

# New England Cuisine

**W**HEN YOU HEAR “New England cuisine,” what food comes to mind? Boston baked beans? Vermont cheddar? Clam chowder or lobster rolls? New England is best known for seafood, dairy products, and classic American produce. New England’s geographic features—an ocean coastline, inland farms, forests and mountains, and marshlands—make a huge variety of menu items possible.



## Objective:



Summarize New England cuisine’s influences, common ingredients, and top food choices.

## Key Terms:



baked beans  
Boston cream pie  
chourico  
clam chowder  
clambake  
clams  
cod

cranberries  
johnnycake  
lobster  
lobster roll  
molasses  
New England boiled  
dinner

New England cuisine  
poutine  
roux  
scrod  
side dish  
tourtiere  
triangle trade

## New England Cuisine

### NEW ENGLAND CUISINE INFLUENCES

**New England cuisine** is a cooking style that originated in the northeastern region of the United States. The style is typified by many traditional English cooking methods, including steaming and boiling. New England is a region best known for its seafood, dairy products, and American produce, including apples, blueberries, and cranberries. These ingredients have been

combined to make many of the characteristic meals that are now considered uniquely American cuisine. By sampling a region's food, you can learn more about the history and culture of a region. This is certainly true in New England.

## Location

New England is comprised of six states: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Connecticut, known as the birthplace of the hamburger sandwich, is also known for hasty pudding. Maine is famous for lobster, whether boiled, steamed, or part of a sandwich. The official dessert of Maine is blueberry pie and the official treat of Maine is the whoopie pie. Massachusetts is associated with cod, clams, cranberries, and Boston baked beans. New Hampshire is noted for fish, shellfish, and orange and cranberry cake. Rhode Islanders go for broth-based chowder made with quahog clams. Vermont foods include corn chowder, poutine, and tourtiere. Favorite ingredients in Vermont cuisine are maple syrup and dairy products.

## Topography

New England's features and surface configurations consist of coastline, rolling hills, and mountains. The coastline, extending from southwestern Connecticut to northeastern Maine, includes lakes, hills, swamps, and sandy beaches. Located inland are mountains, forests, and farmland. The wide variety of geographical features provides New England with fresh ingredients and great culinary opportunities.

## The Coast

Fresh seafood is always available in New England. As one of the primary components of the region's cuisine, seafood is found in many specialties across the Northeast. The peninsula of Maine, in the far northeastern corner of the United States, is the largest producer of lobster in the nation. Clams are another specialty of New England as well as fresh fish, including cod and scrod. **Scrod** is a young fish (cod or haddock), split and boned for cooking. Marshy areas, particularly in Massachusetts, are perfect for growing cranberries.



**FIGURE 1.** This is an aerial view of fishing boats anchored in Perkins Cove, on the coast of Maine south of Portland.

## Inland

A distance from the coastline, farmers raise regional produce, that includes apples, potatoes, blueberries, and cranberries. Forest areas provide maple syrup tapped from the maple trees.

Dairy farming is extensive and is the major source of agricultural income, particularly in Vermont. Vermont is noted for the artisanal cheese that is made there, including white cheddar. Noted dairy products made inland are Ben & Jerry's ice cream, Klondike bars, Good Humor ice cream treats,

and Talenti gelato. Produce and dairy foods are some of New England's most popular items and are used in a variety of dishes throughout the region.



**FIGURE 2.** New England's abundance of dairy products and fresh fruits make gelatos, such as those pictured here, possible. What flavor gelato would you invent?

## History

The earliest settlers in New England were the Puritans, who arrived from England in the early 1600's. After adapting to their new environment, these pilgrims harvested native fruits, including blueberries and cranberries. These fruits later became a part of a traditional Thanksgiving dinner. Thanksgiving dinner originated in New England. The holiday feast dates back to November 1621 in Plymouth, Massachusetts, where popular dishes and ingredients were served: cranberries, roasted turkey, pies, johnnycake, and more. Potatoes were established as the region's principal starch. Rather than frying food, Puritans typically baked foods, such as turkey, beans, and pies. England's early settlers prepared clam chowder using fish, salt pork, and biscuits. The first printed fish chowder recipe dates back to 1751.

