering plants. These honeys begin life as a sweet, sticky residue called honeydew, excreted by aphids who feed on pine needles. In France, this is called miel de puce, or flea honey, and it is considered a great delicacy. In the Black Forest region of Germany, honeydew from another species of pine is gathered by bees and made into a honey known as forest or fir honey. Another type of honeydew honey is produced in New Zealand by insects living in the crevices of tree bark. These insects secrete vast quantities of processed tree sap, which the ever vigilant honey bees collect and take home to the honey factory. According to New Zealanders, honeydew honey is ideal for marinades and barbecue sauces. In general, honeydew honeys have a very high mineral content and a pungent flavor some have compared to cough medicine. But no one really knows what manna actually was. One theory is that manna came from the honeydew produced by either aphids or scale insects living in the Holy Land. Cooking with Honey Throughout the Ages The only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey. Finally I'll provide tempting, sometimes exotic recipes from around the world, all of which use honey to make a delicious, memorable difference. The fact is, babies under twelve months of age should never be given honey. This is because, in rare cases, honey has been found to contain spores of Clostridium botulinum, the bacterium that causes botulism. Infants are susceptible to this form of poisoning, though it is not a problem after their first birthday. The number of infant botulism cases reported in the United States in a typical year is about one hundred, an extremely low incidence. Of course, honey is completely safe for older children and adults, a healthy food to be enjoyed frequently in all its delicious varieties. King Midas also had a taste for golden honey. Mourners assuaged their grief with appetizers of goat cheese, julienned cucumbers, olive paste, and dried figs. The main course was a stew of spicy lamb and lentils, followed by a caramelized honey and fennel tart. Favorite dishes included cheese sweetened with honey, honey omelettes, curds with honey, mushrooms sautéed in honey, and chilled white wine with honey added. Cook the pears until soft, then mash and mix

with lightly beaten egg yolks and the pepper, cumin, honey, passum, salt, and oil. Beat the egg whites until they come to soft peaks, then fold into pear mixture, put in a casserole, and cook approximately 30 minutes in the oven. Serve with a bit of pepper sprinkled on the top. Garnish with the egg quarters and serve. The banquet is anything but a quiet literary affair, however. Most of the highborn guests have arrived with their retainers, who lurk vigilantly on the sidelines to make sure their masters and mistresses have all they need. Dogs are everywhere underfoot, gnawing the bones that, according to court etiquette, should be thrown on the floor rather than replaced on the serving tray from which they had been originally taken. Rising above the currents of boisterous conversation, the lilting strains of Renaissance music compete with clowns and acrobats leaping and tumbling through the air. The menu might also include exotic foods recently arrived in the Old World from the New World, such as tomatoes, maize, pineapple, chocolate, peanuts, hot peppers, and, just off the boat, turkey. Sugar, in fact, is the culprit that has blackened the teeth of Will's aging Virgin Queen. The spices and honey used in many of the dishes not only add subtle complexities of flavor and aroma, but also mask the stale, slightly rancid taste of some of the food. The fact is, fresh ingredients are not readily available in Tudor England, and the refrigerated cases of modern supermarkets will not appear for hundreds of years. As the evening wears on, the battalion of exhausted servers clears away the empty dishes and platters while the lute players retune their instruments and the minstrels prepare to sing. Later, the Virgin Queen, resplendent in her flaming red wig and stiffly brocaded gown, smiles with pleasure as young Will recites a few lines from his latest work in progress. No goblet is left empty, for the mead flows copiously, as it has for centuries, loosening tongues, inflaming desires, and inspiring whispered plans for midnight trysts. If this description of Elizabeth's spread for Will has whetted your appetite for Tudor fare, give the following recipes a try in your own kitchen at home.

Gyngerbrede Gingerbread was a popular staple throughout medieval and Renaissance Europe. Gingerbread was traditionally boiled rather than baked and was usually stamped with decorative designs. You may wish to express your own creativity with a cookie or butter press while your loaf is still warm and malleable. Add all the spices except the anise seeds and stir to blend. Now add the bread crumbs and mix thoroughly. Cover and cook over medium heat for 15 minutes. The mixture should be thick and moist. Place the gingerbread on a large sheet of waxed paper and mold the dough into small rectangular shapes. Sprinkle the anise seeds on top and press them gently into the dough with the side of a knife. Allow to cool, then cover and refrigerate for 2 hours. Serve the gingerbread at room temperature in thin slices. Keeping the pan on very low heat, stir in the bread crumbs and spices except for the cloves. Let the gingerbread cool, then cut it into small squares to serve. Garnish each square with a whole clove. Not to be outdone by his Chinese rival, Emperor Akbar of India now invites us to luncheon at the magnificent Red Fort in Delhi. All of these are still key ingredients in Indian cuisine, with the addition of honey, an important item in many Persian recipes brought to the subcontinent by the invading Mughals. As our meal with the gracious Akbar begins, we find ourselves reclining on sumptuous pillows in a white marble pavilion inlaid with exquisite floral designs. As we continue our trip through culinary history, we might have occasion to sample a breakfast of yak yogurt with honey in Tibet, grapes dipped in honey in Armenia, Persian pastries made with rosewater and honey, and snow collected in the mountains of western Iran and flavored with honey and fruit juices, the refreshing forerunner of sorbet. Next on our gastronomic itinerary is Turkey. Considered one of the three great cuisines of the world, along with French and Chinese, Turkish cooking is known for the uniqueness of its flavors and the universality of their appeal. Turkish cuisine has influenced cooking throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. It originated in Central Asia, home of the first Turkish invaders of Anatolia, and evolved over the centuries as it came into contact with cuisines of the Mediterranean

cultures that the Turks conquered. In central Turkey, the ancient city of Konya made important contributions to the Turkish diet. It also attracted imaginative cooks who created many of the dishes for which Konya has been famous ever since. When the Seljuk rulers were overthrown by the Ottomans in the late thirteenth century, the culinary arts in Turkey reached new heights. A visit to Topkapi Palace in Istanbul underscores the importance of fine dining to the Ottoman sultans. The huge palace kitchens were housed in several buildings under ten large domes. By the seventeenth century, some thirteen hundred workers were needed to staff the royal kitchens. Hundreds of cooks produced soups, pilafs, kebabs, fish, breads, pastries, candy, and halva to feed as many as ten thousand people a day. The Arab historian Ibn Khaldun wrote, The religion of the King, in time, becomes that of the people. The same clearly holds true for food. But enough about the sultans. Let's get a taste of something very sweet and very Turkish.

