

Dumplings & ANZACs. The Golden Syrup story in Australia.

April 2025

Just the other day a school friend of mine living in England sent me an article from the Spectator about 'Golden Syrup Dumplings' which the article said are 'a classic Australian dish'. In all my 62 years in Australia, which often has included Golden Syrup, I have never encountered them. This piqued the Australian food historian in me not just the dumplings but the Australian story of Golden Syrup generally. I began with a search for a dumpling recipe. The earliest I found was in 1934:

Golden Syrup Dumplings

One tablespoon butter rubbed into 1 breakfast cup self raising flour. Beat 1 egg with a little milk, then mix into flour and form a dough. Divide this mixture into balls and drop into this boiling syrup. Take 1 cup water, 1 cup sugar, 1 teaspoon butter and 1 tablespoon golden syrup. Boil 20 minutes. This is an easy sweet and delicious with cream.¹

That settled I turned my attention to the early history of golden syrup in Australia.

The earliest reference I found to the term 'golden syrup' in Australia was in 1840 in an advertisement for an auction where it is given as an alternative name for molasses.

On Sale, by the undersigned, ex Caleb Angas — ...Molasses (golden syrup)²

The earliest recipe found where 'golden' syrup was an ingredient was in 1866:

TOFFY.— One pound loaf sugar, ½ lb golden syrup, ¼ lb fresh butter, a teaspoonful of cold water put into the preserving pan, and then the ingredients. Stir while boiling, and as soon as it will crisp when dropped into cold water it is done. About twenty minutes is the time it takes.³

I suspect in the recipe the 'golden syrup' was also molasses.

Why do I say this? Because what we call 'golden syrup' wasn't created until c1883 when the Eastick brothers found a way to make the waste by product of sugar refining 'into an eminently palatable syrup with the viscosity, hue, and sweetness of honey. The resulting product was marketed commercially in 1885 as "golden syrup".⁴

To muddy the waters further in 1885 the *Evening News* that indicates a company, Messrs Perigo Brothers, is making 'golden syrup' locally in the colony.⁵ In going to hazard a guess that at some point Lyles' golden syrup entered the Australian market. I have no date for when the product was available in the colony.

¹ 'Golden Syrup Dumplings' Women's Interests, The Grenfell Record and Lachlan District Advertiser 1 October 1934 p.4

² *South Australian Register* 29 August 1840 p.1

³ Toffy, Recipes', The *Australasian* 4 August 1866 p.5

⁴ Golden syrup - Wikipedia

⁵ 'Golden Syrup' *Evening News* 6 June 1885 p.5

In 1885 the British product was being made by Lyles. I have no date for when Lyles [product] entered the colony. In 1921 it merged with the Tate sugar refining company.

In the recipes to which I now turn the golden syrup has no brand name.

Golden Syrup Recipes

There were many recipes of which I have selected a few to give an idea of the breadth of uses for golden syrup.

Golden Syrup Tarts

Take ½ lb. war flour, ½ lb bread crumbs, ¼ lb. lard, syrup. To make :he pastry, rub the lard lightly into the flour. Mix gradually with water to a stiff paste; flour well, and roll out, adding the remainder of lard in layers, fold it over, and roll out to a quarter of an inch thickness. Place paste in tart tins; fill each with a teaspoonful of syrup into which drop a teaspoonful of breadcrumbs. Bake in a hot oven for 20 minutes.⁶

Suet Pudding With Golden Syrup

Mix together half a pound of flour, a dessertspoon of baking powder, a tablespoon of fine sugar, half a salt spoon of salt and three ounces of the best shredded suet. Stir in enough cold water to make a light dough, put in a greased basin, cover with greased paper, place over boiling water and steam steadily for an hour and a half. Turn on to a warm dish and serve immediately, with golden syrup(warmed and undiluted) handed round separately. Steaming this pudding in a basin rather than boiling it in a cloth old-fashioned way ensures a lighter pudding, facilitates the dishing up, and saves the washing of greasy cloth afterwards.⁷

Brandysnaps

Melt together 6oz. golden syrup, 2oz. butter, and 4oz. sugar (castor for preference). Mix in a basin 4oz. flour and a small teaspoon ground ginger. When cooling a little, stir the syrup, etc., to the flour and run the mixture on to a flat, greased tin in rounds far apart, as they spread in the oven. Bake about a quarter of an hour in a slow oven. Remove from the tins and before they stiffen roll them up. Keep in a tin.⁸

Golden Chocolate Sponge

4 eggs, ¾ cup castor sugar, 2 ozs. cornflour, 2 ozs, S.R. flour, 2 tablespoons cocoa, 1 tablespoon cinnamon, 1 teaspoon ginger, 1 dessertspoon golden syrup, ½ oz butter.

