

What Am I? – Celebrating a mystery thing



Print a “What Am I?” [sign](#). Add a clue in the text box, print, and post on your bulletin board. Post a different clue every day or so and see who can identify the mystery item. Then plan a “What Am I?” discussion and other related activities.

Do you know what I am? Here are some clues:

1. I help make a type of food that has roots tracing back to ancient Greece.
2. I have a rich history.
3. I have many bumps and ridges.
4. Some believe the specific food I make might have been created by the Dutch in the 16th and 17th centuries.
5. The way I was constructed used to be considered an art form by some.
6. I was typically used by the rich, but nowadays you would find me in any family home.
7. My popularity soared during the Victorian era—people would even use me at parties!
8. Modern versions of me were patented in the early 20th century but wouldn't catch on in the mainstream for two decades or so.
9. I used to be constructed of cast iron mainly.
10. I'm fairly simple to use; even the most novice cook could operate me.
11. Don't touch me when I'm on—I'm very hot!
12. My development in the modern age coincided with the electrification of American homes.
13. Thomas J. Stackbeck secured the first patent for an electric version of me in 1911.
14. My innovation eliminated the need for a dangerous open flame to be used in the kitchen.
15. I'm a somewhat niche appliance, being used to make only one type of dish.
16. I am a well-known kitchen gadget.
17. American breakfast culture wouldn't be the same without me.

18. You could say that I create a type of bread.
19. I help create sweet breakfast treats.
20. These breakfast treats can have all kinds of toppings on them!
21. Entire restaurants have been created around the food I make.
22. Maple syrup goes great with what I deliver.
23. My pattern helps give the foods I make ample crevices for butter, syrup, and other toppings to sit.
24. I may be an iron, but don't use me on your clothes.
25. I don't make pancakes, but many a pancake mix has been used with me.

Can you guess what I am? That's right—I'm a waffle iron!



Print a copy of the [pictures](#) to pass around as you share and discuss the information with your group.

Introduction: The Wonderful World of Waffle Irons

The waffle iron has become a breakfast superstar, turning out a morning staple for countless households—perfectly golden, crispy waffles. The history and evolution of the waffle iron, from its humble beginnings to its modern iterations, may intrigue you more than you know. Let's embark on a journey through time and culinary traditions as we uncover the enduring appeal of this kitchen companion. So, fasten your apron strings and get ready to delve into the wonderful world of waffle irons.

The Origin of a Breakfast Classic

The waffle iron, like many kitchen marvels, has a rich history that stretches back centuries. Its story begins with the ancient Greeks, who cooked flat cakes between metal plates over open flames. While these early creations were a far cry from the waffles we know today, they were the precursor to the modern waffle iron.

By the Middle Ages, Europeans had developed the wafer iron, a device with plates intricately carved with various patterns and designs. These wafers were thin and crisp, more like today's cookies than the fluffy waffles we associate with breakfast. Nevertheless, they were a popular treat at fairs and festivals across the continent.

It wasn't until the 17th century that a waffle resembling the ones we eat today came to fruition. At that time, Dutch settlers brought their version of the waffle, known as "wafel" or "wafele" to North America. It was these early American waffles that were thicker and heartier than their European counterparts, thanks to the use of leavening agents like yeast or pearl ash.

Discussion Starters

- In what ways do you think cultural influences and immigration have shaped cuisine in different regions of the United States?
- Do you know of any other foods or dishes that have ancient origins and have evolved into modern favorites? (Examples: pizza, pasta, sausages, hummus, etc.)

Waffle Irons: A Victorian Kitchen Marvel

The Victorian era was a time of refinement. This cultural shift extended to the culinary world, and waffles were no exception. The popularity of waffles in the United States had steadily risen throughout the 19th century, but it was during the Victorian era that waffle irons as we know them today truly came into being.

These waffle irons were a testament to the craftsmanship of the time. Typically made of durable cast iron, they featured two hinged plates intricately designed to create the iconic waffle grid pattern. The cast iron construction allowed for even heat distribution, ensuring that each waffle would be cooked to perfection. Cooks would skillfully ladle the batter onto one of the plates, close the iron, and place it over the stove or an open flame, often on a hearth or stovetop. The combination of the waffle iron's design and the skill of the cook resulted in the creation of fluffy, golden-brown waffles.



