



Roman food:

Romans normally relied on the traditional food variety of Mediterranean region called 'Mediterranean Triad'. It comprised of Olive oil, barley and wine. Olive oil provided fat and barley much needed proteins. However, the food consumed by wealthy Romans was much more diverse and nutritious. They could afford beef, pork, chicken and fish as well. The poor however, had limited options in addition to the Mediterranean triad. They could add lentils, vegetables, fruits like fig and apple and eggs to their usual diet.

Romans started their day with breakfast early in the morning.

The breakfast included bread, eggs, cheese, milk or wine and perhaps some dried fruits like figs.

The lunch was a simple and a quick meal consumed close to noon. Romans usually had meat, fish, salad, eggs, fruits and wine in lunch.

The most sumptuous meal of the day was the dinner, called '**cena**' by the Romans. Well to do Romans ate a variety of food in dinner. They had meat, pork, fish, vegetables and lots of wine.

In fact Romans had a hearty wine course at the end of the meal. This wine course was called '**comissatio**'.

Food of Rich Romans: Rich Romans spent quite a sum on their food. They had an eye for a good cook and paid a handsome amount to buy a good slave cook. Wealthy Romans diversified their diet by including different food items to their diet. They could easily afford beef, pork, chicken, mutton and fish and also snails. They often arranged banquet meals and invited guests for dinner.

These dinner parties were expensive affairs with lots of exquisite food and high quality wine. These parties often lasted up to eight hours. The Romans did not sit on chairs around the table like we do today. Instead the adults lay on sloping couches situated around a square table. Only small children or slaves were permitted to eat sitting.

The Romans ate mainly with their fingers and so the food was cut into bite size pieces. Slaves would continually wash the guests' hands throughout the dinner. Spoons were used for soup. Rich people used many exotic spices like cinnamon, pepper, clove and nutmeg which were imported all the way from India.

Food of Poor Romans: A vast majority of Roman population was poor and could not afford the exotic and diversified food enjoyed by the wealthy citizens. Poor people relied mainly on the three components of Mediterranean triad (barley, olive oil and wine) and supplemented it with vegetables which were abundantly available and fruits. Some people who owned dairy cattle and chicken also added eggs, milk and cheese to their diet. Poor Romans ate a vegetable stew called 'pottage' with cheap salted bread.

Take Part in a Roman Banquet

The Romans enjoyed banquets. Some of their food seems quite familiar, others might seem a bit strange!

They ate three main meals a day, ientaculum (breakfast), prandium (lunch) and cena (dinner).

You are going to choose some of the food below and enjoy feasting like a Roman. Here are some tips on how to make your banquet truly Roman:

- Food should be cut into bitesize pieces so you can pick it up using your fingers. No cutlery needed at a Roman banquet!
- Lay your food out on a picnic blanket or table cloth. Put cushions on the floor and lie on them. The Romans lay down to eat.

Roman food to choose from:

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| • cheese | • chicken | • peas | • pears |
| • bread | • lamb | • salad | • grapes |
| • olives | • fish | • apples | • honey |



Did You Know?

Some Roman food you might have difficulty getting hold of include dormice, flamingos, garum (a sauce made out of fish guts and blood), giraffe and jellyfish!