

# Introduction to Purim



Iowa Jewish Historical Society

Purim, a festival of joy, is celebrated in remembrance of the Jews' deliverance from Haman, who wanted to annihilate all the Jews in ancient Persia. Haman, a high-ranking official in the court of King Ahasuerus, planned to kill all the Jews in the empire in one day, but his plot was stopped by Mordecai and his niece Esther, who had become Queen of Persia. The day of deliverance became a day of feasting and rejoicing. The story is told in the Book of Esther, which is read every year in the synagogue. This holiday is also celebrated by giving gifts of food and charity to the poor.

On Purim, one of the traditions is to drink more than one usually does, in the happy commemoration of the Jews survival as a people, despite the machination of those who plotted against them.

## Food Especially Associated with Purim

**Hamantaschen** (Yiddish for Haman's Hat): Three-cornered cakes filled with poppy seeds, fruit, cheese or jellies.

**Challah:** Unlike regular Sabbath bread, Purim challah is oversized and braided.

**Beans:** Bean dishes include salted beans boiled in their jackets and chickpeas boiled and seasoned with salt and pepper. In the story of Esther, she refused to eat anything at the court of King Ahashuerus that was not kosher, so her diet consisted of peas and beans.

**Folares:** Among Sephardic Jews, pastry dough is customarily wrapped around a decorated hard-boiled egg and shaped into a Purim character or an animal. After baking, these artistic treats are displayed with pride and then eaten.

## Photographs from Purim *(Courtesy of Iowa Jewish Historical Society)*



1962 Purim in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1962



1969 Purim from the Bureau of Jewish Education/School in Des Moines, Iowa



1936 Purim play in Davenport, Iowa



Purim carnival in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Date Unknown

# Purim continued



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Megillah: The megillah – the Scroll of Esther – is kept in this elaborate silver filigree-like case. The scroll is the centerpiece of the Purim celebration and is read with whoops, hollers and noise so that evildoer Haman's name is never heard.



Megillah on display at the Iowa Jewish Historical Society Museum.

## Recipe for Hamantaschen

Hamantaschen is a food traditionally associated with Purim. The recipe is featured in the Iowa Jewish Historical Society's cookbook, *Beyond Matzo Balls: Celebrating 100 Years of Jewish Cooking in Iowa*. The recipe was submitted by Debbie Gitchell, a member of the Ames Jewish Congregation who said, "I was given this recipe by Holocaust survivor Vera David."

**4 cups** of flour  
**1 cup** of sugar  
**1 teaspoon** baking powder  
**1/2 cup** oil  
**4** eggs  
Juice and grated rind of 1/2 lemon

### **Prune Filling:**

**1 can** Solo prune filling  
**1 cup** raisins  
**1 cup** walnuts  
**1** chopped orange and grated rind  
**1/2 pint jar** of tart orange marmalade (optional)



### **Poppy Seed Filling:**

**1 can** Solo poppy seed filling  
**1/2 cup** honey  
**1/2 cup** chopped walnuts  
**1/4 teaspoon** cinnamon

Sift together: flour, sugar and baking powder. Make a well in the center and add oil, eggs and lemon juice and rind. Mix well and knead until pliable. Roll 1/4 of dough at a time on a floured board and cut into 3-inch rounds. Put 1 teaspoonful of filling in center of each round and fold over the sides to make a triangle and pinch together to make secure. Brush with egg white or yolk. Place on greased cookie sheet. Bake at 375 degrees for 15-20 minutes.