Love it or hate it, Marmite is having a massive foodie moment

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

1 Warmer

What can you put on bread or toast?
What do you prefer to put on your bread or toast?

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nostalgic</td>
<td>likely to cause arguments between people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divisive</td>
<td>soft food that you put on bread and similar foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tap into</td>
<td>an important product, especially a food, that people eat or use regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dripping</td>
<td>liquid made by boiling meat, bones or vegetables and used for making soups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staple</td>
<td>salt, pepper or other spices that you add to food to improve the taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baste</td>
<td>a pleasant savoury taste that is not sweet, sour, bitter or salty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stock</td>
<td>cover meat with hot fat or its own juices while it cooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seasoning</td>
<td>fat and juice that is produced by meat when it is cooked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gimmicky</td>
<td>used to describe something that is intended to impress and interest people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umami</td>
<td>remembering happy times in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>palatable</td>
<td>tasting good enough to eat or drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spread</td>
<td>understand and express something such as people’s beliefs or attitudes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What can you put on bread or toast?
What do you prefer to put on your bread or toast?
Love it or hate it, Marmite is having a massive foodie moment

Clare Finney
26 February, 2020

1 Dark, uncompromising and deeply divisive, if any spread captures the state of the British nation, it's Marmite. The slogan “You either love it or hate it” was first used in the 90s, but it is a perfect fit for today’s combative climate. Marmite is having a moment: it is on Michelin menus, and new controversial combinations are in the supermarkets, such as Marmite Brussels sprouts, Marmite pot noodles and Marmite crunchy peanut butter.

2 In January, 2020, the spread launched its latest product, Marmite smooth peanut butter. “Crunchy Marmite peanut butter has some competition,” the brand tweeted, calling for the public to vote for their favourite Marmite and peanut butter combination, smooth or crunchy. The results? A familiar 52% for crunchy, 48% for smooth.

3 Marmite’s maker, Unilever, says its peanut butter spreads are inspired by fans making their own yeasty peanut butter combinations and putting them on social media. But Marmite’s plan to enter the snacks market shows that it has more potential than just being spread on toast.

4 From being a secret staple of chefs and home cooks who use it in stocks and sauces, Marmite has become a headline ingredient, written loud and proud on restaurant menus in all parts of the country. There’s the Marmite-glazed wings at Eat Vietnam in Birmingham; Monica Galletti’s pumpkin pasta with Marmite and mushrooms at Mere, central London; and a steak with marrowbone and Marmite at the Bank House in south-east London.

5 “From a chef’s point of view, it’s like a seasoning,” says the chef Sat Bains. “Like soy sauce, it gives depth and umami.” Bains has been using Marmite quietly since his restaurant opened in Nottingham in 1999, “mixing it with butter and basting fish and meat in it”. He also serves scallops with black truffle and crisp chicken skin, in a Marmite sauce with soy and elderflower vinegar. And he uses it in the broth for his goat and pork belly meatballs.

6 Gizzi Erskine has been clear about her love for Marmite from the start. At her Covent Garden restaurant, The Nitery, she will be offering steak tartare with bone marrow dripping on Marmite toast with egg yolk. “The Marmite and the dripping soak into the burned toast,” she says, “and along with the tartare, it elevates the flavour.”

7 Tom Cenci of Loyal Tavern in London often turns to Marmite “for richness, saltiness, shine in stocks and sauces. And I have a couple of vegetarian and vegan dishes that need a Marmite stock.” He’s cautious about being “gimmicky”, however. “Marmite has a lot of nostalgic associations for people – I grew up on Marmite crumpets and a cup of tea – and to turn it into something like a cheesecake is silly.” While Bains, Erskine and Galetti are happy to shout about it, Cenci is cautious about naming Marmite on his menu for fear of “putting off people who don’t like it”.

8 As a Marmite-hater myself, I can see his point, although I now know that, in the hands of a good chef, you often can’t taste the Marmite. “You’d never taste Marmite in any of the vegetables I’ve cooked in it,” says Cenci. I’ve probably eaten Marmite without realizing it many times. Alex Haebe of the Fairmont St Andrews in Scotland even uses the spread in his traditional German sourdough. “During the bread production, this process can be used to increase the salt content,” he says. “It’s the perfect base for dough production.”

9 Bains says, “I’d never have Marmite on toast, but reducing it down into a concentrate and mixing it with butter – it’s like a meat stock, really.” Marmite’s makers have realized that this is its strength. “Some Marmite-haters, who hate the strong umami taste of Marmite on toast, find it much more palatable when used as an ingredient in a recipe,” says Camilla Williamson from Unilever.

10 And there’s more to this than marketing – or even taste. “Marmite also taps into certain wider trends in the food world,” says Shokofeh Hejazi, the senior trend analyst at The Food People. These include concerns about food waste (Marmite is naturally found mostly in animal products), and the rise in plant-based diets.

11 “Marmite is rich in vitamin B12 – a vitamin naturally found mostly in animal products,” Hejazi says, “and it is full of umami and salty flavour.” As my Marmite-fan friend Emily says: “If you’re a meat-eater who’s become a vegetarian, it should be top of your shopping list.”

© Guardian News and Media 2020
First published in The Guardian, 26/02/20
Love it or hate it, Marmite is having a massive foodie moment

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions using the information from the article.

1. What does Marmite look and taste like?
2. What is it made from?
3. Who makes Marmite?
4. What nutritional value does it have?
5. How do British people like to eat and use Marmite?
6. In what ways does Marmite reflect wider trends in the food world?
7. In what ways does the author liken Marmite to Brexit?

4 Food

a. Underline all the food items in the article. Look up any that you don’t know.

b. Talk about …

• which of the foods you have already tried
• which you like or dislike
• which ones you cook at home
• which ones you might order in a restaurant but wouldn’t cook at home.

5 Discussion

• Are there any similarly divisive foods or drinks in your country or region, ones that people either love or hate?

• Are there any particular foods that you loved to eat when you were a child and that you still love to eat, perhaps because they make you feel nostalgic?

• Are there any special food items that you take with you when you go on holiday because you think you might not otherwise be able to get them while you are away?

• What food staples do you always try to have at home? And what seasonings do you use most often?

6 Webquest

Search for Marmite recipes online. Which sound and look good to you?
Love it or hate it, Marmite is having a massive foodie moment

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

KEY

2 Key words

1. divisive
2. spread
3. staple
4. stock
5. seasoning
6. umami
7. baste
8. dripping
9. gimmicky
10. nostalgic
11. palatable
12. tap into

4 Food

a.
black truffle, bone marrow/marrowbone, bread, broth, Brussels sprouts, butter, cheesecake, chicken skin, crumpet, dripping, egg yolk, elderflower vinegar, fish, goat and pork belly meatballs, Marmite, meat, mushrooms, pasta, (crunchy/smooth) peanut butter, pot noodles, pumpkin, salt, sauce, scallops, seasoning, sourdough, soy sauce, spread, steak (tartare), stock, tea, toast, vegetables, wings, yeast

3 Comprehension check

1. It’s a dark spread with a rich, salty umami taste.
2. leftover brewer’s yeast
3. Unilever
4. It’s rich in vitamin B12.
5. on toast (or similar bread-type products); in a sauce for flavouring
6. It is a good stock alternative and vitamin B12 source in vegan and vegetarian diets, and it makes use of food waste.
7. She calls it ‘deeply divisive’, says it captures the state of the British nation and talks about a ‘familiar’ outcome in a public vote (52%–48%, the same percentages that voted for and against Brexit).