Lokmas Honeyed Doughnuts These light, golden fritters are drenched in honey syrup as soon as they emerge from a cauldron of hot oil and are served immediately, dusted with cinnamon. They are a favorite during religious festivals when they are offered to visitors on large brass trays. Turn the heat up to high and cook, uncovered and undisturbed, until the syrup reaches a temperature of 220°F on a candy thermometer, or until it thickens sufficiently to lightly coat a spoon. Pour the syrup into a bowl or heatproof pitcher and set aside to cool. Add the warm water slowly while beating with an electric mixer or balloon whisk until smooth, about 2–3 minutes. Cover with a tea towel and let the mixture rest in a warm place for 1 hour, until it has doubled its size and looks frothy. Add the remaining warm water slowly, while beating, until the mixture becomes smooth, soft, and elastic. Cover with a tea towel and leave in a warm place for about 2 1/2 hours until it rises and almost doubles in size. Allow the oil to become very hot but not smoking in a saucepan or deep fryer, and drop a teaspoon of the mixture in it. Dip the teaspoon into a cup of cold water between each addition to prevent sticking. The lokma will puff up and rise to the surface within seconds. You will have around 30 lokmas. Drench them in the honey syrup, sprinkle with the cinnamon, and serve immediately.

The Venerable Honey Cake From the palaces of the Ottoman Empire, our journey now takes us to the castles and cathedrals of medieval Germany. By the time we reach Nuremberg, we may think we have had our fill of sweets, but we really must make room for lebkuchen, the classical honey cake taken to new heights by the bakers of this ancient, walled city. Of course, people had been making honey cakes for centuries. Honey cakes were worn into battle as talismans and were buried with the pharaohs to accompany them to the next life. The panis mellitus, or honey bread, of the Romans was made of sesame flour soaked in honey after it had been cooked. Sliced and fried, it became panis nauticus, the sailor's biscuit. During their conquests, the Mongols passed their taste for honey cake on to the Turks and Arabs. German pilgrims to the Holy Land acquired a passion for it and copied the recipe at home, where superstitious peasants believed it offered protection against evil spirits.

Lebkuchen Bake well in advance, as this will improve its flavor. When stored in an airtight jar and kept in a cool place, the lebkuchen will become softer. Sift the flour, baking soda, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and cardamom into a mixing bowl. Add the grated lemon zest, ground almonds, and chopped peel. Pour the honey mixture over and knead it into a dough. If the mixture is too runny, add some more flour. Roll out on a floured board and cut into a variety of shapes. Glaze or decorate with icing if desired. After our long journey through the past, we're thoroughly homesick and ready for some real American cooking. The National Honey Board suggests you use honey to bring new life to many traditional favorites. On a torpid summer day, add clover, tupelo, or orange blossom honey to a glass of iced tea. Make herbed honey butter by mixing in 2 teaspoons fresh or dried rosemary, thyme, or lavender. I also like to add 1–2 teaspoons of grated lemon zest. From honey butter, it's a short, easy step to . Then whisk in the mayonnaise and chill in the refrigerator. The honey mustard

dipping sauce can be easily transformed into a zesty salad dressing with the addition of balsamic vinegar, a small amount of olive oil, black pepper, and maybe some chopped chives. In fact, I have a chiltepin plant growing right outside my kitchen window and pluck its fruit often. If you can't stand fire, stay out of my kitchen. First, honey should always be stored at room temperature, never in the refrigerator or freezer. Keep it in your cupboard or pantry. It's natural for honey to change in character after a few months on the shelf. Honey that has clouded or granulated can easily be restored to its original golden color and texture by applying a bit of heat. If heated too much or too fast, honey can scorch or burn, losing its wonderful aroma. Stir the honey frequently and the cloudiness and crystals will disappear. If you are in a hurry, uncap the honey jar and place it in a microwave oven. Make sure the setting is on low or medium at most. Stop and check the honey every thirty seconds or so. Whatever you do, don't boil it. You want it just hot enough to dissolve the crystals. Cooking with honey can be a sticky business. To avoid a mess, use a traditional wooden or plastic honey dipper. It looks like a spoon but has little flanges to prevent the honey from dripping. Better yet, store your honey in a plastic squeeze container. There's almost no dripping with this method. Measuring honey in a glass or plastic measuring cup can present a problem. If your recipe calls for both oil and honey, just measure the oil first and then measure the honey in the same cup. Leaving the honey out at room temperature or gently warming it makes it easier to pour and mix with other ingredients. Cooking with honey can really make a difference in your enjoyment of many foods. It adds to and brings out the flavor of the other ingredients it's mixed with. It keeps breads and cakes especially moist and flavorful and even adds to their normal shelf life. Sugar and honey aren't created equal. Honey is 80 percent sugar and 20 percent water, while cane and beet sugars are 100 percent sugar. As a general rule, when replacing sugar with honey, use half the amount of honey as sugar called for in the recipe. It's also a good idea to add 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda to the recipe for each cup of honey used. This will prevent overbrowning.