

What's for Breakfast? Syllabus for Summer 2026

Location: In-person at MAB2

Day/Time: Thursdays, 10:45-12:15

Instructor: Susan Merritt; susanmerritt99@gmail.com

Overview: Imagine that we're sitting down to a breakfast of eggs topped with salt and pepper, potatoes with onions and garlic cooked in olive oil, toast with butter, and tea with sugar. This course will focus on how these ten ingredients came to be on our plates. We'll examine the long and winding history of these food items, many of which changed the course of human history!

Schedule:

| Date | Subject | One-Sentence Highlight |
|------|-----------------|--|
| 5/28 | Potatoes | From the Incan Empire to Ireland, how the humble potato has saved many millions of people from starvation |
| 6/4 | Eggs | Eggs are an ancient food; humans have been eating eggs since the literal beginning of humankind ... and earlier |
| 6/11 | Bread | There is nothing more basic than the demand for bread; riots & revolutions have erupted from its scarcity |
| 6/18 | Butter | Remember the other Great War: butter vs. margarine? |
| 6/25 | Tea | 250 years ago, Boston Harbor became a big tea cup, and the American colonies were on their way to revolution |
| 7/2 | Sugar | Millions of enslaved Africans toiled in the cane fields, chained for life to the English zest for sugared tea |
| 7/9 | Olive Oil | 8000 years ago, even before written language, the olive oil industry had already begun around the Mediterranean |
| 7/16 | Salt | Since salt is necessary for life; controlling salt production and consumption is power, and taxing it brings wealth |
| 7/23 | Onions & Garlic | Ancient Romans had more than 61 medicinal uses for garlic and 100 uses for onions (including dog bites, STDs) |
| 7/30 | Pepper | Black pepper's stubborn inability to grow outside tropical soils is one reason for its profound impact on word history |