Flavors and tastes from the Caribbean, Ireland, Portugal, and Canada had enormous influence on the cuisine of the Northeast. The culinary traditions of New England are both unique and highly diverse, scattered with influences of different cultures throughout American history.



**FIGURE 3.** The first Thanksgiving feast between colonists and natives took place in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1621.



## Native Americans

Native American influences are very strong in New England. Many well-known “Yankee” dishes are a combination of Puritan and Native American influences. Maple syrup was developed long before the arrival of the colonists. One of the most popular dishes in the region is johnnycake. **Johnnycake** is a flatbread made of cornmeal. Johnnycake was adapted from Native Americans. Native Americans taught pilgrims how to grind and use corn for eating. American Indians taught early colonists to cook dried beans, which led to numerous versions of today’s “Boston Baked Beans.” This dish evolved from slow-cooking beans with maple sugar and bear fat to baked beans with salt pork and molasses. Puritans traditionally served baked beans on Saturday nights in Colonial times. [See “A Brief History of Baked Beans,” for more information about serving baked beans on Saturday night at <http://brieffood.com/a-brief-history-of-baked-beans/>.]

## Ireland

It was the Irish who brought the vastly popular potato to the region. The New England boiled dinner is a one-pot meal native to the region. This dish is representative of the Irish influence and resembles today’s traditional St. Patrick’s Day fare.

## Caribbean

Many common ingredients, such as molasses and rum, date back to the 18th and 19th centuries when New England was involved in the triangle trade. **Triangle trade** is a historical term for trade among three ports or regions. A well-known trade triangle occurred between West Africa, Caribbean colonies, and American colonies. Ships from African ports carried slaves to Caribbean sugar plantations. In the Caribbean, molasses was purchased and brought to New England for the production of rum and for use in food dishes. **Molasses** is a thick syrup, brown to black in color, separated from raw sugar when the sugar is processed. Ships then carried rum and other goods (corn, flax, tobacco, timber, cotton, fur, etc.) to sell in European ports on the way back to Africa.

## Portugal

Portugal introduced chourico to New England. **Chourico** is a sausage made with pork shoulder, paprika, garlic, red wine, salt, and black pepper. This sausage can be a main course but it is often served on sandwiches, in stews, and with breakfast foods.

## Canada

French-Canadians introduced tourtiere. **Tourtiere** is a double-cruste meat pie, filled with pork, sometimes mixed with game, potatoes, onions, and spice filling. It is popularly served around Christmas time. A modern food that originated in Canada is poutine. **Poutine** is a hearty dish of French fries, fresh cheese curds, and brown gravy.

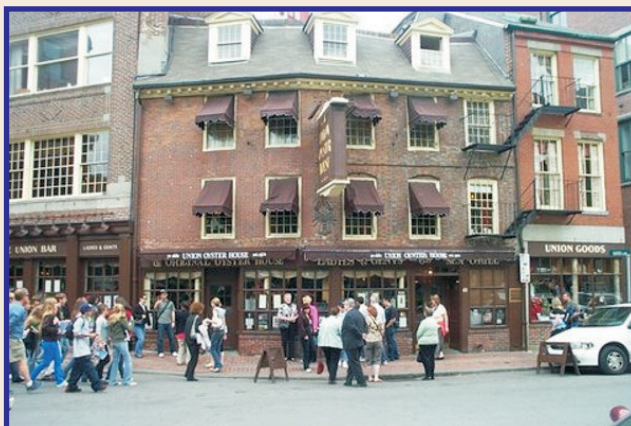


## BROADENING AWARENESS...

### AMAZING ASPECTS: Culture and Cuisine

When the Americas were colonized, the Pilgrims encountered New World foods that they had not used in Europe. Other foreign countries were affected by the immigration of neighboring cultures and the expansion of nations. Each event in history altered local cuisines. As cultures combined, food combinations were fused and new fusion cuisines developed. Find out more about the cultures and traditions that influenced New England. Read the articles at

<https://www.escoffier.edu/blog/culinary-arts/what-sets-new-england-cuisine-apart/> and <https://www.thespruce.com/new-englands-best-dishes-4035280>.



