

Tv Dinners Encyclopedia Article

Tv Dinners

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Tv Dinners

Introduced in the 1930s, General Foods offered the first proto-TV dinner, which was a frozen Irish stew. Successfully reaching a larger market, Swanson manufactured pot pies in 1951, and followed four years later with their mass-marketed "TV Dinners." The first TV Dinner was turkey with cornbread dressing, peas, and sweet potatoes; other varieties like Salisbury steak, ham, and chicken quickly followed.

These frozen dinners reflected changes in cultural patterns. Americans bought 70 million TV Dinners in 1955, 214 million in 1960, and 2 billion in 1994. The first meals were indeed meant to be eaten in front of the television, a relatively new technology in American homes at mid-twentieth century. To satiate larger appetites, Swanson introduced the "Hungry Man's Dinner" in 1972, and changed the generic name from "TV Dinner" to "Frozen Dinner." Producers of frozen dinners in the 1980s and 1990s reflected shifting preoccupations with foods, emphasizing low-calorie yet upscale meals—calling their products Lean Cuisine, Budget Gourmet, and Le Menu—and making cooking times even shorter by utilizing the microwave oven.

A TV Dinner

Further Reading:

"Better Than TV Dinners?" *Consumer Reports*. March 1984, 126-27, 170.

I'll Buy That! 50 Small Wonders and Big Deals that Revolutionized the Lives of Consumers. Mount Vernon, New York, Consumers Union, 1986.

Stern, Jane, and Michael Stern. *The Encyclopedia of Bad Taste*. New York, Harper Collins, 1990.

Volti, Rudi. "How We Got Frozen Food." *Invention and Technology*. Spring 1994, 47-56.