

Cooking

The cooks were responsible for providing the meals at the Mission. Each student is to assist in the preparation of a typical Mexican Mission/Rancho meal and to assemble the proper equipment needed.

The Supervisors will build and maintain a fire in the stove (and oven).

Some great resources for period cooking tools, bowls, mugs, and utensils are:
Jas. Townsend and Son, Inc catalog 1-800-338-1665 www.jastown.com
Smoke and Fire Co catalog 1-800-766-5334 www.smoke-fire.com

BACKGROUND

To make this work the parents and teachers both have to want to make the ESP authentic and a real teaching experience.

During the time of the 1820's, at the Mission you would NOT find, candy (Snickers, M&M's etc.) cookies, (Oreo's, Fig Newtons, etc) juice drinks in boxes, gum, ground beef, whole milk, cheese, sour cream, breakfast rolls from Safeway. Such dishes as the breakfast burritos, refritos, corn bread with cheese, enchiladas and tacos are American food brought later, well after the 1840's. Flour tortillas weren't predominately used in California until about the mid-1860's when white flour was more available. Flour was hard to keep fresh for any length of time due to bugs. However, corn could be dried on the cob and kept for longer periods of time without rotting or bug problems. The cattle here were raised primarily for their hides and secondly for their meat. They were not dairy cattle. Chickens were more often used for their meat than their eggs. The Chicken eggs were not usually available to the workers but the upper classes would use them for meals and in desserts.

In the Mission days, meals were simple but nourishing. A typical breakfast was "atole" rather like our oatmeal. Lunch was more atole with bits of meat and vegetables. Dinner was perhaps a hearty stew or roasted meat or fowl. Sweet desserts were uncommon. Breads or tortillas were common.

During the Mission/*Rancho* period, the trade ships were bringing in more items like coffee, teas, and chocolate. But, these items were still scarce and expensive. Not all *ranchos* had livestock that provided milk and there wasn't refrigeration. Therefore, milk and cheese were not common. The dairy products (milk, cheese, and eggs) often caused problems for the digestive tracts of the Native Americans. However, it was mainly the upper classes that consumed these "delights" and had access to them.

The point is to have the school's that do this program be as close to authentic as possible, so what we've done is found some history on the era and old Mexican recipes and Mission recipes. Also a fact that people may not know, but the Indian people had corn before the European's came to this land. The Indians in the southern part of the state traded for corn from the people of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

A good book is, California Rancho Cooking, written by Jacqueline Higuera McMahan. However, she has "restored the rancho recipes for today's kitchen." Which means you'll have to do research to validate the authenticity of using some of those recipes and ingredients at the mission in the 1820-30's.

HISTORY

Starting with the Corn, a sacred plant to the Mexican people and their religion (as far back as the 1500's and the Spanish conquest of the Aztec's). Corn supplied starch, the main source in the people's diet, as well as protein with little fat. Sometimes eaten green off the cob, raw boiled or roasted. Immature kernels were cut or scraped off and made into cakes or added to other dishes. But the Mexican people usually let the corn ripen and then stored the ears in ventilated corncribs.

Stone mortars and pestles were used to grind the kernels into a meal and atole was made (corn gruel). A better way of heating the kernels was to place them in a lime solution until the skins came off. Skinless kernels were called nixtamal; an Aztec word still used today. The nixtamal could be dried and stored, boiled fresh in water. When boiled the kernels swelled up and became soft, (today called Hominy-yellow or white). The nixtamal was then used to make pozole, one of their basic dishes. Also the making of tortillas was made from nixtamal, by mashing them into a masa (a dough).

Known as the "bread of Mexico" the Mexican people used their tortillas as plates, forks and spoons. They would dip their tortillas into stews, tear off pieces to scoop up sauces, the tortilla could be eaten with almost any kind of food that didn't have a lot of liquid.