

# Supper vs. Dinner: Is There a Difference?

Mental Floss (<http://mentalfloss.com/article/552694/dinner-supper-what-is-the-difference>) ·  
by Emily Petsko · July 27, 2018



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A linguist might be able to guess the general region you're from based solely on what you call your evening meal. But as an article from Wide Open Eats (<http://www.wideopeneats.com/supper-vs-dinner/>) explains, it isn't just a matter of dialect. *Dinner* and *supper* really do mean different things—or at least they used to.

Historically, the word *dinner* was associated with the largest meal of the day, regardless of whether it was served in the morning, afternoon, or evening. The term comes from the non-Classical Latin word *disjējūnāre*, which is defined as

breaking a fast.

*Supper*, on the other hand, is more time-specific. It stems from the Old French word *souper*, meaning an evening meal, and it's generally lighter than other meals served throughout the day. In other words, *supper* and *dinner* have more to do with the quantity of food that's served than the time of day that you feast on them.

In the 1800s and perhaps even earlier, Americans in some rural regions started calling their midday meal *dinner*, while *supper* was reserved for the evening meal. This had more to do with occupation than location, though. In parts of the South and Midwest where farmers needed ample fuel to get them through the day, the midday meal was larger (hence the use of the term *dinner*). In the evening, *supper* typically involved a light soup, and the act of eating it was referred to as *supping*. Indeed, the word *supper* is related to *suppe*, the German word for soup.

This is still the norm in some parts of the U.S. As Wide Open Eats discovered through Google Trends, a search for “supper” is most common in Wisconsin, South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa.

This is also the case in some parts of the South. “If you grew up in the South post-colonial era, however, chances are your association with the words have more to do with colloquial etymology, rather than the time of day you sat down to eat,” *Southern Living* (<https://www.southernliving.com/culture/supper-vs-dinner>) notes. “For example, you probably heard, 'supper's ready,' just before Mama or Grandma placed a table-full of delicious dishes before you.”

However, *supper* is seldom used anymore—especially among younger generations—and *dinner* is by far the more popular term nationwide.

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