What set these Victorian waffle irons apart was not just their practicality but their aesthetic appeal. Craftsmen of the era took great pride in their work, and this was evident in the intricate patterns adorning the waffle iron plates. Handles were not just utilitarian; they were often ornate and embellished with decorative elements. These irons were more than kitchen tools; they were objects of art, displayed with pride in many American kitchens.

The artistry of these waffle irons extended to the plates themselves. Elaborate designs featuring floral motifs, geometric patterns, and even whimsical shapes like hearts and animals adorned the cooking surfaces. These patterns not only added visual appeal to the waffles but also contributed to their unique texture, creating pockets for butter, syrup, and toppings to nestle into.

The Victorian era also saw the rise of social gatherings centered around food, and waffle parties became all the rage. These gatherings, reminiscent of today's brunches, were occasions for people to come together and enjoy freshly baked waffles. Cooks would whip up batches of waffle batter, and guests could customize their waffles with an array of sweet and savory toppings. It was during these waffle parties that the versatility of waffles truly shone. While many enjoyed waffles drizzled with maple syrup, others explored creative options like adding fruits, whipped cream, nuts, or even savory ingredients like cheese and bacon. The waffle became a canvas for culinary experimentation and expression, a tradition that continues to this day.

Discussion Starters

- Waffle parties were legitimate social gatherings in the Victorian era. Have you ever hosted or attended a gathering in which the theme was a certain type of food? What kinds of food were offered?
- What foods do you enjoy that are often served at brunch?
- How do you think the Victorian era's emphasis on hospitality and culinary artistry influenced the way we enjoy similar food gatherings today?

The Dawn of Electric Waffle Irons

While the cast-iron waffle irons of the Victorian era were remarkable, they required a level of attention and culinary skill that made waffle-making an art form. The introduction of the electric waffle iron marked a significant turning point, democratizing the joy of waffle preparation and making it accessible to a broader audience.

At the dawn of the 20th century, American Thomas J. Stackbeck, a General Electric employee, secured a patent for the first electric waffle iron in 1911. However, it wasn't until the '30s that these innovative devices began to gain popularity and find their way into American kitchens. What set these electric waffle irons apart from their predecessors was the inclusion of built-in heating elements. This advancement eliminated the need for an open flame or stovetop, ensuring that the cooking temperature remained consistent and even. With the flip of a switch, home cooks could now achieve perfectly cooked waffles without the intricate timing and manual adjustments required by the older cast-iron models.

As the 20th century progressed, electric waffle irons continued to evolve. They became more affordable, ensuring that families of various income levels could enjoy the delights of homemade waffles. Waffle houses and diners also embraced the electric waffle iron, recognizing the widespread love for these fluffy breakfast treats. They became iconic establishments, known for serving up a variety of waffle-based dishes, from classic buttermilk waffles with syrup to inventive creations like chicken and waffles.



In essence, the electric waffle iron not only simplified the process of making waffles but also played a significant role in shaping American breakfast culture. It made the joy of waffle-making accessible to all, from the seasoned home chef to the novice cook, and contributed to the enduring popularity of this beloved breakfast classic.

Discussion Starters

- How do you think the introduction of electric appliances like the waffle iron contributed to the modernization of American homes in the early 20th century? Are there other kitchen gadgets that had a similar impact?
- Sunday mornings and homemade waffles often go hand in hand. Do you have any cherished family traditions or rituals related to breakfast or brunch? How does food play a role in bringing loved ones together in your family?
- Waffles are a staple of American breakfast cuisine. What's your favorite waffle dish or topping combination? What are some toppings or ingredients that you might like to try? Do you prefer sweet or savory options?

Can You Guess?

Below are eight riddles that describe a certain kitchen appliance or utensil that may be used to prepare breakfast. Read each riddle aloud and have participants try to guess what is being described.

1. In the morning light, it whirls with might,
Transforming fruits to a drink just right.
Berries and greens, a tropical scene.
What is it that turns things to liquid cuisine?

Answer: Blender

2. In the bowl where ingredients mix,
It dances and twirls as you turn your wrist.
What could it be, with wires that twist,
That helps make your pancakes fluffy like this?

Answer: Whisk

3. First things first, in goes the bread,
Then it warms things up by glowing red.
DING! It shouts when breakfast's near.
What's this appliance that we hold dear?

Answer: Toaster

4. Inside its belly, things stay cool.
A marvel, a wonder, the handiest tool.
Filled with food and drink and not with rocks,
What do we call this helpful box?

