

Food, desire, and pleasure: What role should food take in an Epicurean lifestyle?

Post by “Pacatus” of November 26, 2025 at 6:09 PM

I have always been a bit of an over-indulger when it comes to food and drink. With regard to drink, I decided by middle age that overindulgence brought more pain than pleasure, and modified my behavior accordingly. With regard to food, it has been age and economics – rather than any hedonic calculus – that has mandated change: I simply cannot eat like I used to (both in terms of quantity and some foods that I used to enjoy) without unwanted discomforts; and economics, as much as aesthetics, has led to greater simplicity.

My model is my paternal grandmother, Mae (who lived to just 99). In her early twenties, she lived a bit of a high life in San Francisco, but moved while still young to the old family farm in Pennsylvania. There, she maintained a large garden – of flowers, various vegetables and a bit of corn – which she tended every day in season (she leased the fieldland to a neighbor farmer to work). She also harvested (and stored in a cellar in winter) apples from a small orchard near the house, and gathered wild black and red raspberries from the brambles along the lane.

Her eating was mostly modest: perhaps cereal, or an egg and toast, for breakfast; a light lunch; a small portion of meat (say, chicken or a pork chop) with sides of vegetables, corn and/or potatoes for dinner. But on holidays (especially Thanksgiving), she prepared a feast and invited the whole family and some friends. The favorite was roast leg of lamb, pierced with garlic cloves; onions au gratin, sweet potatoes with gravy, and salad. She seldom drank – but always kept some bourbon and scotch and various liqueurs in the sideboard for guests.

I used to have her recipe for risotto – but it got lost over the years. I like to cook – but now am a simple galley-kitchen cook, and the meals get simpler with the years. Usually a glass of wine with dinner, and some brandy in the evening.

If I have a personal hero, it is Mae.