

Harry Potter and the Delectable Dessert:
A Cultural Culinary Analysis of Treacle Tart in the *Harry Potter* Series

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American Eating: Succotash, Spam, and Cultures of Food

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He felt it was a better use of his time to eat his way steadily through his steak and kidney pie, then a large plateful of his favorite treacle tart.
- Harry thought, tuning out Ron and Hermione's bickering.
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, J. K. Rowling

In 2017, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series reached a literary milestone second to the Bible, selling over 500 million series copies and becoming the world's second-best-selling book and fastest-selling series of all time (Wizarding World, Bloomsbury). First published in 1997, the novels have become a fantastical escape for readers of all ages, as the series chronicles an adolescent boy's newly discovered wizarding abilities, alongside his trials and triumphs of being the most famed wizard ever to be born. Thus, "The boy who lived" (Rowling, 1997) has grown into the globe's most sought-after experience; cerebrally and physically. While the fandom has the freedom to crack open their choice between one of seven novels, they also have the opportunity to taste the series by means of the innumerable recipes and *Harry Potter* eats dished around the globe. Hogwarts' ability to provide never-ending platefuls of food for their students and staff comically cause great appetites for readers who merely ingest the text and not the food itself; tantalizing fans to create their own versions of these magicked dishes for themselves. This distinctive palate-craving circumstance is one that sets the series aside from otherworldly phenomena, allowing the fanbase to purchase such trademarked edibles or create their own recipe when seeking the ultimate Potter experience. However, one Potter-themed treat reigns supreme in the wizarding and Muggle realm, creating an essence of desire around Harry's favorite dish: treacle tart. This traditional British dessert launched into worldwide popularity once it was stated this classic dish is Harry's comfort meal; giving way to new significance for

this delectable dessert. What is treacle tart and how did the *Harry Potter* series seemingly take this timeworn British pudding and globalize it into a notable *Harry Potter* recipe? Withal, Potter enthusiasts from across the globe have evolved into wizarding chefs — enabling fandom fun through cultural recipes and permitting fans to turn the fantasy into (plated) reality!

Harry Potter devotees are privy to the whereabouts of global Potter recipes. However, if one does not know where to begin, the *Unofficial Harry Potter Cookbook* is a solid place to commence one’s magical cooking journey. Published in 2010, author Dinah Bucholz takes fans on an epic culinary adventure; including, but certainly not limited to, treacle tart. “Harry loves anything treacle. He’s always reaching for the treacle tart,” the dessert page reads, notifying fans that such treacle recipes found within the book are bound to be a hit with Harry himself (p.73).



Figure 1. Treacle Tart shown in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. 2009.

Overtly sweet, the main ingredient for the tart is golden syrup, giving the dish a chewy center enwrapped with a buttery crust and finished off with a zest of lemon to cut the sweetness down just a bit (Figure 1). The closest thing the United States has to treacle tart (and its consistency) is pecan pie, yet, this dessert is much less sweet than treacle tart. In general, treacle has been a staple in British cuisine since the nineteenth century, as British Food History contests

Mary Jewry was the first to provide a recipe for this well-known pastry in 1879 (“Treacle Tart British Food History,” 2012). Because of its notoriety, it’s no surprise J. K. Rowling chose to insert this frequently ordered dessert into the *Harry Potter*

series; offering worldly fans another in-depth look into traditional United Kingdom culture through the lens of food.

While treacle tart may not wholly be linked to the *Harry Potter* series, its rise in popularity, given the culture surrounding the fandom, has seen an influx in Potter-themed recipes since the novels and films debuted. Considering the Potterverse is globally renowned and continues to be a desirable lived-experience, treacle tart is yet another prime example of how the society encompassing the series draws its own consciousness from the media of which the subculture consumes. Realistically speaking, one cannot label a moment in time for the Potter experience merely because the experience continues to thrive by means of the recent *Harry Potter* spin-offs such as *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, *The Cursed Child*, et cetera. Research by Mintz and Du Bois (2002), proclaimed in *The Anthropology of Food and Eating*, suggests, “Food is used to reenact venerated stories,” within a community, a topic scholars can link between the eats within the *Harry Potter* series and how the fandom takes such tales and turns them into reality (p. 107). By doing so, the pages in the book come to life by means of a thrice shared culture — uniting the stories through the books, the individual, and the overarching *Harry Potter* community. In this case, the food dished throughout the series becomes a vessel for shared ideas between J. K. Rowling’s original thoughts and the fanbase’s creativity toward bringing such words to a plate. Due to this cultural artistry, the customs surrounding the *Harry Potter* community continue to flourish as new recipes churn with every contemporary piece of media unveiled to the public.

Alternatively, the manifold *Harry Potter* treacle tart recipes demonstrate only a slice of the cultural history depicted with this dish. Known as Harry's go-to fare, the dessert seems to pop up during his happiest and roughest times; the tart being his sole comfort food throughout the series. By merely knowing Harry frequently ingested this saccharine treat, the greater *Harry Potter* community has been trained to view this venerable dish as an important edible in his life, adding yet another layer to this culinary chronicle. Due to this routinely written detail, the fandom has been trained to understand Harry's history with the tart, seemingly turning a mega fan's comfort food into treacle by the end of the novels! Moreover, the history between Harry and treacle tart proves to be so much more than sweet pie; it's Harry's home-away-from-home via his tastebuds — an ingestible moment that brings tranquility to a boy who lives anything but a soothing life. If treacle tart has taught the fandom one thing, it's that food can be an escape from even the greatest war of worlds and such knowledge has created a bonding experience between Harry and his fans since the series inception.

To conclude, the *Harry Potter* series has forever engrained itself in fan-based culinary cuisine; serving the subculture large portions of eats such as Hagrid's savory rock cakes, Harry's longed-for treacle tart, and Dumbledore's famous lemon drops. Whether the recipes are completely creative or based upon real-world yummys, the *Harry Potter* series and its unparalleled global prosperity have branded themselves in the minds of at-home cooks yearning for a literal bite of Potter. Because of this truly unique cooking concept, the *Harry Potter* fanbase has evermore reformed a sector of fandom studies by allowing witches and wizards to take full advantage of the series's roots in the Hogwarts kitchens and branch their unparalleled attachment across all cultural and historical dimensions. Regardless of how Potter culture may evolve in the

future, one thing is certain... treacle tart will always be intertwined with the *Harry Potter* series and known to the fan-base as Harry's treasured treat.

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