Answer: Refrigerator

5. Long and round, it paves the way.
Pies and pastries, come what may!
Flattening dough without a fret,
What tool is this, care to bet?

Answer: Rolling pin

6. Doesn't scorch, but gives off heat,
For cakes to rise and cookies sweet.
Don't burn yourself! You'll need a mitt.
Where is this place where dishes fit?

Answer: Oven

7. This holds treasures both hot and sweet,
Aromatic wonders that flavor what you eat.
Not a bookshelf, but holds many a stack,
What is it that keeps this collection intact?

Answer: Spice rack

8. Not a teacher, but it does grade,
Turning blocks to shreds with each little blade.
With holes and handle, it does matter,
What's this tool that makes cheese scatter?

Answer: Grater

What's the Waffle?

What type of waffle is described?

1. Originally called a "froffle," this type of waffle is kept in the freezer until ready for use.
- A. Toaster waffle
 - B. Pizzelle
 - C. American waffle

Answer: A. Toaster waffle. Americans and Canadians will probably call these by a common brand name, Eggo waffles.

2. This type of waffle is big and rectangular and usually served for dessert. It is crispy on the outside and fluffy inside. Its deep pockets hold fruit, whipped cream, or other delicious sweetness.
- A. American waffle
 - B. Liege waffle
 - C. Brussels waffle

Answer: C. Brussels waffle. Not to be confused with the Belgian waffle, the Brussels waffle is made with yeast rather than baking powder.

3. Another name for this waffle is "bubble waffle." Instead of pockets, this waffle has spherical bubbles that stick out, making it easy to break off and snack on.
- A. Pizzelle
 - B. Hong Kong egg waffle
 - C. Savory waffle

Answer: B. Hong Kong egg waffle. A popular street food in Hong Kong and Macau, it can be stuffed with sweet or savory fillings or enjoyed plain.

4. This type of waffle is typically made with baking powder and is thinner and has much smaller pockets than the Brussels waffles. They come in all shapes and sizes and are topped with sweet and savory toppings alike, although the most popular toppings are simply butter and maple syrup.
- A. American waffle
 - B. Stroopwafel
 - C. Liege waffle

Answer: A. American waffle. A particularly savory creation involving the American waffle is chicken and waffles, a hearty dish with its beginnings in Pennsylvania Dutch country in the 1600s.

5. This small waffle is made from a dense, yeast-based brioche dough and has a sweet coating on the outside that keeps it from becoming soggy once toppings are added.
- A. Liège waffle
 - B. Paris waffle
 - C. Belgian waffle

Answer: A. Liège waffle. Liège waffles, aka pearl sugar waffles, are frequently sold as handheld desserts.

6. This is a crisp waffle cookie.
- A. Pizzelle
 - B. Stroopwafel
 - C. Winter waffle

Answer: A. Pizzelle. Pizzelles are a common Christmas cookie made in a decorative waffle iron. They are often flavored with anise or sprinkled with sugar.

7. You might put your ice cream in one of these.
- A. Waffle cone
 - B. Hong Kong egg waffle
 - C. Savory waffle

Answer: A. Waffle cone. More flavorful than a cake cone or sugar cone, the waffle cone is an American favorite.

8. This Norwegian waffle whose name translates to “bent cake” is a delicate, rolled cookie.
- A. Stroopwafel
 - B. Croffle
 - C. Krumkake

Answer: C. Krumkake. The key “ingredient” for making a krumkake is the iron.

9. This popular and delicious cookie is simply a sandwich made with two very thin waffle cookies with a layer of ooey-goey caramel in between.
- A. Potato waffle
 - B. Belgian waffle
 - C. Stroopwafel

Answer: C. Stroopwafel. The Dutch word *stroopwafel* means “syrup waffle.”

10. This waffle is a cross between a croissant and a waffle.
- A. Paris waffle
 - B. Croffle
 - C. Mochi waffle

Answer: B. Croffle. These unusual waffles had their start in Korea and are made using croissant dough in a waffle maker. They are tricky to make and sometimes include other ingredients such as cheese or corn in the dough.

Additional Activities

1. Check out the images of vintage waffle irons in this [article from the Cast Iron Collector website](#). (Click on the camera icons throughout the article to see the different designs.)
 2. Learn a bit more about the [history of the waffle](#) (3:23) from this video.
 3. Watch this YouTube [video](#) (11:54) by Townsends in which the creator talks about the history of waffles and how they might have been made in the 18th century.
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