The Union Oyster House, open in Boston, MA since 1826, is the oldest continuously operating restaurant in the United States. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>)

### Culture

Much of the New England food culture is defined by history and tradition. Regional cooks developed the use of ingredients that became the food culture present in New England today. To develop as a chef, it helps if you understand New England's key ingredients and cultural cuisine. Modern cooks still prepare johnnycake (a Native American cornbread variation) and baked beans (a variation of the way Native Americans cooked dried beans). Clambakes (a Native American tradition in MA, ME, CT) are as popular as ever. Today, hard or soft clams are used, along with the salt pork, and biscuits have been replaced with "chowder crackers." Of course, nothing is more American than apple pie (brought to New England by the Puritans).

## NEW ENGLAND INGREDIENTS AND CUISINE

New England cuisine, a cooking style that originated in the northeastern region of the United States, incorporates many old English cooking methods, including steaming and boiling. Traditional foods remain strong menu items in this region and many of the dishes popular to New England are well known across the country. Both the marine and inland areas of New England have food traditions that have influenced other areas of the country. These foods have become staples in the diet of north easterners.

### Spices and Herbs

New England cuisine is known for its limited use of spices and herbs. Black pepper, parsley, and sage are commonly used. Nutmeg, a Caribbean spice, is often featured in baked goods.

## Dairy

Cream is widely used in New England dishes, due to the abundance of dairy in the region. Cheddar cheese is popular and plentiful, particularly in Vermont. Vermont is known for its dairy and dairy products, especially cheddar cheeses and ice creams. Vermont cheddar is considered the highest quality cheddar in the country. It is a sharp, aged white cheese, unlike many other varieties of cheddar that are orange in color.

## Seafood

Early settlers quickly made use of the abundance that the Atlantic Ocean provided. Clams, lobster, and cod became common fare at a New England table.

### Clams

**Clams** are bivalve mollusks, popular for their chewy texture and salty, ocean taste. Their edible body parts are encapsulated in two equally sized shells that open and close. Clams are prepared in a variety of ways: raw, boiled, stewed, steamed, fried, etc. Steaming is the most common method of cooking clams: they are quickly boiled in water and aromatic vegetables until they pop open. The broth may be then used as a base for a rich clam chowder. Clams are used in the popular New England clam bake. A **clam-bake** is a picnic at which clams and other seafood, along with corn and potatoes, are baked over hot stones under a covering of seaweed. **Clam chowder** is a roux-based thick soup that contains salted meat, potatoes, onions, and heavy cream. **Roux** is a cooked mixture of flour and fat, used to thicken soups and sauces. The white color of traditional New England clam chowder makes it different from other chowder types. Manhattan clam chowder is a tomato-based soup. Rhode Island clam chowder is a broth-based soup.



**FIGURE 4.** Clams, other seafood, and vegetables are baked with seaweed in seawater over hot stones. A clam bake is not just a staple of New England cuisine. It is also a social affair.

### Lobster

**Lobster** is an edible marine crustacean known for a rich, subtle, slightly sweet flavor. Lobsters have stalked eyes, a pair of large claws, and a long abdomen. With the abundance of lobster in Maine, this fresh seafood is used in a variety of dishes, including the popular lobster



roll. A **lobster roll** is a sandwich that consists of a grilled, hotdog-style bun filled with cooked, chilled, lobster meat. The lobster meat is often mixed with a simple mayonnaise dressing. Lobster rolls are regularly found at “lobster shacks” around the state.

## Cod

**Cod** is a white, mild-tasting saltwater fish. Cod is sometimes called “New England’s fish.” A Massachusetts peninsula was named Cape Cod because of the abundance of cod that was caught off its shore. Cod and scrod (young cod) can be baked, broiled, poached, and fried.



