



# ON THE RIGHT COURSE

**Suneeta Sodhi Kanga** helps you navigate the minefield of table etiquette. In this issue she discusses the finer points of the first two courses of a meal — salads and soups



**I**N formal dining, a full course dinner can consist of five, seven, eight, ten or twelve courses, and, in its extreme form, has been known to have twenty-one courses. In these more formalised dining events, the courses are carefully planned to complement each other gastronomically. The courses are smaller and spread out over a long evening, that can extend up to three, four or five hours, and follow conventions of menu planning that have been established over many years.

Most courses (excluding some light courses such as sorbets) in the most formal full course dinners are usually accompanied by ('paired with') a different wine, liqueur, or other spirit.

Let us begin with the very first course — the salad.

## Salad smorgasbord

Salads are generally served as the first course of a meal but may be served at any point during a meal also such as:

Appetiser salads, light salads to stimulate the appetite as the first course of the meal.

Side salads, to accompany the main course as a side dish.

Main course salads, usually containing a portion of protein.

Salad is, in fact, any of a wide variety of dishes, including vegetable salads; salads of pasta, legumes, or grains; mixed salads and fruit salads.

They may include a mixture of cold and hot ingredients, often including raw vegetables or fruits.

Green salads include leaf lettuce and leafy vegetables with a sauce or dressing. Other salads are based on pasta, noodles, or gelatin. Most salads are served cold, although some, such as south German potato salad, are served warm.

## Eating salad

Use the outer most fork and knife, working your way towards the plate, on both sides of the plate. Sometimes you will have a salad knife and at other times you won't. In that case, your fork will be used as fork and knife at the same time.

Handle your utensils properly by wrapping your hand around the stem of the knife and fork while the index finger rests on top of the utensil. In

the European style of eating your fork will face downward.

When chewing your food you can place your wrists on the table while still holding on to your knife and fork.

If taking a break then place your knife and fork facing down in a crisscross position or an inverted 'V' on your plate.

When you have completed your salad place the utensils together, fork facing down in a twenty past the hour position.

There are normally at least two forks at each place setting on the left side of the plate. The salad is usually served as a first course so the small salad fork is on the outside and is used first.

## Tips:

- A fine restaurant or considerate hostess will always serve the lettuce salad in bite size pieces. However if you are served large pieces or a whole wedge of lettuce then it should never be cut. You should rather try to fold the leaf and bring it to your mouth with the fork. The salad knife is present on the table but using it to cut the leaves should be your last resort.
- Don't cut salad into smaller pieces all at one time.
- When salad is served with a main course rather than before or after, it is best placed on a separate salad plate so that the salad dressing doesn't mix with any gravy or sauce.
- Salads are generally served with a dressing, as well as various garnishes such as nuts or croutons, and sometimes with the addition of pasta, cheese, or whole grains.
- Sauces for salads are often called 'dressings'. The concept of salad dressing varies across cultures. Dressing means to add flavour, so please don't drown your salad with the dressing. It may be lightly sprinkled or poured on the side of the plate.
- There are two basic types of salad dressings: vinaigrette or a light lime or olive oil based dressing. Vinaigrette is a mixture of salad oil and vinegar, often flavored with herbs, spices, salt, pepper, sugar, and other ingredients. It is used most commonly as a salad dressing. Creamy mayonnaise-based dressings may also contain yogurt, sour cream, buttermilk or milk.



Soup is always “eaten” as it is considered liquid food and part of the meal and not a drink. When eating soup, you should hold your spoon in your right hand and tip the bowl away from you, scooping the soup in movements away from yourself. The soup spoon should never be put into the mouth, and soup should be sipped quietly from the side of the spoon, not the end

**And on to soups ...**

Soup is generally the second course to be served, after salad. It is generally a warm food that is made by combining ingredients such as vegetables with stock, juice, water, or another liquid.

Hot soups are additionally characterised by boiling solid ingredients in liquids in a pot until the flavours are extracted, forming a broth.

Traditionally, soups are classified into two main groups: clear soups and thick soups.

The established french classifications of clear soups are bouillon and consommé.

Thick soups are classified depending upon the type of thickening agent used: purées are vegetable soups thickened with starch; bisques are made from vegetables thickened with cream; cream soups may be thickened with béchamel sauce; and veloutés are thickened with butter and cream.

Other ingredients commonly used to thicken soups and broths include rice, lentils, flour and grains.

Soup is always “Eaten” as it is liquid food and part of the meal and not a drink.

When eating soup, you should hold your spoon in your right hand and tip the bowl away from you, scooping the soup in elegant movements away from yourself.

The soup spoon should never be put into the mouth, and soup should be sipped quietly from the side of the spoon, not the end.

If you want to get the last bit of it, there is no impropriety in tipping the dish away from you in order to collect it at the edge. Indeed you are paying a subtle compliment to your hostess by this demonstrating how good it is.

Eat soup quietly, without lifting the bowl off the table.

When eating soup, tilt the spoon away from you to avoid splashing your outfit or napkin.

Do not overly season your soup with salt, pepper, chilly sauces etc. as that implies that you do not like the taste of the soup.

**Tips**

- Do not blow or make slurping sounds while eating soup. The trick is to take a small amount in the spoon and tip it in your mouth rather than sucking it in.
- To show that you have finished, place your spoon on the under plate in the 6 o'clock position.
- Eat thin soups and bouillons served in cups, as you would drink tea or coffee, but if there are vegetables or noodles left in the bottom, eat them with the spoon, rather than struggle unattractively to make them slide from the cup into your mouth. ☺