

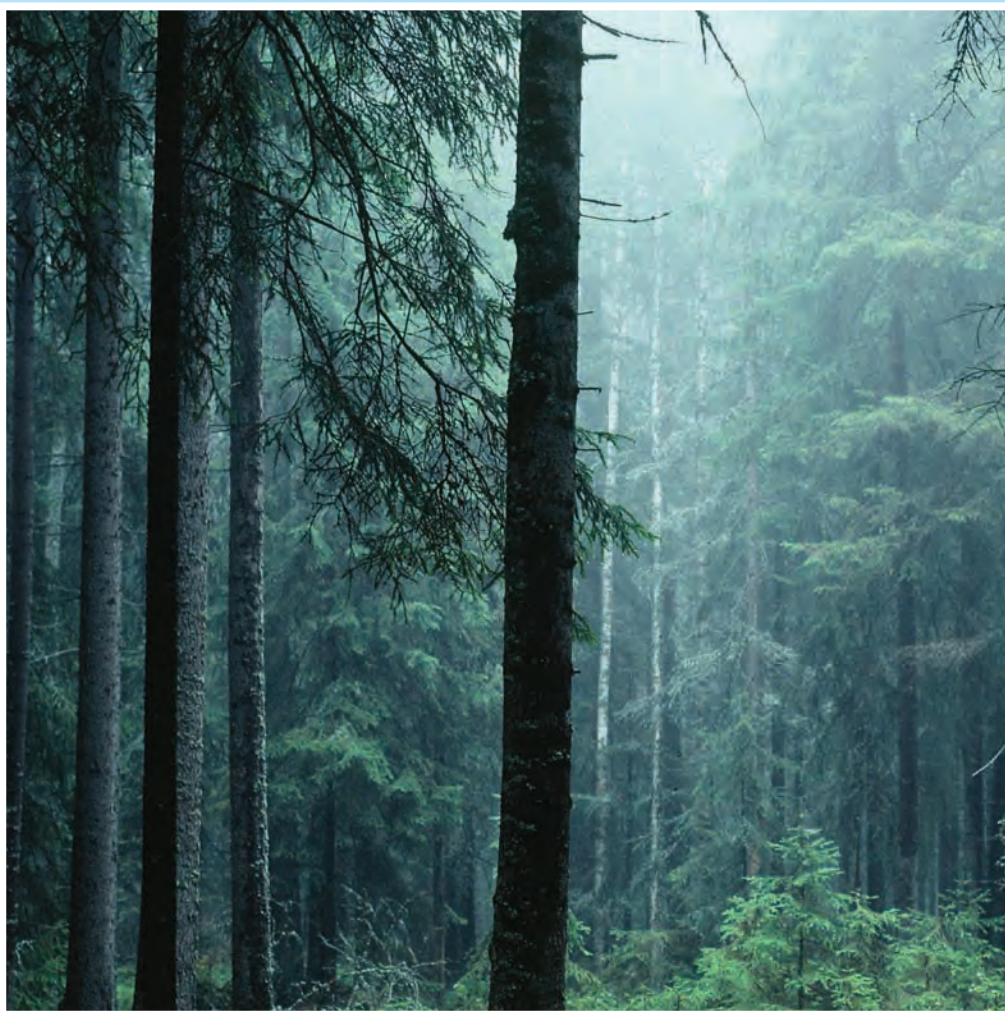
Sweden's Culinary Landscape

From the Sea:

The rivers, lakes and seas of Scandinavia are home to a variety of aquatic life. Swedes have used spears and nets to catch their meals from under the waves for more than 10,000 years, beginning with hunter-gatherer societies and continuing to the modern fishing industries of today. Herring, pike and salmon were enjoyed throughout the country by the aristocracy as well as peasants, and were often preserved to ensure that a large supply would last throughout the frozen winter months. Eel continues to be fished in the rivers and along the coastline. Crayfish are found in lakes and small streams throughout Sweden and particularly in Götaland. Eating crayfish became popular after the 15th century when it was believed to help cure illnesses. In 1907, native Swedish crayfish suffered from a terrible plague and their numbers were greatly diminished. Sweden introduced another species of crayfish to help mitigate the losses, but it too was susceptible to the disease. Since then, the crayfish fishing season is limited to less than two months, making the annual crayfish parties in August a particularly special food holiday.



Cliffs in the Archipelago/Photo/Bo Lind/Visit Sweden



The Troll Glade/Photo/Håkan Vargas/Hälsingland, Sweden

From the Forest:

Wild game from the region's forests was abundant throughout the Viking Age, and animals were hunted for their meat, skin and horns. Reindeer, elk and deer were common, but over time the Saami people in the North began to domesticate the reindeer. In the early 1800s, laws were passed to control elk populations and protect them from over-hunting. Today, fresh game is still central to many Swedish dishes, but now hunters must be licensed by the government and follow strict rules. Berries and nuts are also native and grow wild throughout Sweden. Historically, these abundant foods were gathered by peasants who often sold them to the wealthy upper class. Today, migrant workers from Eastern Europe and Asia come to northern Sweden every summer to work for the berry industry. Blueberries, lingonberries, cloudberries, raspberries and currants that grow locally are harvested and pressed into juices or incorporated into Swedish pastries, desserts and sweet breads.

From the Farm:

From the mountains to the plains, Swedes have survived by eating the foods that can endure the harsh Scandinavian climate. In the mountainous northern region, only grains like barley and some hearty vegetables like turnips can grow. In the southern regions crops including wheat, rye, barley, oats and curly kale are harvests that Swedes can consistently rely on. In the last few hundred years, foods like the potato have become a common staple and now potatoes are grown in huge quantities throughout Sweden. Cows, goats and sheep support farmers by providing meat and milk. Before the 20th century it was very rare to drink fresh milk in Sweden. Instead, families made butter or cheese from their milk supplies. The remaining milk was often mixed with porridge, gruel or beer after it had soured and curdled. Butter and cheeses were valuable to Sweden's barter economy and people used them to pay taxes or trade for imported goods like salt.



Happy Cow/Photo/Gerda Söderlund/Skaraborg



Viking Ship Prow/Photo/replica ship/Stockholm

From Afar:

Since the 9th century, Viking expeditions to Russia, Europe and the Middle East returned with treasures and exotic culinary delights. Over time, trade routes were established that allowed for wine, spices, and other ingredients to be imported to Sweden. Records indicate that Swedes imported salt in bulk as early as the 12th century, when it was used both as a cooking ingredient and to preserve fish and meats. As global trade increased in the 18th century, foods from all over the world were introduced to the region's agriculture and into the daily meals of Swedish households, including what would become two key Swedish staples: coffee and potatoes. Today, spices and alcohol are also regularly imported, reflecting current interest in foods with flavors like turmeric from India, chilies from Thailand and wines from South Africa and Australia.