**FIGURE 5.** The most popular variety of lobster is the Maine lobster. Its front claws contain a good amount of meat. The other meat-rich portion is the tail. A lobster roll is lobster meat in a simple mayonnaise dressing, served on a soft frankfurter-type roll.

## Corned Beef or Brisket

**New England boiled dinner** is a one-pot meal consisting of corned beef or plain brisket, cabbage, and potatoes or other root vegetables, that simmers for several hours until the meat is tender. The dish is typically served with horseradish or mustard. Although this is the traditional nature of New England boiled dinner, several variations are available.

## Side Dishes

A **side dish** is any food that accompanies the main course of a meal.

## Baked Beans

**Baked beans** are sweetened and stewed navy beans, usually flavored with bacon or salt pork. Baked beans are another special dish that originated from New England. There are Boston and Maine versions. Boston baked beans are sweetened with molasses. In Maine, maple syrup is used to sweeten baked beans (due to the large production of syrup in this far northern region).

## Johnnycake

Johnnycake is commonly served as a side dish (often with baked beans). These corncakes (also known as journey cakes) were a staple during the Civil War because they were quick to make and easy to transport.

## Cranberries

**Cranberries** are tart, shiny, scarlet fruits, grown primarily in Massachusetts. Because the peak time to harvest cranberries is in October, this fruit has traditionally played a big role in holiday cooking. However, cranberries can be eaten any time of the year. Cranberries may be purchased fresh, dried, or frozen. Cranberries are used to make sauces and jellies, chutneys, pies, and cobblers. They may serve as an ingredient in a meat dish, as well as an ingredient in a baked good. They may be eaten on their own, thrown into a salad or trail mix, or may accompany a morning breakfast cereal. This sour, little fruit is versatile.

## Desserts

Pies and cobblers are popular in New England, with apple, blueberry, and cranberry varieties being particular favorites. **Boston cream pie** is a dessert consisting of two yellow sponge cake layers filled with a vanilla custard, and topped with a chocolate glaze. Despite its name, Boston cream pie is a cake, not a pie.

## Summary:



New England is a region of the U.S. best known for its seafood, dairy products, and classic American produce: apples, blueberries, and cranberries. For a chef or cook, New England's geographic location—an ocean coastline, inland farms, forests and mountains, and marshlands—make a huge variety of menu items possible. Classic New England foods and cuisine include Vermont cheddar cheese, maple syrup, Boston baked beans, clam chowder, clambakes, and lobster rolls. The classic regional cuisine of New England is often considered to be uniquely American.

## Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What makes New England's food products so special to chefs and cooks?
2. Describe the role New England's geography plays in its cuisine.
3. Differentiate between traditional, Manhattan, and Rhode Island clam chowder.
4. What did Native Americans teach the first New Englanders about cooking?
5. How did the Puritans influence New England cuisine?

## Expanding Your Knowledge:



Aside from the region's popular food items and dishes known around the country, New England has a larger presence in the culinary realm. An e-unit cannot adequately portray all that New England cuisine has to offer you. Research regional



food festivals and other major culinary events to get a feel for the modern role that New England plays in the U.S. culinary experience. Begin your research using the Web Links. Two of the videos illustrate how to build a clambake and how to eat a lobster like a real New Englander.

## Web Links:

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### **Authentic Maine Lobster Clam Bake**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWhHSoUYMWE>

### **How to Eat a Lobster**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BCH4u9h\\_yg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BCH4u9h_yg)

### **New England Food and Culinary Experiences**

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLenab1e6lsrBCdM8oyVeHGJg1\\_bN-vGpw](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLenab1e6lsrBCdM8oyVeHGJg1_bN-vGpw)

### **New England Major Events and Festivals**

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLenab1e6lsrDtfIGMzRxJV5VcDgX0xFoo>

### **New England States Playlist**

<https://www.youtube.com/user/NewEnglandVisit/playlists>