



Pancake Day

What in England is now popularly known as Pancake Day was originally a pagan festival. Many ancient cultures saw it as the important time when winter started to change to spring. The Slavs, for example, believed that there was a struggle between Jarilo, the god of springtime, and the evil spirits of the cold and darkness of winter. In order to help Jarilo, they made pancakes. That, at least, is one possible origin.

During the Middle Ages, Pancake Day, or Shrove Tuesday, became the traditional feast day before Ash Wednesday. Making pancakes was a convenient (and tasty!) way of getting rid of rich foods before the forty days of Lent, the period before Easter which for Christians is a time of fasting and therefore giving up sweet foods.

What goes into a pancake? There are four ingredients, each of them in some way symbolic. Eggs refer to the Creation; flour to bread, 'the staff of life'; salt stands for wholesomeness; milk signifies purity.

Pancake races form an important part of the Shrove Tuesday celebrations in the UK. Pancake racing is very funny and entertaining, and might seem straightforward, but it isn't. Everyone runs with a frying pan in which there is a pancake. That part is easy. However, while you are running, you have to toss your pancake all the time and hope that most of it falls back into the pan. If you don't toss your pancake, you will be disqualified.

Probably the oldest pancake race takes place in the town of Olney, in Buckinghamshire, and dates back to 1445. Nowadays, only local housewives can take part, and they have to wear an apron and a hat or scarf. The first woman to arrive at the church, hand her pancake to the bell ringer and be kissed by him, is the winner of the race.

Elsewhere in England even politicians get involved. Members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, together with members of the press, make teams and race against each other to raise money for charity.





Do you want to make your own pancakes? Here's the recipe!

Get a large bowl, then put 140 g of flour, 2 eggs, 200 ml of milk and a pinch of salt into it. Whisk the mixture to make a smooth batter. Leave it for 30 minutes or longer – that's the secret of a good pancake. Then put a very little sunflower (never olive) oil into a frying pan and heat it. Wipe the pan, pour a spoonful of the batter into it and cook the pancake for one minute. Now comes the difficult part. Take the pan, toss the pancake up in the air, making sure that it turns over and comes back down into the pan on its other side. One more minute, then slide the pancake onto a plate, dust with caster sugar and fresh lemon juice and roll it up. The recipe will make 12 pancakes, so enjoy them with your friends and family!