Beat eggs until stiff and lemon coloured. Gradually add sugar beating until mixture will hold a figure 8 when trialled from beaters. Sift flour, add cocoa, cinnamon, and ginger, divide into 3. Fold each portion into egg mixture, approximately 20 folds each time. Melt butter and syrup in hot water and fold in. Pour mixture into 2 greased 8-inch sandwich tins. Bake in moderate- oven (350 degrees) for 25 minutes. Remove from tins. Fill or ice as desired.⁹

⁶ ‘Golden Syrup Tarts’, *Farmers’ Advocate* 29 November 1918 p.6

⁷ ‘Suet Pudding With Golden Syrup’, *Daily Advertiser* 19 September 1928 p.4

⁸ ‘Brandysnaps’, With Golden Syrup, Some Nourishing Recipes Examiner 3 September 1937 p.26

⁹ ‘Golden Chocolate Sponge’, Today’s Recipe, Queanbeyan Age 17 September 1967 p.5

Chocolate Caramels

400g can sweetened condensed milk

2 tablespoons golden syrup

60g (2oz) Copha

Chocolate Topping

30g (1oz) dark chocolate

½ teaspoon butter or margarine

3 teaspoons water

½ cup icing sugar

Combine condensed milk and golden syrup in heavy based saucepan; stir constantly over medium heat for about 10 minutes or until mixture turns light golden brown. It will be necessary to reduce heat very gradually as caramel is cooking; if heat is too high, caramel will burn. Remove from heat, stir in roughly chopped Copha, stir until melted. Turn mixture into greased 25cm x 7cm (10 in x 3in) tin, smooth top with wet fingers. When cold, spread with Chocolate Topping; leave to set before cutting.¹⁰

The ANZAC Biscuit

This is the best use of golden syrup for many; a true Australian icon.

2 cup oats

1 cup flour

1 tablespoon golden syrup

half a cup of sugar

1 teaspoonful carbonate of soda

1 good [pinch salt

2 tablespoons of boiling water, 1 half-cup melted butter

Out oatmeal, flour, sugar and salt together. Pour on the melted butter, mix syrup and boiling water, and stir in the soda. Mix all while frothing. Put on greased oven slide with a spoon.

bake till brown in a moderate oven.¹¹

Vox Pop

I asked a cohort of mine: Golden Syrup how do like having it? I love it dripping through a hot buttered crumpet.

Me too

Me too!

Childhood treat - crumpets Toasted on a fork by the gas fire in winter then butter & golden syrup

Me too.

Definitely on crumpets, it's the best combination!

Me too!

Oh yummy

Oh yes please

Crumpets are the best way by far. On Turkish bread toast isn't too shabby though.

Me too

Don't like it on anything but do like it in Anzac Biscuits

¹⁰ 'Chocolate Caramels' Sweet Treats, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 7 May 1980 p.95

¹¹ Josephine of Brunswick, van Reyk, Paul, True to The Land. A history of food in Australia, Reaktion 2022 p.123

Only use it for making Anzac biscuits these days.
In Anzac biscuits

Dumplings.

Golden syrup dumplings

I remember making golden syrup dumplings in winter as a teenager. Recently used it in a pecan pie recipe.

Dumplings

As a pudding sauce

On pancakes

Pancakes

In my porridge on winter mornings.

Got to be Tate & Lyle nothing else comes close, in porridge.

Off a spoon!

It has to be Lyle's Golden Syrup from England. Love it on buttered bread. The Australian golden syrup is revolting.

Make sure it's the English and not the dark Australian one

Instead of sugar in stir fry and salad dressing.

My thanks to all who shared their Golden Syrup story with me.